

## Prior Positive Psychologists Proposed Personality and Spiritual Growth

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Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (January 2000) and the other authors in the January 2000 special issue of the *American Psychologist* should be applauded for opening a dialogue about a psychology of human health and well-being, one encompassing concepts such as hope, love, courage, optimism, faith, and flow. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi asserted that "humanistic psychology did not attract much of an empirical base . . . and encouraged a self-centeredness that played down concerns for a collective well-being" (p. 7). In this comment, I outline an overarching theoretical framework for a positive psychology, supported by psychoanalytic, existential, humanistic, and transpersonal theories. Jung, Frankl, Maslow, and Assagioli emphasized wholeness and wellness without encouraging narcissism, though admittedly with little empirical support. Each of these theorists implicitly or explicitly acknowledged *two* overlapping processes of growth: the emergence of personality and the alignment of that personality with a transcendent (spiritual) center.

For Jung (1933), every patient over 35 years old "fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook" (p. 229). He addressed narcissism when he stated, "man is never helped in his suffering by what he thinks for himself, but only by revelations of a wisdom greater than his own" (Jung, 1933, pp. 240–241). Jung acknowledged both processes of growth when he noted that it is in personality unfoldment (individuation) that a person develops a transcendent function that gives one the ability to move beyond the self-centered ego.

Abraham Maslow (1970) defined self-actualizing persons as being self-determined, self-organized, and self-directed. Their behavior is marked by a naturalness and spontaneity that is congruent with the "positive personality" of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 8). Maslow (1971) noted two processes in his two types of self-actualizing people, nontranscenders and transcenders. Whereas nontranscenders are high achievers, transcenders are more spiritual, more ego transcendent, and have a greater number of

peak experiences. Paradoxically, Maslow mused that transcendents might be *less* happy because of their enhanced vision and insight (e.g., consider the burdens faced by Albert Einstein and Mother Teresa).

Viktor Frankl (1967, 1986) pointed out that happiness cannot be sought as an end in itself, but rather is the side effect of the normal pursuit of meaningful activities. He stated that when self-actualization "is made an end in itself and is aimed at as the objective of a primary intention, it cannot be attained" (Frankl, 1967, p. 63). To Frankl, a self-centered focus prevents growth; the person can only "find identity to the extent to which he commits himself to something beyond himself" (Frankl, 1967, p. 34). Both ideas are analogous to Seligman's (1998) observation that self-esteem cannot be taught directly but must be the by-product of hard work and earned accomplishment.

Frankl (1967, 1986) asserted the existence of three dimensions of human existence: soma (the physical), psyche (including the emotions), and noëtic (of the spirit). To Frankl (1967), illness manifests only in soma and psyche, not in the noëtic dimension. Logotherapists are trained to assess whether the philosophical stance of the individual is materialistic (mechanical) or teleological (spiritual).

Like Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Roberto Assagioli (1965) argued that psychology had for too long focused on pathology instead of health and giftedness. He proposed psychosynthesis: the discovery and formation of a dynamic relationship of the personality with a spiritual Self. The goal is not bliss, but a creativity, service, and practical livingness exemplified by geniuses and forerunners such as Jefferson, Spinoza, and Mozart. The two stages of psychosynthesis involve the attainment of the following: first, individualization and self-identification in the personality and, second, the discovery of—and identification of the personality with—a transpersonal, spiritual Self.

How can these theorists, taken collectively, be supportive of a positive psychology? Each proposed two processes of wellness in the human being. The first is the development of individuation or personality unfoldment. The second involves alignment of that personality with a spiritual or transcendent function, one explicitly concerned with traits emphasized in positive psychology, such as collective well-being, optimism, resilience, and faith! Indeed, many of the traits mentioned by positive psychologists (such as peace, love, faith, hope, patience, and joy) are identical to qualities emphasized by all world religions, including Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions.

The notion of two processes of normal,

healthy human growth is crucial to an emerging science of positive psychology. First, it provides a theoretical framework that can be empirically tested. The traditional methods of scientific research may be used to understand the more mechanical functions of soma and psyche as they are integrated into a fully functioning personality. However, the emergence of a transcendent function may be far more difficult to study because the assumptions of traditional statistical methods remove the uniqueness of the individual. Specifically, if psychologists are looking for the one thing that a person can do better than ten thousand others, as stated by Seligman (1998), then a wise, intuitive guide may be more appropriate than a multiple choice inventory. Qualitative approaches may better help positive psychologists to identify qualities that define the uniqueness of each person.

Unquestionably, those who pursue the empirical study of psychological health have much exciting work ahead. Success will require empirical consideration of the ideas of those, such as Jung, Maslow, Assagioli, Frankl, and others, who advocate a psychology of health. Moreover, development and validation of new methods will be needed for studying two simultaneous processes of wellness in the human being: the unfolding of personality and the alignment of that personality with a point of transcendence.

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## Rediscovering Hope in American Psychology

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I was delighted to see the *American Psychologist's* January 2000 special issue dedicated to happiness, optimism, excellence, and hope. What better way to start the new century and millennium than to emphasize the positive aspects of psychology and the bright side of life? It is refreshing to see the current attempts to rediscover contentment and courage and to reemphasize the place of hope, the role of wisdom, and the importance of purpose in the lives of individuals and communities alike.

Indeed, people do not find true meaning in mere individual accomplishments and material accumulations, though these may bring some temporal satisfaction, but essentially in family, faith, and friends, as Myers (January 2000) eloquently wrote. These seem to really count, especially as people come to the end of their life journeys. Across the ages, philosophers and thinkers have repeatedly reached that conclusion, and now Western psychologists are coming full circle to rediscover the place of hope, the importance of spirituality, and the centrality of connections within the realm of community.

According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (January 2000), if Americans continue to accumulate wealth and ignore the human needs of others around them, such a course "is likely to lead to increasing selfishness, to alienation between the more and the less fortunate, and eventually to chaos and despair" (p. 5). It is possible that the same factors that made the United States such a strong, wealthy, and powerful country could be the ones, I am afraid, that will cause its decline, agony, and disintegration. Self-reliance and personal autonomy have become core values in most Western and industrialized societies. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on achievement, accumulation, and independence has resulted in an increased sense of detachment, loneliness, emptiness, and discontentment. Family bonding, communal belonging, and social connectivity have been suffering greatly. This is why psychotherapy is in such demand in the Western world, and this is what psychotherapy is trying to correct, treat, and restore.