Flourish

A VISIONARY NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

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PART 1

A New Positive Psychology

Chapter 1

What Is Well-Being?

The real way positive psychology got its start has been a secret until now. When I was president-elect of the American Psychological Association in 1997, my email tripled. I rarely answer phone calls, and I never do snail mail anymore, but because there is a twenty-four-hour-a-day bridge game on the Internet, I answer my email swiftly and diligently. My replies are just the length that fits the time it takes for my partner to play the hand when I am the dummy. (I am seligman@psych.upenn.edu, and you should feel free to email me if you don't mind one-sentence answers.)

One email that I received in late 1997, however, puzzled me, and I put it into my "huh?" folder. It said simply, "Why don't you come up to see me in New York?" and was signed with initials only. A couple of weeks later, I was at a cocktail party with Judy Rodin, then the president of the University of Pennsylvania, where I have taught for forty years. Judy, now the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, was a senior at Penn when I was a first-year graduate student, and we both worked in psychology professor Richard Solomon's animal lab. We became fast friends, and I watched with admiration and more than a little envy when Judy zoomed at an astonishingly young age from president of the Eastern Psychological Association, to chairman of psychology at Yale University, to dean, and to provost at Yale, and then to president at Penn. In between, we even managed to collaborate on a study investigating the correlation of optimism with a stronger immune system in senior citizens when Judy headed the MacArthur Foundation's massive

project on psychoneuroimmunology—the pathways through which psychological events influence neural events which in turn influence immune events.

"Do you know a 'PT' who might have sent me an email inviting me to New York?" I asked Judy, who knows everybody who is anybody.

"Go see him!" she gasped.

So two weeks later, I found myself at an unmarked door on the eighth floor of a small, grimy office building in the bowels of lower Manhattan. I was ushered into an undecorated, windowless room in which sat two gray-haired, gray-suited men and one speakerphone.

"We are the lawyers for an anonymous foundation," explained one of them, introducing himself as PT. "We pick winners, and you are a winner. We'd like to know what research and scholarship you want to do. We don't micromanage. We should warn you at the outset, however, that if you reveal our identity, any funding we give you will stop."

I briefly explained to the lawyers and the speakerphone one of my APA initiatives, ethnopolitical warfare (most assuredly not any kind of positive psychology), and said that I would like to hold a meeting of the forty leading people who work in genocide. I wanted to find out when genocides do or do not occur, by comparing the settings surrounding the dozen genocides of the twentieth century to the fifty in settings so rife with hatred that genocide should have occurred but did not. Then I would edit a book about how to avoid genocide in the twenty-first century.

"Thanks for telling us," they said after just five minutes. "And when you get back to your office, would you send us a one-pager about this? And don't forget to include a budget."

Two weeks later, a check for over $120,000 appeared on my desk. This was a delightful shock, since almost all the academic research I had known is funded through tedious grant requests, annoying peer reviews, officious bureaucracy, unconscionable delays, wrenching revisions, and then rejection or at best heart-stopping budget cuts.

I held the weeklong meeting, choosing Derry in Northern Ireland as its symbolic location. Forty academics, the princes and princesses of

ethnopolitical violence, attended. All but two knew one another from the social-science circuit. One was my father-in-law, Dennis McCarthy, a retired British industrialist. The other was the treasurer of the anonymous foundation, a retired engineering professor from Cornell University. Afterward, Dennis commented to me that people have never been so nice to him. And the volume *Ethnopolitical Warfare,* edited by Daniel Chirot and me, was indeed published in 2002. It's worth reading, but that is not what this story is about.

I had almost forgotten this generous foundation, the name of which I still did not know, when I got a call from the treasurer about six months later.

"That was a super meeting you held in Derry, Marty. I met two brilliant people there, the medical anthropologist Mel Konner and that McCarthy chap. What does he do, by the way? And what do you want to do next?"

"Next?" I stammered, wholly unprepared to solicit more funding. "Well, I am thinking about something I call 'positive psychology.'" I explained it for about a minute.

"Why don't you come visit us in New York?" he said.

The morning of this visit, Mandy, my wife, offered me my best white shirt. "I think I should take the one with the worn collar," I said, thinking of the modest office in lower Manhattan. The office building, however, had changed to one of Manhattan's swankiest, and now the top-floor meeting room was large and windowed—but still with the same two lawyers and the speakerphone, and still no sign on the door.

"What is this positive psychology?" they asked. After about ten minutes of explanation, they ushered me out and said, "When you get back to your office, would you send us a three-pager? And don't forget to include a budget."

A month later, a check for $1.5 million appeared.

This tale has an ending as strange as its beginning. Positive psychology began to flourish with this funding, and the anonymous foundation must have noted this, since two years later, I got another one-line email from PT.

"Is the Mandela-Milosevic dimension a continuum?" it read.

"Hmmm . . . now what could that mean?" I wondered. Knowing, however, that this time I was not dealing with a crank, I made my best guess and sent PT a long, scholarly response, outlining what was known about the nature and nurture of saints and of monsters.

"Why don't you come visit us in New York?" was his response.

This time I wore my best white shirt, and there was a sign on the door that read "Atlantic Philanthropies." The foundation, it turned out, was the gift of a single generous individual, Charles Feeney, who had made his fortune in duty-free shops and donated it all—$5 billion—to these trustees to do good work. American law had forced it to assume a public name.

"We'd like you to gather together the leading scientists and scholars and answer the Mandela-Milosevic question, from the genetics all the way up to the political science and sociology of good and evil," they said. "And we intend to give you twenty million dollars to do it."

That is a lot of money, certainly way above my pay grade, and so I bit. Hard. Over the next six months, the two lawyers and I held meetings with scholars and drafted and redrafted the proposal, to be rubber-stamped the following week by their board of directors. It contained some very fine science.

"We're very embarrassed, Marty," PT said on the phone. "The board turned us down—for the first time in our history. They didn't like the genetics part. Too politically explosive." Within a year, both these wonderful custodians of good works—figures right out of *The Millionaire* (a 1950s television series, on which I had been imprinted as a teenager, in which a person shows up on your doorstep with a check for a million dollars)—had resigned.

I followed the good work that Atlantic Philanthropies did over the next three years—funding Africa, aging, Ireland, and schools—and I decided to phone the new CEO. He took the call, and I could almost feel him steeling himself for yet another solicitation.

"I called only to say thank you and to ask you to convey my deepest gratitude to Mr. Feeney," I began. "You came along at just the right time and made just the right investment in the offbeat idea of a psychology about what makes life worth living. You helped us when we were newborn, and now we don't need any further funding because

positive psychology is now self-supporting. But it would not have happened without Atlantic."

"I never got this sort of call before," the CEO replied, his voice puzzled.

The Birth of a New Theory

My encounter with that anonymous foundation was one of the high points of the last ten years in positive psychology, and this book is the story of what this beginning wrought. To explain what positive psychology has become, I begin with a radical *re*thinking of what positivity and flourishing are. First and most important, however, I have to tell you about my new thoughts of what happiness is.

Thales thought that everything was water.
Aristotle thought that all human action was to achieve happiness.
Nietzsche thought that all human action was to get power.
Freud thought that all human action was to avoid anxiety.

All of these giants made the grand mistake of monism, in which all human motives come down to just one. Monisms get the most mileage from the fewest variables, and so they pass with flying colors the test of "parsimony," the philosophical dictum that the simplest answer is the right answer. But there is also a lower limit on parsimony: when there are too few variables to explain the rich nuances of the phenomenon in question, nothing at all is explained. Monism is fatal to the theories of these four giants.

Of these monisms, my original view was closest to Aristotle's—that everything we do is done in order to make us happy—but I actually detest the word *happiness,* which is so overused that it has become almost meaningless. It is an unworkable term for science, or for any practical goal such as education, therapy, public policy, or just changing your personal life. The first step in positive psychology is to dissolve the monism of "happiness" into more workable terms. Much

more hangs on doing this well than a mere exercise in semantics. Understanding happiness requires a theory, and this chapter is my new theory.

"Your 2002 theory can't be right, Marty," said Senia Maymin when we were discussing my previous theory in my Introduction to Positive Psychology for the inaugural class of the Master of Applied Positive Psychology in 2005. A thirty-two-year-old Harvard University summa in mathematics who is fluent in Russian and Japanese and runs her own hedge fund, Senia is a poster child for positive psychology. Her smile warms even cavernous classrooms like those in Huntsman Hall, nicknamed the "Death Star" by the Wharton School business students of the University of Pennsylvania who call it their home base. The students in this master's program are really special: thirty-five successful adults from all over the world who fly into Philadelphia once a month for a three-day feast of what's at the cutting edge in positive psychology and how they can apply it to their professions.

"The 2002 theory in the book *Authentic Happiness* is supposed to be a theory of what humans choose, but it has a huge hole in it: it omits success and mastery. People try to achieve just for winning's own sake," Senia continued.

This was the moment I began to rethink happiness.

When I wrote *Authentic Happiness* a decade ago, I wanted to call it *Positive Psychology,* but the publisher thought that "happiness" in the title would sell more books. I have been able to win many skirmishes with editors, but never over titles. So I found myself saddled with the word. (I also dislike *authentic,* a close relative of the overused term *self,* in a world of overblown selves.) The primary problem with that title and with "happiness" is not only that it underexplains what we choose but that the modern ear immediately hears "happy" to mean buoyant mood, merriment, good cheer, and smiling. Just as annoying, the title saddled me with that awful smiley face whenever positive psychology made the news.

"Happiness" historically is not closely tied to such hedonics—feeling cheerful or merry is a far cry from what Thomas Jefferson declared that we have the right to pursue—and it is an even further cry from my intentions for a positive psychology.

The Original Theory: Authentic Happiness

Positive psychology, as I intend it, is about what we choose for its own sake. I chose to have a back rub in the Minneapolis airport recently because it made me feel good. I chose the back rub for its own sake, not because it gave my life more meaning or for any other reason. We often choose what makes us feel good, but it is very important to realize that often our choices are not made for the sake of how we will feel. I chose to listen to my six-year-old's excruciating piano recital last night, not because it made me feel good but because it is my parental duty and part of what gives my life meaning.

The theory in *Authentic Happiness* is that happiness could be analyzed into three different elements that we choose for their own sakes: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. And each of these elements is better defined and more measurable than happiness. The first is positive emotion; what we feel: pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and the like. An entire life led successfully around this element, I call the "pleasant life."

The second element, engagement, is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity. I refer to a life lived with these aims as the "engaged life." Engagement is different, even opposite, from positive emotion; for if you ask people who are in flow what they are thinking and feeling, they usually say, "nothing." In flow we merge with the object. I believe that the concentrated attention that flow requires uses up all the cognitive and emotional resources that make up thought and feeling.

There are no shortcuts to flow. On the contrary, you need to deploy your highest strengths and talents to meet the world in flow. There are

effortless shortcuts to feeling positive emotion, which is another difference between engagement and positive emotion. You can masturbate, go shopping, take drugs, or watch television. Hence, the importance of identifying your highest strengths and learning to use them more often in order to go into flow (www.authentichappiness.org).

There is yet a third element of happiness, which is meaning. I go into flow playing bridge, but after a long tournament, when I look in the mirror, I worry that I am merely fidgeting until I die. The pursuit of engagement and the pursuit of pleasure are often solitary, solipsistic endeavors. Human beings, ineluctably, want meaning and purpose in life. The Meaningful Life consists in belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self, and humanity creates all the positive institutions to allow this: religion, political party, being green, the Boy Scouts, or the family.

So that is authentic happiness theory: positive psychology is about happiness in three guises—positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. Senia's challenge crystallized ten years of teaching, thinking about, and testing this theory and pushed me to develop it further. Beginning in that October class in Huntsman Hall, I changed my mind about *what positive psychology is.* I also changed my mind about *what the elements of positive psychology are* and *what the goal of positive psychology should be.*

Authentic Happiness Theory	Well-Being Theory
Topic: happiness	Topic: well-being
Measure: life satisfaction	Measures: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment
Goal: increase life satisfaction	Goal: increase flourishing by increasing positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment

Authentic Happiness = PEM

Well-Being = PERMA

From Authentic Happiness Theory to Well-Being Theory

I used to think that the topic of positive psychology was happiness, that the gold standard for measuring happiness was life satisfaction, and that the goal of positive psychology was to increase life satisfaction. I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. This theory, which I call well-being theory, is very different from authentic happiness theory, and the difference requires explanation.

There are three inadequacies in authentic happiness theory. The first is that the dominant popular connotation of "happiness" is inextricably bound up with being in a cheerful mood. Positive emotion is the rock-bottom meaning of happiness. Critics cogently contend that authentic happiness theory arbitrarily and preemptively redefines happiness by dragging in the desiderata of engagement and meaning to supplement positive emotion. Neither engagement nor meaning refers to how we feel, and while we may desire engagement and meaning, they are not and can never be part of what "happiness" denotes.

The second inadequacy in authentic happiness theory is that life satisfaction holds too privileged a place in the measurement of happiness. Happiness in authentic happiness theory is operationalized by the gold standard of life satisfaction, a widely researched self-report measure that asks on a 1-to-10 scale how satisfied you are with your life, from terrible (a score of 1) to ideal (10). The goal of positive psychology follows from the gold standard—to increase the amount of life satisfaction on the planet. It turns out, however, that how much life satisfaction people report is itself determined by how good we *feel* at the very moment we are asked the question. Averaged over many people, the mood you are in determines more than 70 percent of how much life satisfaction you report and how well you *judge* your life to be going at that moment determines less than 30 percent.

So the old, gold standard of positive psychology is disproportionately tied to mood, the form of happiness that the ancients snob-

bishly, but rightly, considered vulgar. My reason for denying mood a privileged place is not snobbishness, but liberation. A mood view of happiness consigns the 50 percent of the world's population who are "low-positive affectives" to the hell of unhappiness. Even though they lack cheerfulness, this low-mood half may have more engagement and meaning in life than merry people. Introverts are much less cheery than extroverts, but if public policy is based (as we shall inquire in the final chapter) on maximizing happiness in the mood sense, extroverts get a much greater vote than introverts. The decision to build a circus rather than a library based on how much additional happiness will be produced counts those capable of cheerful mood more heavily than those less capable. A theory that counts increases in engagement and meaning along with increases in positive emotion is morally liberating as well as more democratic for public policy. And it turns out that life satisfaction does not take into account how much meaning we have or how engaged we are in our work or how engaged we are with the people we love. *Life satisfaction essentially measures cheerful mood, so it is not entitled to a central place in any theory that aims to be more than a happiology.*

The third inadequacy in authentic happiness theory is that positive emotion, engagement, and meaning do not exhaust the elements that people choose for their own sake. "Their own sake" is the operative phrase: to be a basic element in a theory, what you choose must serve no other master. This was Senia's challenge; she asserted that many people live to achieve, just for achievement's sake. A better theory will more completely specify the elements of what people choose. And so, here is the new theory and how it solves these three problems.

Well-Being Theory

Well-being is a construct, and happiness is a thing. A "real thing" is a directly measurable entity. Such an entity can be "operationalized"—which means that a highly specific set of measures defines it. For instance, the windchill factor in meteorology is defined by the combination of temperature and wind at which water freezes (and frostbite occurs). Authentic happiness theory is an attempt to explain a *real thing*—happiness—as defined by life satisfaction, where on a 1-to-10 ladder, people rate their satisfaction with their lives. People who have the most positive emotion, the most engagement, and the most meaning in life are the happiest, and they have the most life satisfaction. Well-being theory denies that the topic of positive psychology is a real thing; rather the topic is a *construct*—well-being—which in turn has several measurable elements, each a real thing, each contributing to well-being, *but none defining well-being.*

In meteorology, "weather" is such a construct. Weather is not in and of itself a real thing. Several elements, each operationalizable and thus each a real thing, contribute to the weather: temperature, humidity, wind speed, barometric pressure, and the like. Imagine that our topic were not the study of positive psychology but the study of "freedom." How would we go about studying freedom scientifically? Freedom is a construct, not a real thing, and several different elements contribute to it: how free the citizens feel, how often the press is censored, the frequency of elections, the ratio of representatives to population, how many officials are corrupt, among other factors. Each of these elements, unlike the construct of freedom itself, is a measurable thing, but only by measuring these elements do we get an overall picture of how much freedom there is.

Well-being is just like "weather" and "freedom" in its structure: no single measure defines it exhaustively (in jargon, "defines exhaustively" is called "operationalizes"), but several things contribute to it; these are the *elements* of well-being, and each of the elements is a measurable thing. By contrast, life satisfaction operationalizes happiness in authentic happiness theory just as temperature and wind speed define windchill. Importantly, the elements of well-being are themselves different kinds of things; they are not all mere self-reports of thoughts and feelings of positive emotion, of how engaged you are, and of how much meaning you have in life, as in the original theory of authentic happiness. So the construct of well-being, not the entity of life satisfaction, is the focal topic of positive psychology. Enumerating the elements of well-being is our next task.

The Elements of Well-Being

Authentic happiness theory comes dangerously close to Aristotle's monism because happiness is operationalized, or defined, by life satisfaction. Well-being has several contributing elements that take us safely away from monism. It is essentially a theory of uncoerced choice, and its five elements comprise what free people will choose for their own sake. And each element of well-being must itself have three properties to count as an element:

1. It contributes to well-being.
2. Many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements.
3. It is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity).

Well-being theory has five elements, and each of the five has these three properties. The five elements are positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. A handy mnemonic is PERMA. Let's look at each of the five, starting with positive emotion.

Positive emotion. The first element in well-being theory is positive emotion (the pleasant life). It is also the first in authentic happiness theory. But it remains a cornerstone of well-being theory, although with two crucial changes. Happiness and life satisfaction, as subjective measures, are now demoted from being the goal of the entire theory to merely being one of the factors included under the element of positive emotion.

Engagement. Engagement remains an element. Like positive emotion, it is assessed only subjectively ("Did time stop for you?" "Were you completely absorbed by the task?" "Did you lose self-consciousness?"). Positive emotion and engagement are the two categories in well-being theory where all the factors are measured only subjectively. As the hedonic, or pleasurable, element, positive emotion encompasses all

the usual subjective well-being variables: pleasure, ecstasy, comfort, warmth, and the like. Keep in mind, however, that thought and feeling are usually absent during the flow state, and only in retrospect do we say, "That was fun" or "That was wonderful." While the subjective state for the pleasures is in the present, the subjective state for engagement is only retrospective.

Positive emotion and engagement easily meet the three criteria for being an element of well-being: (1) Positive emotion and engagement contribute to well-being. (2) They are pursued by many people for their own sake, and not necessarily to gain any of the other elements (I want this back rub even if it brings no meaning, no accomplishment, and no relationships). (3) They are measured independently of the rest of the elements. (There is, in fact, a cottage industry of scientists that measures all the subjective well-being variables.)

Meaning. I retain meaning (belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self) as the third element of well-being. Meaning has a subjective component ("Wasn't that all-night session in the dormitory the most meaningful conversation ever?"), and so it might be subsumed into positive emotion. Recall that the subjective component is *dispositive* for positive emotion. The person who has it cannot be wrong about his own pleasure, ecstasy, or comfort. What he feels settles the issue. Not so for meaning, however: you might think that the all-night bull session was very meaningful, but when you remember its gist years later and are no longer high on marijuana, it is clear that it was only adolescent gibberish.

Meaning is not solely a subjective state. The dispassionate and more objective judgment of history, logic, and coherence can contradict a subjective judgment. Abraham Lincoln, a profound melancholic, may have, in his despair, judged his life to be meaningless, but we judge it pregnant with meaning. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist play *No Exit* might have been judged meaningful by him and his post–World War II devotees, but it now seems wrongheaded ("Hell is other people") and almost meaningless, since today it is accepted without dissent that connections to other people and relationships are what give meaning and purpose to life. Meaning meets the three criteria of elementhood: (1) It

contributes to well-being. (2) It is often pursued for its own sake; for example, your single-minded advocacy for AIDS research annoys others, makes you miserable subjectively, and has gotten you fired from your writing job on the *Washington Post,* but you persist undaunted. And (3) meaning is defined and measured independently of positive emotion or engagement and independent of the other two elements—accomplishment and relationships—to which I now turn.

Accomplishment. Here is what Senia's challenge to authentic happiness theory—her assertion that people pursue success, accomplishment, winning, achievement, and mastery for their own sakes—has wrought. I have become convinced that she is correct and that the two transient states above (positive emotion and meaning, or the pleasant life and the meaningful life in their extended forms) do not exhaust what people commonly pursue for their own sakes. Two other states have an adequate claim on "well-being" and need not be pursued in the service of either pleasure or meaning.

Accomplishment (or achievement) is often pursued for its own sake, even when it brings no positive emotion, no meaning, and nothing in the way of positive relationships. Here is what ultimately convinced me: I play a lot of serious duplicate bridge. I have played with and against many of the greatest players. Some expert bridge players play to improve, to learn, to solve problems, and to be in flow. When they win, it's great. They call it "winning pretty." But when they lose—as long as they played well—it's almost as great. These experts play in the pursuit of engagement or positive emotion, even outright joy. Other experts play only to win. For them, if they lose, it's devastating no matter how well they played; if they win, however, it's great, even if they "win ugly." Some will even cheat to win. It does not seem that winning for them reduces to positive emotion (many of the stonier experts deny feeling anything at all when they win and quickly rush on to the next game or play backgammon until the next bridge game assembles), nor does the pursuit reduce to engagement, since defeat nullifies the experience so easily. Nor is it about meaning, since bridge is not about anything remotely larger than the self.

Winning only for winning's sake can also be seen in the pursuit of wealth. Some tycoons pursue wealth and then give much of it away, in astonishing gestures of philanthropy. John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie set the model, and Charles Feeney, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett are contemporary paragons of this virtue: Rockefeller and Carnegie both spent the second half of their lives giving away to science and medicine, to culture and education much of the fortunes they had made in the first half of their lives. They created meaning later in their lives after early lives of winning only for winning's sake.

In contrast to these "donors," there are the "accumulators" who believe that the person who dies with the most toys wins. Their lives are built around winning. When they lose, it's devastating, and they do not give away their toys except in the service of winning more toys. It is undeniable that these accumulators and the companies they build provide the means for many other people to build lives, have families, and create their own meaning and purpose. But this is only a side effect of the accumulators' motive to win.

So well-being theory requires a fourth element: accomplishment in its momentary form, and the "achieving life," a life dedicated to accomplishment for the sake of accomplishment, in its extended form.

I fully recognize that such a life is almost never seen in its pure state (nor are any of the other lives). People who lead the achieving life are often absorbed in what they do, they often pursue pleasure avidly and they feel positive emotion (however evanescent) when they win, and they may win in the service of something larger. ("God made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure," says the actor portraying the real-life Olympic runner Eric Liddell in the film *Chariots of Fire.*) Nevertheless, I believe that accomplishment is a fourth fundamental and distinguishable element of well-being and that this addition takes well-being theory one step closer to a more complete account of what people choose for its own sake.

I added accomplishment pursued for its own sake because of one of the most formative articles I ever read. In the early 1960s, I was working in psychology professor Byron Campbell's rat lab at Princeton University, and at that time the umbrella theory of motivation was

"drive-reduction" theory: the notion that animals acted only to satisfy their biological needs. In 1959 Robert White had published a heretical article, "Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence," which threw cold water on the entire drive-reduction enterprise by arguing that rats and people often acted simply to exert mastery over the environment. We pooh-poohed it as soft-headed then, but White, I discovered on my own long and winding road, was right on target.

The addition of the achieving life also emphasizes that the task of positive psychology is to *describe,* rather than *prescribe,* what people actually do to get well-being. Adding this element in no way endorses the achieving life or suggests that you should divert your own path to well-being to win more often. Rather I include it to better describe what human beings, when free of coercion, choose to do for its own sake.

Positive Relationships. When asked what, in two words or fewer, positive psychology is about, Christopher Peterson, one of its founders, replied, "*Other people.*"

Very little that is positive is solitary. When was the last time you laughed uproariously? The last time you felt indescribable joy? The last time you sensed profound meaning and purpose? The last time you felt enormously proud of an accomplishment? Even without knowing the particulars of these high points of your life, I know their form: all of them took place around other people.

Other people are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up. Hence my snide comment about Sartre's "Hell is other people." My friend Stephen Post, professor of Medical Humanities at Stony Brook, tells a story about his mother. When he was a young boy, and his mother saw that he was in a bad mood, she would say, "Stephen, you are looking piqued. Why don't you go out and help someone?" Empirically, Ma Post's maxim has been put to rigorous test, and we scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested.

Kindness Exercise

"Another one-penny stamp increase!" I fumed as I stood in an enormous, meandering line for forty-five minutes to get a sheet of one hundred one-cent stamps. The line moved glacially, with tempers rising all around me. Finally I made it to the front and asked for ten sheets of one hundred. All of ten dollars.

"Who needs one-penny stamps?" I shouted. "They're free!" People burst into applause and clustered around me as I gave away this treasure. Within two minutes, everyone was gone, along with most of my stamps. It was one of the most satisfying moments of my life.

Here is the exercise: find one wholly unexpected kind thing to do tomorrow and just do it. Notice what happens to your mood.

There is an island near the Portuguese island of Madeira that is shaped like an enormous cylinder. The very top of the cylinder is a several-acre plateau on which are grown the most prized grapes that go into Madeira wine. On this plateau lives only one large animal: an ox whose job is to plow the field. There is only one way up to the top, a very winding and narrow path. How in the world does a new ox get up there when the old ox dies? A baby ox is carried on the back of a worker up the mountain, where it spends the next forty years plowing the field alone. If you are moved by this story, ask yourself why.

Is there someone in your life whom you would feel comfortable phoning at four in the morning to tell your troubles to? If your answer is yes, you will likely live longer than someone whose answer is no. For George Vaillant, the Harvard psychiatrist who discovered this fact, the master strength is the capacity to *be* loved. Conversely, as the social neuroscientist John Cacioppo has argued, loneliness is such a disabling condition that it compels the belief that the pursuit of relationships is a rock-bottom fundamental to human well-being.

There is no denying the profound influences that positive relationships or their absence have on well-being. The theoretical issue, however, is whether positive relationships qualify as an *element* of well-being. Positive relationships clearly fulfill two of the criteria of being an element: they contribute to well-being and they can be mea-

has bolstered them with the additional support of the other elements in order to make damn sure that we pursue positive relationships.

SUMMARY OF WELL-BEING THEORY

Here then is well-being theory: well-being is a construct; and well-being, not happiness, is the topic of positive psychology. Well-being has five measurable elements (PERMA) that count toward it:

- Positive emotion (of which happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects)
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Achievement

No one element defines well-being, but each contributes to it. Some aspects of these five elements are measured subjectively by self-report, but other aspects are measured objectively.

In authentic happiness theory, by contrast, happiness is the centerpiece of positive psychology. It is a real thing that is defined by the measurement of life satisfaction. Happiness has three aspects: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning, each of which feeds into life satisfaction and is measured entirely by subjective report.

There is one loose end to clarify: in authentic happiness theory, the strengths and virtues—kindness, social intelligence, humor, courage, integrity, and the like (there are twenty-four of them)—are the supports for engagement. You go into flow when your highest strengths are deployed to meet the highest challenges that come your way. In well-being theory, these twenty-four strengths underpin all five elements, not just engagement: deploying your highest strengths leads to more positive emotion, to more meaning, to more accomplishment, and to better relationships.

Authentic happiness theory is one-dimensional: it is about feeling good and it claims that the way we choose our life course is to try to maximize how we feel. Well-being theory is about all five pillars, the

underpinnings of the five elements is the strengths. Well-being theory is plural in method as well as substance: positive emotion is a subjective variable, defined by what you think and feel. Engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment have both subjective and objective components, since you can believe you have engagement, meaning, good relations, and high accomplishment and be *wrong*, even deluded. The upshot of this is that well-being cannot exist just in your own head: well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment. The way we choose our course in life is to maximize all five of these elements.

This difference between happiness theory and well-being theory is of real moment. Happiness theory claims that the way we make choices is to estimate how much happiness (life satisfaction) will ensue, and then we take the course that maximizes future happiness. Maximizing happiness is the final common path of individual choice. As economist Richard Layard argues, that is how individuals choose and in addition maximizing happiness should become the gold standard measure for all policy decisions by government. Richard, the advisor to both prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown on unemployment, and my good friend and teacher, is a card-carrying economist, and his view—for an economist—is remarkable. It sensibly departs from the typical economist's view of wealth: that the purpose of wealth is to produce more wealth. For Richard, the only rationale for increasing wealth is to increase happiness, so he promotes happiness, not only as the criterion by which we choose what to do as individuals, but as the single outcome measure that should be measured by government in order to decide what policies to pursue. While I welcome this development, it is another naked monism, and I disagree with the idea that happiness is the be-all and end-all of well-being and its best measure.

The final chapter of this book is about the politics and economics of well-being, but for now I want to give just one example of why happiness theory fails abysmally as the sole explanation of how we choose. It is well established that couples with children have on average lower happiness and life satisfaction than childless couples. If evolution had to rely on maximizing happiness, the human race would have died out long ago. So clearly either humans are massively deluded about how

much life satisfaction children will bring or else we use some additional metric for choosing to reproduce. Similarly, if personal future happiness were our sole aim, we would leave our aging parents out on ice floes to die. So the happiness monism not only conflicts with the facts, but it is a poor moral guide as well: from happiness theory as a guide to life choice, some couples might choose to remain childless. When we broaden our view of well-being to include meaning and relationships, it becomes obvious why we choose to have children and why we choose to care for our aging parents.

Happiness and life satisfaction are one element of well-being and are useful subjective measures, but well-being cannot exist just in your own head. Public policy aimed only at subjective well-being is vulnerable to the *Brave New World* caricature in which the government promotes happiness simply by drugging the population with a euphoriant called "soma." Just as we choose how to live by plural criteria, and not just to maximize happiness, truly useful measures of well-being for public policy will need to be a dashboard of both subjective and objective measures of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, good relationships, and positive accomplishment.

Flourishing as the Goal of Positive Psychology

The goal of positive psychology in authentic happiness theory is, like Richard Layard's goal, to increase the amount of happiness in your own life and on the planet. The goal of positive psychology in well-being theory, in contrast, is plural and importantly different: it is to increase the amount of *flourishing* in your own life and on the planet.

What is flourishing?

Felicia Huppert and Timothy So of the University of Cambridge have defined and measured flourishing in each of twenty-three European Union nations. Their definition of flourishing is in the spirit of well-being theory: to flourish, an individual must have all the "core features" below and three of the six "additional features."

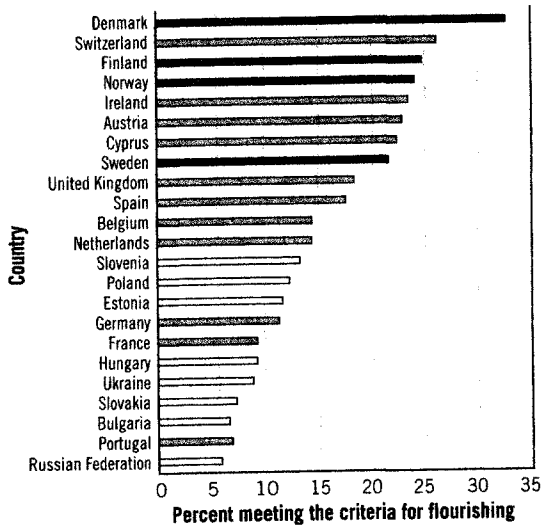
Core features	Additional features
Positive emotions Engagement, interest Meaning, purpose	Self-esteem Optimism Resilience Vitality Self-determination Positive relationships

All 3 ≥ 3

They administered the following well-being items to more than two thousand adults in each nation in order to find out how each country was doing by way of its citizens' flourishing.

Positive emotion	Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
Engagement, interest	I love learning new things.
Meaning, purpose	I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile.
Self-esteem	In general, I feel very positive about myself.
Optimism	I'm always optimistic about my future.
Resilience	When things go wrong in my life, it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal. (Opposite answers indicate more resilience.)
Positive relationships	There are people in my life who really care about me.

Denmark leads Europe, with 33 percent of its citizens flourishing. The United Kingdom has about half that rate, with 18 percent flourishing; and Russia sits at the bottom, with only 6 percent of its citizens flourishing.



This kind of study leads to the "moon-shot" goal for positive psychology, which is what the final chapter is about and what this book is really aimed at. As our ability to measure positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive relations improves, we can ask with rigor how many people in a nation, in a city, or in a corporation are flourishing. We can ask with rigor when in her lifetime an individual is flourishing. We can ask with rigor if a charity is increasing the flourishing of its beneficiaries. We can ask with rigor if our school systems are helping our children flourish.

Public policy follows only from what we measure—and until recently, we measured only money, gross domestic product (GDP). So the success of government could be quantified only by how much it built wealth. But what is wealth for, anyway? The goal of wealth, in my view, is not just to produce more wealth but to engender flourishing. We can now ask of public policy, "How much will building this new school rather than this park increase flourishing?" We can ask if a program of vaccination for measles will produce more flourishing than an equally expensive corneal transplant program. We can ask by how much a program of paying parents to take extra time at home raising their children increases flourishing.

So the goal of positive psychology in well-being theory is to measure and to build human flourishing. Achieving this goal starts by asking what really makes us happy.

Chapter 2

Creating Your Happiness: Positive Psychology Exercises That Work

Here's a brief exercise that will raise your well-being and lower your depression:

The Gratitude Visit

Close your eyes. Call up the face of someone still alive who years ago did something or said something that changed your life for the better. Someone who you never properly thanked; someone you could meet face-to-face next week. Got a face?

Gratitude can make your life happier and more satisfying. When we feel gratitude, we benefit from the pleasant memory of a positive event in our life. Also, when we express our gratitude to others, we strengthen our relationship with them. But sometimes our thank-you is said so casually or quickly that it is nearly meaningless. In this exercise, called the "Gratitude Visit," you will have the opportunity to experience what it is like to express your gratitude in a thoughtful, purposeful manner.

Your task is to write a letter of gratitude to this individual and deliver it in person. The letter should be concrete and about three hundred words: be specific about what she did for you and how it affected your life. Let her know what you are doing now, and mention how you often remember what she did. Make it sing!

Once you have written the testimonial, call the person and tell her

you'd like to visit her, but be vague about the purpose of the meeting; this exercise is much more fun when it is a surprise. When you meet her, take your time reading your letter. Notice her reactions as well as yours. If she interrupts you as you read, say that you really want her to listen until you are done. After you have read the letter (every word), discuss the content and your feelings for each other.

You will be happier and less depressed one month from now.

Can Well-Being Be Changed?

If positive psychology aims to build well-being on the planet, well-being must be buildable. That sounds trivial, but it is not. The behaviorists of the first half of the twentieth century were optimists: they believed that if you could rid the world of the disabling conditions of life—poverty, racism, injustice—human life would be transformed for the better. Contrary to their insouciant optimism, it turns out that many aspects of human behavior do not change lastingly. Your waistline is a prime example. Dieting is a scam, one that bilks Americans out of $50 billion annually. You can follow any diet on the bestseller list and within a month lose 5 percent of your body weight. I did the watermelon diet for thirty days and lost twenty pounds. I had diarrhea for a month. But like 80 percent to 95 percent of dieters, I regained all that weight (and more) within three years. Similarly, as we will see in the next chapter, much psychotherapy and many drugs are merely cosmetic, relieving the symptoms for a short time, followed by a dismaying return to square one.

Is well-being like your waistline—just a temporary boost followed by relapse to your usual curmudgeonliness—or can it be lastingly changed? Before positive psychology started a decade ago, most psychologists had become pessimistic about lasting changes in happiness. The hope that better externalities could make people lastingly happier was discouraged by a study of lottery winners, who were happier for a few months after their windfall but soon fell back to their habitual level of grouchiness or cheerfulness. We adapt rapidly to windfall, job promotion, or marriage, so theorists argue, and we soon want to trade

up to yet more goodies to raise our plummeting happiness. If we trade up successfully, we stay on the hedonic treadmill, but we will always need yet another shot.

Not a pretty picture for the pursuit of well-being.

If well-being could not be lastingly increased, then the aim of positive psychology would have to be abandoned, but I believe that well-being can be robustly raised. So this chapter is about my search for exercises that actually make us lastingly happier. From the Buddha to modern pop psychology, there have been at least two hundred endeavors proposed that allegedly do this. Which—if any—of these really produce lasting increases in well-being, which are temporary boosts, and which are just bogus?

I am a "naughty thumb of science" person—an empiricist, in other words, who prods and pokes people to get at truth that we cannot see otherwise—and some of my earlier work involved testing therapies and drugs that make people less depressed. There is a gold standard for testing therapies—random-assignment, placebo-controlled studies: randomly assigning some volunteers to the treatment group (to receive the therapy under investigation) and other subjects to what's called the control group (which is given either an inactive treatment or the current standard therapy). The random assignment of some individuals to the treatment and the others to the control group controls for internal, confounding factors, such as being highly motivated to get better: the really unmotivated and the really motivated people should in principle get spread equally into both groups by randomization. And the placebo nature of the control group controls for external factors: an equal number of individuals in each group will do each treatment when it is raining or when it is sunny. So if the treatment works, and the experimental group improves more than the randomly assigned placebo-controlled group, the treatment is gold-standard "efficacious" and is indeed the actual cause of the improvement.

The same logic holds for testing exercises that purport to increase well-being. So starting in 2001, the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania (which I direct; visit the website at www

but only the emotional element—increases in life satisfaction and decreases in depression.

Here's a second exercise to give you the flavor of the interventions that we have validated in random-assignment, placebo-controlled designs:

What-Went-Well Exercise (Also Called "Three Blessings")

We think too much about what goes wrong and not enough about what goes right in our lives. Of course, sometimes it makes sense to analyze bad events so that we can learn from them and avoid them in the future. However, people tend to spend more time thinking about what is bad in life than is helpful. Worse, this focus on negative events sets us up for anxiety and depression. One way to keep this from happening is to get better at thinking about and savoring what went well.

For sound evolutionary reasons, most of us are not nearly as good at dwelling on good events as we are at analyzing bad events. Those of our ancestors who spent a lot of time basking in the sunshine of good events, when they should have been preparing for disaster, did not survive the Ice Age. So to overcome our brains' natural catastrophic bent, we need to work on and practice this skill of thinking about what went well.

Every night for the next week, set aside ten minutes before you go to sleep. *Write down three things that went well today and why they went well.* You may use a journal or your computer to write about the events, but it is important that you have a physical record of what you wrote. The three things need not be earthshaking in importance ("My husband picked up my favorite ice cream for dessert on the way home from work today"), but they can be important ("My sister just gave birth to a healthy baby boy").

Next to each positive event, answer the question "Why did this

"because I remembered to call him from work and remind him to stop by the grocery store." Or if you wrote, "My sister just gave birth to a healthy baby boy," you might pick as the cause "God was looking out for her" or "She did everything right during her pregnancy."

Writing about why the positive events in your life happened may seem awkward at first, but please stick with it for one week. It will get easier. The odds are that you will be less depressed, happier, and addicted to this exercise six months from now.

Aside from being a naughty-thumb type, I take my own medicine. When I did experiments with electric shock and dogs forty-five years ago, I first gave myself the shock, and I tasted the Purina Dog Chow the dogs fed on—which was worse than the shock. So when I thought up the what-went-well exercise, I first tried it on myself. It worked. Next I tried it on my wife and my children. It worked again. Next my students got it.

Over the last forty-five years, I've taught almost every topic in psychology. But I have never had so much fun teaching, nor have my teaching ratings ever been so high as when I have taught positive psychology. When I taught abnormal psychology for twenty-five years, I could not assign my students meaningful, experiential homework: they couldn't become schizophrenic for a weekend! It was all book learning, and they could never know craziness itself. But in teaching positive psychology, I can assign my students to make a gratitude visit or to do the what-went-well exercise.

Many of the exercises that work actually began in my courses. For example, after we had read the scholarly literature on gratitude, I asked the students to devise a gratitude homework exercise: hence, the gratitude visit, which was dreamed up by Marisa Lascher. In five courses on positive psychology, I assigned students to carry out in their own lives the exercises we had thought up. What ensued was remarkable. I have never seen so much positive life change in my students or heard the sweetest words a teacher can hear—*life changing*—used so often to describe the course.

I then tried a new departure. Instead of teaching university stu-

dents, I taught professional mental health workers from all over the world about positive psychology. I gave four live telephone courses under the auspices of Dr. Ben Dean, who has made a profession of giving telephone courses on coaching for continuing education to licensed clinical psychologists. Each course was two hours per week for six months, and more than eight hundred professionals (including psychologists, life coaches, counselors, and psychiatrists) took my course. Each week I gave a live lecture, and then I assigned one out of about a dozen positive psychology exercises for them to do with their patients and clients, as well as to practice in their own lives.

Positive Psychology Interventions and Cases

I was astonished by how well these interventions "took" even with very depressed patients. I know that testimonials are suspect, but, for what it's worth, as a therapist and trainer of therapists for thirty years and director of clinical training for fourteen years, I had never encountered such a mass of positive reports. Here are three from the therapists who were new to positive psychology and were trying the exercises for the first time:

CASE STORY

The client is a thirty-six-year-old female who is currently under outpatient counseling and medication for depression (and is working full-time). I have been working with her for eight weeks and have basically been walking her through the telephone course in generally the same sequence we have followed. One assignment that worked especially well:

"Three happy moments" (what-went-well). She mentioned that she had forgotten all of these positives from the past. We used this to transition to "blessings," which we described as "happy moments every day," which have helped her to see her daily life more positively.

In short, everything has "worked" very well. Her scores on the

scales from the website are much more positive than before, and she credits the coaching process very strongly.

CASE STORY

The client is a depressed woman, middle-aged, morbidly obese, with underlying depression and blocks to her health and weight reduction. Among other interventions, she took the "approaches to happiness" test (AHI, available online at www.authentichappiness.org) about three months into therapy. She was working on balancing her life using the ideas of flow, meaning, and pleasantries. She noted that she knew from the start that she had no flow in her life and that all of the meaning was defined by helping others and certainly not at all about herself and her needs and wishes (pleasantries). After working hard for the three months, she took the test and was pleased to note that the three areas were quite in balance at about 3.5 on the scale of 5. She was thrilled and encouraged that there was a measure available to feedback her progress. She summarily made more plans to work with the three areas, adding all sorts of new ways to add more flow and meaning into her life.

Therapists reported to me that getting their patients in touch with their strengths, rather than just trying to correct their weaknesses, was particularly beneficial. The crucial step in this process is systematic: it begins when patients take the Values in Action Signature Strengths (VIA) test (available in a short version in the Appendix and in the full version on the Authentic Happiness website, at www.authentichappiness.org).

CASE STORY

I've been working with Emma for about six years, with an interruption of one year. She came back two years ago following the death of one of her few friends. I have recently used a few positive psychology exercises/interventions with Emma, a severely depressed, suicidal client who has been abused in every way possible since she was a baby, up to and including present-day abuse. In the past few months, I have decided to use some of the positive psychology material. I started her with the VIA Signature Strengths test in an effort to help her see the truth of who she is at her core, rather than who she has believed she is (no better than "pond scum"). This survey was the launch pad and foundation upon which to build a clear reflection. It was a tool in which I used the metaphor of a clear image being reflected back from a clear mirror that I was holding up for her. It was slow going, but soon she was able to talk about each strength, see each strength as "true" about her, see how some of the strengths get her into trouble, see where she uses the strengths to her benefit and the benefit of others, and see what strengths could help her to develop less-developed strengths. Three days later, she came for her appointment with two pages in hand . . . with seven items and the steps she was willing to take. I cried all the way through the reading of those two pages, and she smiled the entire time. This is a woman who rarely if ever smiles! It was a moment of celebration, and beyond that, she was leaping over some of the most salient and challenging "stuck places" having to do with learned helplessness and all her other personal issues that have been a part of her work in therapy.

I want you to take the test Emma took, the Values in Action Signature Strengths test, either in the Appendix or on my website and then we will do the exercise that started Emma on the road to recovery.

Let me first tell you about why I constructed the website, which has all the major validated tests of the positive side of life, with feedback on where you stand. This website is free and is intended as a public service. It is also a gold mine for positive psychology researchers, much better for obtaining valid results than asking questions, as researchers usually do, of college sophomores or clinic volunteers.

At this writing 1.8 million people have registered at the website and taken the tests. Between 500 and 1,500 new people register every day, and every so often I put up a link. One link is about exercises. People who go to this link are invited to help us test new exercises. First they take depression and happiness tests, such as the Center for Epidemiological Studies depression scale and the authentic happiness inventory, which are both on www.authentichappiness.org. Next we

randomly assign them to a single exercise that is either active or a placebo. All exercises require two to three hours over the course of one week. In our first web study, we tried six exercises, including the gratitude visit and what-went-well.

Of the 577 participants who completed the baseline questionnaires, 471 completed all five follow-up assessments. We found that participants in all conditions (including the placebo-control condition, which was to write up a childhood memory every night for a week) were happier and less depressed one week after they received their assigned exercise. Thereafter, people in the control condition were no happier or less depressed than they were at baseline.

Two of the exercises—what-went-well and the signature strengths exercise below—markedly lowered depression three months and six months later. These two exercises also substantially increased happiness through six months. The gratitude visit produced large decreases in depression and large increases in happiness one month later, but the effect faded three months later. Not surprisingly, we found that the degree to which participants actively continue their assigned exercise beyond the prescribed one-week period predicted how long the changes in happiness last.

Signature Strengths Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to encourage you to own your signature strengths by finding new and more frequent uses for them. A signature strength has the following hallmarks:

- A sense of ownership and authenticity ("This is the real me")
- A feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first
- A rapid learning curve as the strength is first practiced
- A sense of yearning to find new ways to use it
- A feeling of inevitability in using the strength ("Try to stop me")

- Invigoration rather than exhaustion while using the strength
- The creation and pursuit of personal projects that revolve around it
- Joy, zest, enthusiasm, even ecstasy while using it

Now please take the strengths survey. If you do not have access to the web, you can go to the Appendix and take a brief version of this test. On the website, you will get your results immediately and can print them out if you like. This questionnaire was developed by Chris Peterson, a professor at the University of Michigan, and has been taken by more than a million people from two hundred nations. You will have the benefit of being able to compare yourself to other people like you.

As you complete the questionnaire, pay most attention to the rank order of your own strengths. Were there any surprises for you? Next, take your five highest strengths one at a time and ask yourself, "Is it a *signature* strength?"

After you have completed the test, perform the following exercise: this week I want you to create a designated time in your schedule when you will exercise one or more of your signature strengths in a new way either at work or at home or in leisure—just make sure that you create a clearly defined opportunity to use it. For example:

- If your signature strength is creativity, you may choose to set aside two hours one evening to begin working on a screenplay.
- If you identify hope/optimism as a strength, you might write a column for the local newspaper in which you express hope about the future of the space program.
- If you claim self-control as a strength, you might choose to work out at the gym rather than watch TV one evening.
- If your strength is an appreciation of beauty and excellence, you might take a longer, more beautiful route to and from work, even though it adds twenty minutes more to your commute.

The best thing to do is to create the new way of using your strength yourself. Write about your experience. How did you feel before, during,

and after engaging in the activity? Was the activity challenging? Easy? Did time pass quickly? Did you lose your sense of self-consciousness? Do you plan to repeat the exercise?

These positive psychology exercises worked on me, they worked on my family, they worked on my students, and they were taught to professionals and then worked on their clients—even very depressed clients. And the exercises even worked in the gold-standard testing of placebo-controlled, random assignment.

Positive Psychotherapy

We positive psychologists continued our work on these single exercises with normal people, and about a dozen proved effective. I include some of these at appropriate places throughout this book.

Our next step in our research, however, was to test the best of these exercises on depressed people. Acacia Parks, then my graduate student, now teaching at Reed College, created a six-week package of six exercises, delivered in group therapy, as a means of treating depressive symptoms in mildly to moderately depressed young adults. We found dramatic effects: the exercises lowered their depression markedly into the nondepressed range, relative to randomly assigned depressed controls. And they stayed nondepressed for the year that we tracked them.

Finally Dr. Tayyab Rashid created positive psychotherapy (PPT) for depressed patients seeking treatment at Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Pennsylvania. As with other psychotherapies, positive psychotherapy is a set of techniques that are most effectively delivered with basic therapeutic essentials such as warmth, accurate empathy, basic trust and genuineness, and rapport. We believe that these essentials allow for tailoring the techniques to the individual needs of depressed clients. We first conduct a careful assessment of the client's depressive symptoms and the well-being scores from www.authentichappiness.org. We then discuss how depressive symptoms are potentially explained by lack of well-being: lack of positive emotion, engagement, and meaning in life. As shown

by the following outline, thirteen more sessions follow in which we tailor positive psychology exercises to the client. The details can be found in my book *Positive Psychotherapy: A Treatment Manual* co-authored with Dr. Rashid (Rashid and Seligman, 2011):

An Overview of Fourteen Sessions of PPT
(Rashid and Seligman, 2011)

Session 1: The absence or lack of positive resources (positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning) can cause and maintain depression and can create an empty life. Homework: The client writes a one-page (roughly three hundred words) "positive introduction," in which she tells a concrete story showing her at her best and illustrating how she used her highest character strengths.

Session 2: The client identifies his character strengths from the positive introduction and discusses situations in which these character strengths have helped him previously. Homework: The client completes the VIA questionnaire online to identify his character strengths.

Session 3: We focus on specific situations in which character strengths may facilitate cultivation of pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Homework (starting now and continuing through the entire course of therapy): The client starts a "blessings journal," in which she writes, every night, three good things (big or small) that happened that day.

Session 4: We discuss the roles of good and bad memories in maintaining depression. Holding on to anger and bitterness maintains depression and undermines well-being. Homework: The client writes about feelings of anger and bitterness and how they feed his depression.

Session 5: We introduce forgiveness as a powerful tool that can transform feelings of anger and bitterness into neutrality, or even, for some, into positive emotions. Homework: The client writes a forgiveness letter describing a transgression and related emotions and pledges to forgive the transgressor (only if appropriate) but does not deliver the letter.

Session 6: Gratitude is discussed as enduring thankfulness. Homework: The client writes a gratitude letter to someone she never properly thanked and is urged to deliver it in person.

Session 7: We review the importance of cultivating positive emotions through writing in the blessings journal and the use of character strengths.

Session 8: We discuss the fact that "satisficers" ("This is good enough") have better well-being than "maximizers" ("I must find the perfect wife, dishwasher, or vacation spot"). Satisficing is encouraged over maximizing. Homework: The client reviews ways to increase satisficing and devises a personal satisficing plan.

Session 9: We discuss optimism and hope, using explanatory style: the optimistic style is to see bad events as temporary, changeable, and local. Homework: The client thinks of three doors that closed on her. What doors opened?

Session 10: The client is invited to recognize character strengths of significant other(s). Homework: We coach the client to respond actively and constructively to positive events reported by others, and the client arranges a date that celebrates his character strengths and those of his significant other(s).

Session 11: We discuss how to recognize the character strengths of family members and where the client's own character strengths originated. Homework: The client asks family members to take the VIA questionnaire online and then draws a tree that includes the character strengths of all members of the family.

Session 12: Savoring is introduced as a technique to increase the intensity and duration of positive emotion. Homework: The client plans pleasurable activities and carries them out as planned. The client is provided with a list of specific savoring techniques.

Session 13: The client has the power to give one of the greatest gifts of all—the gift of time. Homework: The client is to give the gift of time by doing something that requires a fair amount of time and calls on her character strengths.

Session 14: We discuss the full life integrating pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

In our one test of positive psychotherapy with severe depression, the patients were randomly assigned to either individual positive psychotherapy following the outline above or treatment as usual. A matched but nonrandomized group of equally depressed patients underwent treatment as usual plus antidepressant medication. (I don't think randomly assigning patients to medication is ethical, so we matched on demographics and intensity of depression.) Positive psychotherapy relieved depressive symptoms on all outcome measures better than treatment as usual and better than drugs. We found that 55 percent of patients in positive psychotherapy, 20 percent in treatment as usual, and only 8 percent in treatment as usual plus drugs achieved remission.

Positive psychotherapy is only at its very beginning stages of practice and application, and these results are preliminary and much in need of replication. It will be important to tailor the order and duration of the exercises to clients' reactions. Even though they are new as a package, however, the individual exercises themselves have been well validated.

Probably the most striking result of the exercises happened in January 2005. *Time* magazine ran a cover story on positive psychology, and anticipating a flood of requests, we opened a website offering one free exercise: what-went-well. Thousands of people registered. My particular interest was in the fifty most severely depressed people who came to the website, took the depression and happiness tests, and then did the what-went-well exercise. These fifty people had an average depression score of 34, which put them in the "extremely" depressed category of people who barely get out of bed, go to their computer, and then go back to bed. They each did what-went-well—recording three things that went well each day for one week and then reporting back to the website. On average, their depression score plummeted from 34 to 17, from extreme to the cusp of mild-moderate, and their happiness score jumped from the 15th percentile to the 50th percentile. Forty-seven of the fifty were now less depressed and happier.

This was by no means a controlled study, like the two studies above; there was no random assignment, no placebo, and there was potential bias because the people mostly came to the website in the first place wanting to get better. On the other hand, I've worked with psychotherapy and drugs in depression for forty years, and I've never seen results like this. All of which brings me to the dirty little secret of psychotherapy and drugs.

Chapter 3

The Dirty Little Secret of Drugs and Therapy

I am an old hand at cultivating funding for science. I have spent much of the last forty years as a supplicant for government funding, and my knees are just about worn out. I have been funded continuously for forty years by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), however, and I know an important breakthrough when I see it. The findings presented in the last chapter are such a breakthrough: not conclusive, of course, but easily intriguing enough to merit the big bucks in the effort to find out if such inexpensive treatments of depression work reliably.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is the most costly disease in the world, and the treatments of choice are drugs and psychotherapy. On average, treating a case of depression costs about $5,000 per year, and there are around ten million such cases annually in America. Antidepressant drugs are a multibillion-dollar industry. Imagine a treatment—giving positive psychology exercises on the web—that is dirt cheap, massively disseminated, and at least as effective as therapy and drugs. So I was shocked when I applied for funding from the NIMH three times to pursue these findings, and the proposals were rejected unreviewed each time. (This chapter is not special pleading for personal funding, which I am happy to say that I have more of than I know what to do with. Rather it is about misplaced government and industry priorities.) For you to understand why this proposal was rejected, I have to tell you a bit about the hammerlock that