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## CHAPTER 1

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# Applied Positive Psychology 10 Years On

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**T**HE FIRST EDITION of this handbook was published in 2004. The title of the introduction chapter was “Applied Positive Psychology: A New Perspective for Professional Practice.” In that chapter, the authors argued for the need for applied positive psychology. It had only been a few years since positive psychology had first come to widespread attention following Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2000) special issue of the *American Psychologist*. Positive psychology was still a fledgling discipline and scholars were beginning to coalesce around this exciting new idea. Applications of positive psychology were in their infancy.

A decade later, positive psychology is no longer new. The ideas of positive psychology have now firmly taken root within professional psychological practice. In the intervening years, there have been applications in the contexts of work, health, organizations, counseling, and coaching, as well as in professional disciplines outside psychology such as sociology, social work, education, and public policy. There seems little need 10 years on to argue the case for positive psychology. The notion that psychology had focused too much on the alleviation of problems with scant attention to what goes right in life is no longer controversial. It is now widely accepted that it is of equal value to attend to what makes life worth living as it is to what goes wrong, and it is important to look for ways to help people lead lives in which they are happier, have a sense of meaning and purpose, and come closer to fulfilling their potential. These are the aims of positive psychology, which broadly expressed can be said to be “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104).

Since 2004, research output in positive psychology has continued apace, not only in the dedicated journals of positive psychology, well-being, and happiness, but also in the wider literature. Research with a positive psychology emphasis is now regularly published in the journals of social, personality, and clinical psychology, as well as in the flagship journals of the leading professional associations. Many new books have appeared in the intervening years, including major scholarly volumes (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; David, Boniwell, & Conley-Ayers, 2012; Lopez & Snyder, 2011), an encyclopedia (Lopez, 2009), and introductory level



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textbooks (e.g., Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Peterson, 2006), which demonstrate the breadth of the topic and its appeal.

It is beyond doubt that positive psychology deserves to be a major force in contemporary psychology. Across the globe, there are now dedicated courses in positive psychology as part of the undergraduate curriculum and postgraduate-level courses specializing in positive psychology, and since 2004 a new generation of scholars with doctorates in positive psychology has emerged. Many more scholars and practitioners now identify themselves with positive psychology.

Positive psychology provides a common identity for all scholars and practitioners interested in human flourishing and well-being. Some may identify themselves primarily as positive psychologists, particularly those who have graduated from the new courses over the past decade or gained doctorates in positive psychology topics. For others, positive psychology may be a secondary identity because they view themselves first and foremost as clinical, counseling, developmental, educational, forensic, health, management, occupational, personality, or social psychologists. They may be academics or practitioners, but all share the same concern in what makes for a good life, but in a way that now encompasses the idea that we ought to be interested not only in the alleviation of problems but also the promotion of optimal functioning. For some, positive psychology has been a new way of thinking altogether. For others, it has provided a way to understand and give voice to what it was they always aspired to achieve.

Positive psychology has also attracted interest from the general public eager to find out what the science can contribute to their lives. In the bookstores, positive psychology is well-represented by a number of books written for the general public (e.g., Froh & Bono, 2014; Joseph, 2011; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2011). Unlike many of the traditional areas of psychology, positive psychology has clear and direct applications to everyday life. As human beings, we are motivated to fulfil our potential, function at optimal levels, and achieve a pleasurable and meaningful life. Positive psychology is concerned with how best to support these aspirations in us in ways that are both good for us and those around us.

### THE CONTENT OF THIS VOLUME

Any volume such as this inevitably reflects the interests and biases of its editor. I have endeavored to provide coverage of the range of activity in positive psychology and to maintain the book's cutting-edge appeal. I was also interested in strengthening the historical, theoretical, and philosophical perspectives. There is a famous quote from Kurt Lewin: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951, p. 169). To me this quote sums up the essential ingredient of good practice. No matter what one's practice specialty, whether it is in coaching, counseling, clinical, or health psychology, the most important thing is to understand how what you do relates to and emerges from theory. There is much that is directly practical in this volume, but it is also a book that is rich in ideas. In this respect, one of the key developments over the past 10 years has been the shift in emphasis from hedonistic well-being to eudaimonic well-being.

The importance of this development of interest in eudaimonia is twofold. First, it has widened the scope of positive psychology so that it is no longer as concerned with happiness in the traditional sense of joy and pleasure but also with the existential concerns of meaning and purpose. This has given positive psychology greater depth and provided a counterbalance to those critics who saw it as little more than happiology. Second, it has allowed positive psychology to build bridges



toward humanistic psychology. Initially, positive psychology distanced itself from humanistic psychology. But as positive psychologists have shifted toward a greater appreciation of the eudaimonic perspective, it has become clearer that there is much to be valued in the earlier writings of the humanistic psychologists. As will be clear in this volume, the two disciplines have come closer together, and many of the ideas in humanistic psychology have now become part of the scope of positive psychology. Positive psychologists did not invent the study of well-being. It is now acknowledged that the pioneers of humanistic psychology, such as Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1963), also offered perspectives that were positive psychologies. It is useful to see the links between disciplines and for their forces to combine in creating a better understanding of what makes for a good life. Positive psychology must recognize that its topics of interest date back to humanistic psychology and even beyond to the origins of psychology itself. This has led to deeper philosophical considerations and a more thoughtful and sophisticated approach to what it means to promote human flourishing.

In Part I (Historical and Philosophical Foundations), Hilde Nafstad (Chapter 2) deals with a number of antecedent developments in the history of psychology and science that have informed the development and epistemology of today's positive psychology. Specifically, Nafstad discusses the Aristotelian philosophical position that has attracted increasing attention over the past decade. It is important to understand that practice is always rooted philosophically. Despite a contentious early relationship, the past 10 years have seen much rapprochement between positive psychology and humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology has long recognized the importance of one's philosophical position. As such, a new chapter from Brent Robbins (Chapter 3) is included that continues this theme of understanding our history, the Aristotelian tradition, and further builds bridges between humanistic and positive psychology. Roger Bretherton deepens this line of enquiry even further in Chapter 4 with an exploration of how positive psychology can learn from existential thinking with its focus on the person's inherent strengths and capacities. Finally, concluding this section is another new chapter by Shifra Sagy, Monica Eriksson, and Orna Braun-Lewensohn (Chapter 5) on Antonovsky's concept of salutogenesis. Most positive psychologists will have heard the term *salutogenesis*, but this is a concept that deserves to be more widely understood than it is, particularly the profound notion that entropy is the natural state of being human.

In Part II (Values and Choices in Pursuit of the Good Life), Tim Kasser (Chapter 6) examines the question of our pursuit of "the good life or the goods life"—that is, psychological satisfaction or material success and its implications for personal and social well-being. Lilach Sagiv, Sonia Roccas, and Shani Oppenheim-Weller (Chapter 7) consider three value pathways to fulfillment, looking specifically at the roles of healthy values, valued goal attainment, and the congruence between our own values and the values supported by our environment. Barry Schwartz (Chapter 8) addresses the paradox of choice, that is, how it can be that more choice is actually bad for us, and suggests ways in which we can act to counter this maladaptive influence. This theme is reflected by Kirk Warren Brown and Richard Ryan (Chapter 9) who discuss developments in self-determination theory and how adopting an attitude of mindfulness can facilitate autonomous thought and behavior that serves to foster more fully informed decisions and intrinsic values and goals with attendant positive psychological outcomes. As already mentioned, one of the key developments in the past 10 years has been the increased attention to Aristotelian philosophy and rapprochement with humanistic psychology. Veronika Huta (Chapter 10) concludes this section



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with a new discussion of eudaimonic and hedonic pursuits. Huta shows how these ideas are now being taken forward conceptually and empirically, and how specific activities and practices can bring more eudaimonia and hedonia into a person's life.

In Part III (Practices for Health and Well-Being), Kristin Layous, Kennon Sheldon, and Sonja Lyubomirsky (Chapter 11) discuss strategies for achieving sustained gains in happiness and well-being, noting that intentional activities may hold the key to this elusive pursuit. The role of physical activity in promoting both physical and psychological health is discussed by Guy Faulkner, Kate Hefferon, and Nanette Mutrie (Chapter 12), who show that relatively simple and available physical activity strategies can convey substantial benefits for well-being. Ilona Boniwell and Philip Zimbardo (Chapter 13) explore how the way in which we relate to the temporal aspects of our lives influences our choices, intentions, and behaviors, and discuss what we can do to try to achieve a more optimal balanced time perspective. The lesson is that if we choose to, we can do things to facilitate our well-being. Concluding this section are two new chapters by Acacia Parks (Chapter 14) on self-help and Margarita Tarragona (Chapter 15) on life coaching, showing how the ideas of positive psychology can be put into practice in everyday life.

In Part IV (Methods and Processes of Teaching and Learning), Amy Fineburg and Andrew Monk (Chapter 16) show the value of introducing positive psychology to students and the different ways this can be achieved. Alina Reznitskaya and Ian Wilkinson (Chapter 17) build on their chapter in the previous volume with an overview of the dialogical approach to education. Recognizing that education is one of the most important and flourishing areas of application, a new chapter from Chieko Kibe and Ilona Boniwell (Chapter 18) discusses positive education in primary and secondary schools. Finally, concluding this section, Reed Larson and Nickki Dawes (Chapter 19) describe their work in documenting what practices in adult leaders are effective in youth development programs and facilitating motivation of young people.

Part V (Positive Psychology at Work) opens with a new chapter by Sarah Lewis (Chapter 20) on the relationship between organizational psychology and positive psychology. Heather Clarke, Kara Arnold, and Catherine Connelly (Chapter 21) show how transformational leadership can positively affect all levels of an organization, from its employees and culture through to its leaders themselves. The culture and functions of positive and creative organizations are discussed by Jane Henry (Chapter 22), who describes how positive working practices can be fostered from the top down. Carol Kauffman, Stephen Joseph, and Anne Scoular (Chapter 23) review executive coaching through the lens of positive psychology and note the many possibilities for further research in this area.

In Part VI (Health, Clinical, Counseling, and Rehabilitation), John Salsman and Judith Moskowitz (Chapter 24) elaborate on the integration of positive psychology and health psychology, showing how health psychologists have often worked in ways typical of positive psychological practice. James Maddux and Shane Lopez (Chapter 25) critique the dominance of the *DSM* diagnostic system within clinical psychology and provide recommendations for the development and practice of a positive clinical psychology. In a new chapter, Andreas Vossler, Edith Steffen, and Stephen Joseph (Chapter 26) continue this theme within the domain of counseling, showing how counseling psychology can benefit from the theorizing and applications of positive psychology. Finally, concluding this section with another new chapter, Claudio Peter, Szilvia Geyh, Dawn Ehde, Rachel Müller, and Mark Jensen (Chapter 27) consider rehabilitation psychology from the positive psychology perspective.

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In Part VII (Contexts of Clinical Practice), Chiara Ruini and Giovanni Fava (Chapter 28) update their review of well-being therapy, a psychotherapeutic approach that aims to facilitate sustainable increases in psychological well-being that go beyond the more traditional focus on just the treatment of presenting psychopathology. Jeana Magyar-Moe and Shane Lopez (Chapter 29) examine the role of hope as an agent of positive change and focus on how hope might be facilitated within the consulting room and beyond. Dealing with the aftermath of trauma and adversity from a positive, growth-oriented perspective is the focus of Richard Tedeschi, Lawrence Calhoun, and Jessica Groleau's chapter (Chapter 30) on posttraumatic growth. Concluding this section is a new chapter by Tayyab Rashid (Chapter 31) on strength-based assessment. Importantly, Rashid opens up discussion on how we can understand distress and dysfunction as the opposite or absence of the positive.

In Part VIII (Inner Resources and Positive Development Across the Life Span), David Caruso, Peter Salovey, Marc Brackett, and John Mayer (Chapter 32) update their review of their work on emotional intelligence and its role in relationships, working environments, education, human resources, and executive coaching. Giacomo Bono, Mikki Krakauer, and Jeffrey Froh (Chapter 33) survey the role of gratitude in practice, demonstrating how it is a character strength reliably related to positive psychological outcomes and good lives in both adults and young people. Ute Kunzmann and Stefanie Thomas (Chapter 34) describe their work on the emotional-motivational side of wisdom. Concluding this section, George Vaillant (Chapter 35) moves the focus toward the end of life with his analysis of what constitutes and facilitates positive aging—factors that are pertinent and applicable throughout the life span.

In Part IX (Building Community Through Integration and Regeneration), Antonella Delle Fave, Andrea Fianco, and Raffaella Sartori (Chapter 36) look at the role of optimal experiences in adjusting to and living with disability and the role of caregivers, demonstrating that to be disabled in no way represents the end of opportunities for optimal living. Clare-Ann Fortune, Tony Ward, and Ruth Mann (Chapter 37) address positive treatment approaches with sex offenders, conveying how interventions that respect them as individuals lead to improved treatment compliance and lower recidivism. Frank Fincham (Chapter 38) explores the role of forgiveness at group and community levels, offering a range of ways in which forgiveness can be facilitated to promote group and community healing and integration. Two new chapters end this section on how positive psychology is relevant to professional practices in the community; the first by Rachel Dekel and Orit Taubman-Ben-Ari (Chapter 39) on social work, and the second by Sandra Resnick and Meaghan Leddy (Chapter 40) on the recovery movement.

In Part X (Public Policy and Systems for Resilience and Social Planning), David Myers (Chapter 41) explores the tension between individualism and community in facilitating good human connections and the attendant implications for public policy. Ruut Veenhoven (Chapter 42) outlines and debunks the objections to the greatest happiness principle, showing that greater happiness for people is a legitimate and achievable public policy aim. In a new chapter, Neil Thin (Chapter 43) discusses social planning. Finally, Tuppett Yates, Fanita Tyrell, and Ann Masten (Chapter 44) explore the role of resilience theory in the practice of positive psychology and the need for a systems-based approach.

Finally, in Part XI (Signposts for the Practice of Positive Psychology), two new chapters introduce signposts for the future. Kate Hefferon (Chapter 45) discusses the need for positive psychology to pay much greater attention to the fact of our



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embodiment as human beings. Brian Pauwels (Chapter 46) discusses what is meant by the term *positive* in positive psychology and its relation with the negative. Finally, Stephen Joseph (Chapter 47) concludes the volume by reviewing some of the key issues and implications facing applied positive psychology.

The sections of the book organize the chapters in a coherent way and provide structure, but there are also consistent themes throughout the book that cut across the sections and contexts of application. Practitioners of all persuasions will find riches in the sections on values and choices and on lifestyle practices.

This volume promises to be a valuable resource in the further development and evolution of applied positive psychology and in bringing it to the attention of new scholars and practitioners. In doing so, it is my hope that we will move closer to the vision that one day all psychologists will embrace the idea of positive psychology. Finally, it has been my great pleasure to work with these authors in the development of this volume, and I hope you will enjoy reading it and will learn as much as I have learned in its preparation.

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