

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS CONCEPTUAL COMPLEMENTS: TOWARD A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF WELL-BEING.

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## Abstract

Positive Psychology, known as the Science of Well-being, which was born on the shoulders of giants, its predecessors, has a wonderful current representation, its main authors, and a promising future from the studies that are beginning to develop in the third wave of Positive Psychology that contemplate “human complexity” as its center.

This Science of Well-Being is born as a great compiler of authors and studies that contemplate the variables that correlate with well-being and full life. On the other hand, many scholars of human behavior have developed conceptual frameworks that complement the Positive Psychology theory of Well-Being, making it broaden and deepen some of its constituent elements (positive emotions, optimal experiences, interpersonal relationships, purpose and determination) and its transversal axis (character strengths). Similarly, the application and integration of the approaches of the Science of Well-Being to the different fields of human development has allowed for its broadening and a deeper understanding of human flourishing. The appearance in academic publishing houses of titles that combine and complement Positive Psychology such as: Positive Psychology and Nonviolent Communication, Sustainability and Positive Psychology, Character Strengths and Resilience, Contemplative Positive Psychology, Positive Psychology and Logotherapy, Positive Psychology from a Christian perspective, Positive Psychotherapy and Positive Parenting based on strengths, are a sample of the conceptual complements that open the way towards an integral understanding of wellbeing.

**Key words:** Positive Psychology, Well-being, Integral Well-being, Happiness.

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## Introduction

The historian and futurist Yuval Noah Harari (2018) in his book *21 lessons for the 21st century* states that tomorrow will be dominated by artificial intelligence with databases and algorithms that make decisions for us in all areas of human endeavor, but the skill of **knowing ourselves and living together in intimate communities** as the basis of human development will continue to be our challenge, that of families and schools. By the way, at the moment it is very little developed. In his most recent book *“Unstoppable. Diary of how we conquered the Earth”*, he states that the true superiority of human beings as a species, the one that makes us unstoppable, is to **be able to collaborate with each other to achieve common goals**. The ongoing history of the Science of Well-Being, Positive Psychology, is evidence of Harari's two approaches: man's quest for self-knowledge and coexistence for his full development as a human being, and the realization of this goal in collaboration for a complete understanding of it.

The birth of Positive Psychology is recognized in Martin Seligman's inaugural speech at his appointment as president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998, at the end of the 20th century. There he stated that the goal of Psychology as the science of the study of human behavior was: “not only to fix what was broken, but to nurture the best in each person”. Based on this wonderful approach, he pointed out that Psychology should **also** deal with the study of positive variables, those that constitute protective/potentiating factors for a full and meaningful life, thus creating the Science of Well-being. From its founding declaration of Positive Psychology, he dedicated himself to contacting researchers who were already studying these variables, generating alliance among them, new research proposals that gave rise to the publication that catapulted the theory of well-being of Positive Psychology known as PERMA in 2011 in a publication by Martin Seligman entitled *The Life that Flourishes*. Subsequently many researchers and practitioners of the Science of Well-Being, mostly academics, scholars of these positive variables or variables promoting human well-being, began to integrate the theory of Positive Psychology Well-Being, or some of its constituent elements such as Character Strengths, with other constructs that complemented it. In the same way, all these studied elements compiled by the Science of Well-Being and related variables began to be applied in contexts of human development and care such as: parenting, life as a couple, organizations and psychotherapy. This journey initially piloted by Martin Seligman as a great promoter and compiler of the Science of Well-Being, and the collaborations made by multiple authors to expand knowledge and intervention for full human development, are allowing us a comprehensive understanding of well-being.

## Objective

The objective of this documentary research is to make an integration of the publications that served as background, conceptual support and later complements for Positive Psychology or Science of Well-Being that show a route towards an integral understanding of well-being.

## Development

### Background and birth of Positive Psychology (philosophers, conceptual frameworks, theories of well-being)

Seligman (2003) in his book *Authentic Happiness* expresses that positive psychology is the study of the positive aspects of human behavior that can be grouped into four pillars, positive traits (character strengths), positive emotions, positive attachments and positive institutions (Castro, 2010).

Subsequently, Seligman in 2011, as a result of many consultations and integrations of previous conceptual approaches, published the book *The Life that Flourishes*, migrating from the theory of Authentic Happiness to the theory of Well-being, restructuring the four initial pillars to five essential elements taken from authors who had been developing in depth these variables associated with well-being such as Barbara Fredrikson (with the study of Positive Emotions); Mihály Csikszentmihályi (with the study of Optimal Experiences-Flux); took up authors studying attachment such as John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, as well as Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver; integrated Victor Frankl's ideas on the meaning of life and included the approaches of his disciple Angela Duckworth on determination (grit in English). These five elements: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Meaning, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement, are known under the acrostic PERMA for its acronym: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement (Seligman, 2011).

For this renewed approach, virtues and strengths assume a higher importance. For the Authentic Happiness theory these constituted a support to achieve engagement. For the Well-Being theory, character strengths constitute a transversal axis that supports the five elements of PERMA mentioned above, helping to generate more positive emotions, more meaning, more achievements and better interpersonal relationships (Seligman, 2011).

Together with Christopher Peterson, he deepened the study of the Virtues and Strengths of Character, building the VIA (Values in Action) classification of the Strengths that would later constitute the transversal axis of the theory of well-being of Positive Psychology. For the elaboration of this classification, they based themselves on an extensive research that included surveys with worldwide samples on those characteristics of people worthy of admiration and vital for the survival of the human species. Historical studies, Western and Eastern philosophy

and even popular philosophy and their approaches to virtuousness were also considered (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

Similarly, authors such as Ed Diener and Ruut Veenhoven, pioneers in the study of Happiness, joined Martin Seligman's crusade to create a conceptual framework that would become the great **compiler and integrator** of all scientific studies on Happiness and Human Well-being. Other authors, who already had time studying concepts or themes promoting human development began to find common aspects, integrations that enriched the Science of Well-Being such as Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica (2010) in their book *The Element*, describing the importance of achieving growth activities where people feel challenged to give the best of themselves; Carol Dweck (2012) by raising the importance of developing a growth mindset, as well as all the authors who had raised previous theories of well-being such as Carol Riff, Yajoda and others who served as support for the conceptual proposal of Positive Psychology (Vázquez and Hervás, 2008).

On the other hand, concepts that were coined and took off in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century such as resilience, known as the ability to recover from adverse situations and learn from them, raised and developed by authors such as Boris Cyrulnic (2016, 2018, 2020), and later recognized as protective factors of human development by the APA (2010) join the study of variables that promote human well-being and publications appear that combine both themes Positive Psychology and Resilience (Quiceno et al., 2016; Jiménez , 2021).

Finally, once the theory of well-being is structured with its background and complementary authors, studies and publications that combine Positive Psychology with other conceptual frameworks that expand it begin to appear, among them: non-violent communication, sustainability, logotherapy, adolescent and adult development, contemplative life, psychotherapy, coaching and many others showing how Positive Psychology and its complements are helping us to a comprehensive understanding of well-being.

According to Lomas and Ivztan (2016) the first wave of Positive Psychology focused on the study of positive, and therefore desirable and intended, phenomena as opposed to the study of negative phenomena that ideally should be avoided. As a natural consequence, criticisms were made of this positive and negative polarization, with the positive always being considered as beneficial and promoting well-being and the negative as detrimental and conducive to discomfort.

The second wave represents the consideration of the complementarity of the opposite or negative and the role of tension generated by the experience of the contrast of both polarities. From there, according to Lomas and Ivztan (2016) derived three principles that would guide research on well-being where it is confirmed that it is complex, dialectical and even ambivalent, which are: **valuation principle**, where the evaluation of the events depends on the context thus being positive or negative for the well-being of each person, **covalence principle**, where

it is recognized that positive and negative emotionality can happen simultaneously (hope and anxiety for an event) due to the complexity of each situation, **principle of complementarity**, since well-being and discomfort are part of the vital reality and two dimensions that can coexist in two spheres of life.

The third wave of Positive Psychology integrates the approaches of the first and second waves and transcends them by emphasizing the complexity of human behavior considering the individual and the collective for its approach rooted in diverse cultural contexts and considering the existing interdisciplinary and methodological diversity (Lomas et al., 2020).

Presenting the three waves of Positive Psychology as the closing of the section seeks to highlight the living character of the social sciences, Psychology and Positive Psychology itself, whose original mission was to bring attention and credibility to research on positive aspects of human functioning. It could be predicted that the field may succeed to such an extent that psychology as a whole will embrace this mission, making unnecessary the need for a distinct sub-discipline called Positive Psychology. In the following section we present what has been happening as positive psychology has percolated and complemented other constructs and areas of application.

## Analysis and Explanation

### Positive Psychology, its conceptual complements and applications

Positive Psychology is being integrated into various studies in areas of challenges of human coexistence, from the environment and nature, other frames of reference for understanding human behavior, as well as specific areas of coexistence such as the family and the challenge of parenting and working with leadership.

An interesting complementary area of Positive Psychology that could be considered within the second wave is the approach to **Sustainability and Positive Psychology**. Corral (2012) states that some scholars of environmental protective behaviors consider that they generate negative or unpleasant emotions such as discomfort, sacrifice and displeasure. Other authors point out that negative emotions such as guilt, indignation, shame and fear also arise from the perception of an insufficient environmental protection effort, which drives people to get involved in environmental care. The author states that there is also ample evidence of the association of positive emotions with pro-ecological and prosocial acts. In this way, he proposes the concept of sustainable behaviors as a set of positive practices (i.e., favorably valued) considering those who practice them as people with a pro-sustainable orientation.) Among the benefits of being pro-environmental are psychological restoration, intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being and happiness, which gives us a good dose of hope to change the anti-environmental lifestyles that now prevail for other more pro-ecological and prosocial ones.



Positive psychology, raises the importance of positive interpersonal relationships that raise the bonding and assertive human communication as one of the elements that promote well-being (Seligman, 2011). In turn, nonviolent communication offers a model to develop dialogues that consider both interlocutors from their capacities as observers of reality from their beliefs, their satisfied and unsatisfied human needs and the emotions evoked by the observation of certain facts or actions for the development of requests in the form of negotiable proposals (Rosenberg, 2006). The complement offered by nonviolent communication for the development of healthy interpersonal relationships extends the proposal to maintain secure bonds with others by providing a communication model for the development of conversations when the actions of another disturb our well-being giving rise to the complement between **Positive Psychology and Nonviolent Communication** (Garassini, 2018).

Zelenski (2022), linking **Positive Psychology and nature**, studies the benefits in human well-being of staying close to nature. He suggests that evolutionarily our ancestors needed to be located in healthy and resource-rich natural environments, just as people depend on other people to survive and thrive in early evolutionary environments. Thus social scientists point out that there is a fundamental human need to connect with other people, and that we are a social species. Citing sociobiologist Wilson (1984) the author points out that humans seem to have a similar basic need to connect with healthy nature, this need being known as biophilia, an innate attraction to other life forms and life-like things, as a motivating force behind our selection of healthy environments. On the other hand, citing Capaldi et al (2005), he states that contact with healthy nature can produce a wide range of pleasant emotions, such as relaxation, enthusiasm, vitality, awe, gratitude and interest, and this perception is a product of our evaluation as a key to survival. As a proposal, the author suggests that many people with a high degree of relationship with nature had early positive experiences in it, which suggests that education led by the family and school may also play a role.

Cebolla and Alvear (2020) offer us a proposal for the integration of **Positive Psychology and contemplative life** (mindfulness and compassion), two movements that have been booming and developing since the end of the last century, suggesting that a rigorous approach is just beginning to connect them. The authors propose the development of positive emotions, recovery from difficult emotions, the development of mindfulness and the enhancement of altruism and compassion based on the Well-Being Coaching Program based on Contemplative Practices (CBC). Again, like the authors mentioned in previous paragraphs, they point out that human well-being and happiness can be developed through education and training, specifically appropriate mental/behavioral behavior supported by virtuous actions.

As a complement to Cebolla and Alvear (2002), in a more recent publication of 2021, Payne offers us the development of the relationship between **Positive Psychology and Mindfulness** with a practical proposal to calm the mind and achieve emotional resilience, as an art from Positive Psychology. Starting from the usual behaviors of modern life such as: overthinking, self-destructive habits, low self-awareness and emotional intelligence, the book

offers techniques from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that allow to calm the mind and get rid of persistent negative thoughts, address anxiety, self-doubt and self-sabotage, as well as develop emotional intelligence and foster healthier relationships.

Hackney (2021) proposes the study of **Positive Psychology from a Christian perspective** appealing to the principles of positive psychology referring to the importance of the study of virtue and the projection of people towards the future with the identification of their strengths to put them at the service of others. Archetypal challenges, related to self-control, guilt and determination, are posited as playing a vital role, and even the terror of death enters into positive psychology's vision of human flourishing. The author connects the concepts of Positive Psychology with Christian philosophy and theology. He describes the importance of subjective states, cognitive processes and personality roles, relationships and environment, and their influence on behavior in different settings such as the workplace, the church and the martial arts dojo. From the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) he points out how Christianity relates to mental health so that psychology, counseling, social work, and marriage and family therapy, can support Christian clinicians in supporting the well-being of their patients.

Continuing with the integration of Positive Psychology with other conceptual frameworks that complement it, we find the proposal of **Positive Psychology and Logotherapy** to accompany well-being and human suffering (Garassini, 2024). An introduction on the central elements of both Positive Psychology (Science of Well-being) and Logotherapy (Therapy of the meaning and understanding of human suffering) allow an attention to the human being who flourishes and is suffering in a complementary way in the course of his life cycle. It is proposed that from individual or group psychotherapy, as well as in teaching, these two conceptual frameworks offer tools and complement each other for the understanding of human behavior from normal development, the promotion of well-being for the cultivation of potentialities, and the understanding of necessary and unnecessary human suffering, to accompany individuals, families, groups and organizations.

Rashid and Seligman (2019) offer us a proposal to integrate **Positive Psychology and Psychotherapy** calling their publication on the subject *Positive Psychotherapy*, stating that traditionally psychotherapy has attended processes of affliction healing past traumas, correcting erroneous thoughts and restoring problematic relationships leaving aside the positive aspects that allow us the achievement of human well-being and happiness. The consideration of the factors that allow us to thrive and become assets, our character strengths, which we can use for the achievement of our best version, are proposed as the main north. This transversal axis that is proposed to guide the entire therapeutic process is an input for the person assisted to develop a sense of purpose and meaning that many have found lacking in more traditional therapies.

A very important contribution is found in the proposal of Pileggi and Pawelski (2018) **Positive Psychology and Couple Relationships**. In their book *Felices Juntos (Happy Together)* the authors Susan and James, who are a couple, propose that healthy habits are those that generate long-term happiness using the principles of positive psychology to create thriving romantic relationships. Among the habits they suggest are: promoting healthy passion, prioritizing positive emotions, enjoying experiences together in a mindful way, and looking for each other's strengths.

Building a solid couple will be a good start for the arrival of children and the development of parenthood. Waters (2017) proposes us to align **Positive Psychology and Parenting based on strengths** considering multiple interventions carried out with her team of researchers suggests us to focus on the strengths of our children instead of always trying to correct their weaknesses, a recurrent phenomenon in modernity because parents suffer from a negativity bias, learned in their own upbringing and experiences in other areas such as school and work which makes them not look at the strengths of their children, nor use, in a conscious way their own, as a parental team ( father and mother). The identification and support to use the most developed strengths in family members in a creative way can help them to develop resilience, optimism and achievement, as well as help them against the current pandemic of depression and anxiety. The author posits that this approach to parenting improves self-esteem and energy in both children and adolescents. Discovering children's strengths, using positive emotions as a resource to develop strong brains and even how to deal with problem behaviors and difficult conversations.

Accompanying adolescents for a full development is a challenge for all significant adults in their environment. **Positive Psychology and Adolescent Development** also constitute a conceptual duo that has borne fruit. Positive Adolescent Development, which is based on a deep understanding of adolescents and their development in the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions, proposes to consider the competencies to be developed in this period of the life cycle, proposed in the Positive Adolescent Development model, which allow a healthy personal identity that enables each young person to contribute to the social network to which he or she belongs. Considering the character strengths and positive emotions proposed by Positive Psychology, as well as the capacity for resilience, an understanding of the adolescent and his or her potential is proposed (Garassini, 2020).

Parenting has been one of the topics most addressed in publications on human development in the family context, and we have found studies on how Positive Psychology and its tools can accompany the development of parents and children aware of their strengths for their personal growth and the development of their family roles. Rodgers Lee (2025) offers us a publication that combines **Positive Psychology and parenting for professional parents**, which focuses on positive parenting by proposing strategies aimed at balancing stress reduction work with conscious parenting for secure children and trusting relationships between parents and children. The author points out that a compassionate, step-by-step guide

is proposed, designed for professionals with limited time, with the objective of simplifying their parenting tasks and redefining family harmony.

The workplace brings significant challenges to the well-being of the people who interact with it many hours a day. Many studies have been developed to understand and propose interventions at work, with the predominant use of the combination of **Labor Coaching and Positive Psychology**. Vázquez and Guzmán (2020) emphasize the importance of Positive Psychology for a new leadership, which gives leaders the skills of an Emergent Coaching, which using instruments to identify character strengths and flow activities at work, both their own and those of their collaborators, can improve their present and future professional well-being, as well as impact the well-being of the people with whom they relate in different areas. For their part, Smith et al. (2021), who also combine coaching with positive psychology at work, highlight from academic studies the convergence of organizational psychology and coaching psychology, professional and ethical practices, resilience and well-being, systemic and team approaches, leadership, intervention tools, the convergence of clinical interventions and virtue, and the future of thriving workplaces.

A very modern contribution, specifically addressing the well-being of working women is found in the contributions of Greenberg and Avigdor (2009) in a proposal for a complement between **Positive Psychology and Working Mothers** stating that the science of well-being (Positive Psychology) has come a long way in understanding what makes us happy and how to achieve it. For working mothers, who face endless demands on their time and attention, there are scientifically proven and practical ways to find the right balance and replace stress with happiness by using self-awareness strategies (of their strengths, emotions, optimal experiences, relationships, meaning and determination) for self-care and self-worth to consciously be better mothers and workers using the learnings in interactions with children and co-workers.

The topic of gender and well-being is becoming more and more important due to the visibility of women in modernity, which goes beyond being caregivers and caregivers, to be full citizens with rights and duties like everyone else. **Positive Psychology and Gender Education** is a necessity for 21st century societies to know, reflect and support women's well-being, starting from the identification of spaces, opportunities and recognition in society, as well as promoting the acceptance of femininities and masculinities with their wonderful diversity and complementarity. Knowing the differences and similarities between men and women in topics such as neuroscience, socialization, character strengths, positive emotions, optimal experiences, interpersonal relationships, meaning, determination, resilience, menopause/ andropause, as well as presence in art and sport can revalue the role of women, and men, and all the possible diversity that leads us to cultivate well-being for all.

## Conclusions

As a conclusion of this documentary research, it can be pointed out that there are several publications and authors that served as background, conceptual support and later complements for Positive Psychology, which correspond to the three waves and evidence the evolution and integration of the same to the study of human behavior in its complexity and the need to incorporate strategies and interventions for the understanding and monitoring of well-being, to populations with different characteristics, and in the different environments where they live and develop.

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