
COMMENTARIES

When the Negative Becomes Positive and the Reverse: Comments on Lazarus's Critique of Positive Psychology

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Emotions Are Often Not What They Seem

One of the greatest dramas in the English-language literature of the 20th century is Edward Albee's (1963) play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The play is gripping to most but repugnant to some. It is funny, but it is also scathing. It is a love story, but hardly *Romeo and Juliet* (2002). It is a highly creative play, its creativity coming from its extreme irony. That irony has much relevance to the points made by Lazarus (this issue) in his critique of positive psychology in the target article.

The dramatic tension in the play comes from the interactions of a young, newly married couple, who are invited for a late-night drink by the middle-aged wife of a stagnant, worn-out college professor. The former pair is polite, sociable, gracious, and cheerful; the latter is grouchy, cantankerous, combative, and full of what we have been told is the poison of marriage—mutual scorn and contempt. The play is peppered with repartee that, on a superficial level, appears to involve the older couple demeaning and insulting themselves, whereas the younger couple shows social niceties both to their hosts and to one another. However, as the play unfolds, the dramatic and profoundly impactful irony becomes evident: The vicious scorn shown by the apparently dysfunctional older couple takes on a meaning that transcends its superficial destructiveness. Indeed, far from being damaging to the relationship, the scornful repartee is revealed to be a surprising source of intense and enduring love. The climax of the play comes when the older woman reveals that no one understands her better than her husband, and that their apparently bitter exchanges are really part of a complex game that gives the emotional expression of one to the other a sense of fulfillment and engagement. The older couple's behavior is like teasing, which involves negative emotional interaction in the interest of the positive outcomes of playfulness and affiliation. However, it is more intense

than teasing and creates love, not just friendship. The play ends with a wonderfully moving scene of the older couple gently touching each other in a thoroughly endearing way. As for the young couple, they exit bickering with each other with the audience fully aware that their social niceties are a sham.

The relevance of this drama to the evaluation of positive psychology is its lesson that we must go beyond the appearances created by apparently negative emotional interaction and understand how those appearances can be given a totally different valence by the meaning the couple gives to it. In turn, the meaning emerges from the manner with which the older couple assimilates into their goals the specifics of their interaction. The goal of the older couple, which was to make their put-downs and insults into a paralinguistic chess match of one-upmanship, changed the scorn and contempt of the verbal interactions into an expression of deep intimacy and engagement. The scorn became bonding, not divisive. The emotional interaction of the older couple clearly is not typical, but it creates deep love nonetheless as is evident by the touching final scene. The dramatist's message? Negative exchanges can in actuality reflect positive affective valence. The dramatist's creativity? The challenge to the audience to go beyond the manifest emotion it witnesses to a deeper and latent personal meaning.

Thus, we can learn several lessons about the nature of emotion from this drama:

1. Physical events do not convey affective meaning in and of themselves.
2. A proper understanding of emotion requires an appreciation of the subjective evaluation of events by a person.
3. The goals of an individual enter into the subjective evaluations of a person and can convert an apparently negative (or positive) interaction into the opposite.

4. Coping, such as making life events into a form of game, is part and parcel of the emotion process and must always be considered in explaining and understanding emotional states; coping is not something external to the generation of affect.

5. Emotions involve three components: a cognitive interpretational one, a motivational one that the event is assimilated into, and a relational one (insofar as meaning is given neither by cognition alone nor motivation alone and also insofar as shared interpretation of events affects human interactions).

6. The cognitive, the motivational, and the relational are indissociable from one another in real time.

Two Developmental Illustrations of Emotions Not Being What They Appear To Be

Lest one think that in this commentary too much is being made of the poetic license an audience gives to a dramatist such as Albee, let us consider the applicability of the various principles just enunciated to an understanding of the emotional behavior of human infants. Two examples from the literature on emotional development are especially dramatic and relevant. One involves babies' wariness of heights, and the second concerns how babies can make scary toys into joyful ones.

The visual cliff, which assesses fear of heights, is, after the fear of parental separation, the most intense elicitor of fear in infancy (Scarr & Salapatek, 1970). Once infants have had a certain level of crawling experience, they flatly refuse to venture onto a glass surface atop a sufficiently great drop-off. They will do so despite their being called to cross the depth by their enthusiastic and trusted mothers and despite the evidence of their sense of touch affirming the existence of the solidity of the glass surface. The infant on the cliff thus clearly shows fear-motivated avoidance. Yet, despite the presence of such unmistakable avoidance, the most salient emotion that infants show when called to cross the deep side is not fear but joy. The babies typically smile, scurry around on the shallow side of the cliff, giggle at the mother, and generally appear to be having a wonderful time. They rarely cry. Thus, at the same time that they avoid the deep side of the cliff, they reveal no facial, vocal, or gestural indication of fearfulness—quite the opposite.

How does one explain this apparent contradiction? Shouldn't there be a coherence of behavior and expression when someone, especially a baby, experiences an extremely intense emotion such as the fear of heights? Why then is so much positive affect shown in the midst of such intense threat? The answer is as follows:

First, the depth is not, in and of itself, a negative fearful stimulus. As is discussed shortly, the affective valence of depth can be changed by manipulating context. Second, the child's personal strivings play a major role in giving the drop-off its sometimes positive and sometimes negative emotional meaning. Third, the baby who shows happiness while avoiding the drop-off is doing so precisely because he or she is showing successful coping. Fourth, the entire process is a relational one involving fusion of goal and event. Neither one alone produces the emotion.

This analysis can be elaborated as follows: A drop-off becomes negative only when it threatens loss of support. For instance, if an infant hits upon the strategy of holding onto the side walls of the visual cliff, then hitches his or her way to the mother by holding onto the sides of the table, thus providing for himself or herself the support that at first glance seems lacking, the infant readily crosses to the mother and shows no expression of fear. If the infant avoids the loss of support in a different way, by staying atop the shallow side of the cliff table, the child also shows no fear. The maintenance of postural stability is assured either by hitching or by staying on the shallow side. Postural stability is a powerful goal for babies, as well as for adults of all ages. It is the conjunction of a drop-off with postural instability that leads to fear. Each one alone produces no fearfulness. When a coping action leads to postural stability or renders postural instability as part of a safe game (as when an infant is thrown into the air by the father), security and joy are generated. However, if an action (such as pushing the infant involuntarily onto the deep side) leads to postural instability, the opposite occurs. When pushed, the baby becomes extremely fearful. To reiterate, it is not the depth, but the relation of the depth to the child's appreciation of potential instability that creates fear and avoidance. Thus, even something as biologically adaptive and emotionally powerful as reactions to heights can be affectively positive or negative in its expressive manifestations. To infer emotion, one must understand that what is apparent to the senses of an observer may not be what is real in the mind state of the observed person.

Another example of how an infant can convert a fearful interaction into a joyful one has been documented in the excellent experiments of Megan Gunnar-von Gnechten (1978). If a baby is operantly conditioned such that his or her actions lead to the illumination of a mechanical monkey that starts raucously to bang on a set of cymbals, the infant manifests intense joy and smiling. However, if one removes the element of control (coping?) from the instrumental conditioning, the monkey with the clashing cymbals makes the infant cry. The child's sense of agency—which, like postural stability, is a basic motivational process, one that lasts a lifetime—

converts fright into joy; its absence converts joy into fearfulness.

What Do Legs Have To Do With Positive Psychology?

When I first read the title of Lazarus's (this issue) target article, "Does the Positive Psychology Movement Have Legs?," I was confused. I could think of no reference to link *legs* to the points that Lazarus makes. Subsequently, I appreciated the relevance of the title. Legs are the instruments of intentionality. They are what move us from where we are to where we want to be. They are what enable us to steer around obstacles or climb over them. They are the quintessential tools for implementing one's goals. Unless one is sleepwalking, one does not use legs unintentionally. By thinking about Lazarus's choice of title, I came to infer that positive psychology is an intellectual movement that gives little play to intention or to the means of relating intention to outcomes in the world. If I am right in this inference, then positive psychology creates an approach to emotion that is seriously in error. It neglects or downplays the telic aspect of human nature.

The human being, from the start, is a goal-oriented organism, and having goals necessarily creates the context for both positive and negative emotions. One cannot control one's emotions any more than one can control one's winnings in Las Vegas. If one has a goal, then one necessarily creates the context for a mismatch between an event and that goal; negative emotions will ensue. Either there will be anger, if attempts to correct a grievance impeding the goal continue to be possible; or there will be sadness, to the extent that there is resignation and giving up of one's goals. One cannot will these outcomes. They are fated by the conjunction of events with the strivings of the person. Positive psychology seems to pay little attention to the existential state the human creates just by being a telic organism. Rather, the positive movement seems to restrict itself to thought, fantasy, and attributions, seemingly posing them as the most important factors in the emotional life of the human being.

Even when one meets the positive psychologist's nirvana of a successful match between a goal and an outcome, the positive emotion that results in no way need be healthy or desirable. Our language has a word for a highly undesirable state of positive emotion, reflecting match of world with goal. The word is *contentment*. Contentment has a negative connotation because it reflects something static and self-indulgent; it is a state of "resting on one's laurels," of self-satisfaction, of going nowhere. It has many of the same negative connotations of another otherwise positive emotion, pride (specifically, the pride that "go-

eth before a fall," Proverbs 16:18). Contentment is deemed negative in our society precisely because it seems to imply disengagement from new intentions and motivations to deal with the world. An intentionless life may not be worth living; yet, positive psychology seems to foster contentment. A life with intention renders the person vulnerable to suffering, loss, and negativity. Wishing it otherwise will not make it so.

Are Negative Emotions Bad for Human Personality Development?

There is another way in which an emphasis on positive emotionality leaves out crucial aspects of human development. The core of one's personality rests in the attachment relationship of the developing child to his or her principal caregiver. Positive psychology would have us emphasize the tenderness; the smiling; the playfulness; and the pleasures of eating, drinking, and bathing as critical components of the attachment relationship. However, as Bowlby (1973) argued, the core of the attachment relationship is formed only when negative emotions, particularly fear, are generated and the caregiver then serves as a crucial and needed haven of safety, a source of protection and comfort. In other words, unless the infant is exposed to insecurity and threat, the infant will not develop an attachment relationship. Negative emotion is thus essential for normal development, because without attachment, no child will develop normally. Viewed this way, negative emotions are necessary for the infant and child to experience love and to build up secure knowledge that he or she can explore the world and learn from it as a result of the relief from fear and threat that the caregiver has previously provided.

Bowlby (1973) based his initial propositions about the mother as the haven of safety on his observations of children separated from their parents traumatically or for lengthy periods of time. However, the phenomenon is evident to any parent any day. Observe what happens when a child begins to walk. The child expands his or her explorations farther and farther from the parent, but without fail, the child reaches a point in his or her travels when he or she appears to have gone too far and then turns around to return to the parent. The child first "touches base" with the parent, so to speak, then initiates anew the explorations of the world. This phenomenon, called "emotional refueling" by the psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler (Mahler, Pine, & Berman, 1975), reflects the intimate link between negativity and positivity. As with Albee's play, there is a profound irony here: At the very moment that the child is exerting his positive emotions of joy in exploration, he or she is rendering himself or herself vulnerable to the dread of separation from the parent. So, he or she is motivated to return to

the parent for a boost of security. As Sroufe (1996) pointed out, positive emotions and negative emotions are indissociable in the developing world of the infant.

Conclusion

The theme of this commentary has been that it is a mistake to dichotomize events into emotionally “positive” and “negative” ones, and that such dichotomies are fundamentally superficial and misleading. Any apparent emotion, even anger, can be adaptive and desirable, such as when anger motivates moral indignation or leads one to proper assertion of one’s rights. Similarly, apparently positive emotions, such as smiling or laughing, can be quite inappropriate in certain contexts. Consider smiling at or laughing at someone. What is needed is not to encourage positive emotions in a simple-minded manner, but to understand how an expression comes about, what function it is serving for the smiling person and for the recipient of the expression, and how to maximize one’s appropriate expression of emotion. Appropriateness, however, is not at all the same as “positivity.”

Note

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Legs or Wings? A Reply to R. S. Lazarus

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Personally I welcome Lazarus’s target article (this issue), no matter how ill-tempered and self-serving, because it does raise important issues that if taken seriously will strengthen the future of positive psychology, and thus the field of psychology in general. If positive psychology achieved nothing more than to provoke the kind of dialogue that his article represents, it would have served a useful end. For beside the anger and outrage at having his work identified with “negative” psychology (which I hasten to add is purely a self-attribution), Lazarus does make important points that might not have been made in the absence of what he is pleased to characterize as the “new ideological movement that is being referred to as *positive psychology*.”

What Is Positive Psychology?

Lazarus (this issue) seems much better informed about what positive psychology is than I am, despite the fact that I have been one of its original movers, to-

gether with Martin Seligman. For instance, we learn that, besides being a new ideological movement, it is a fad with its own “central dogmas”—which are “oversimple”—and rely on “dicta” and “political slogan[s]” that are also “popular slogans” that some unidentified cabal is engaged in “marketing.”

All of this is news to me. As far as I can tell, the “movement” started in the winter of 1997, when Seligman and I first met. Our families had serendipitously booked a week’s vacation in the same resort, and what with snorkeling and drinking margaritas, Marty and I fell to discussing the state of our profession and what could be done about it. It turned out we both felt that psychology had become rather boring and myopically focused on pathology. We both felt that the science of human experience and behavior deserved better. As Marty had just been elected president of the American Psychological Association, he resolved to use this opportunity to do something helpful about the situation.

Basically, we intended to do our best to legitimize the study of positive aspects of human experience in

their own right—not just as tools for prevention, coping, health, or some other desirable outcome. We felt that as long as hope, courage, optimism, and joy are viewed simply as useful in reducing pathology, we will never go beyond the homeostatic point of repose and begin to understand those qualities that make life worth living in the first place.

To this effect, we asked 50 colleagues we knew, and thought might be interested, to identify one former student whom they thought would become an outstanding researcher and who might contribute to this field of inquiry. All of them responded, and on the basis of the written material submitted we selected the first cohort of what since has become a yearly week-long meeting of young researchers in Akumal, Mexico.

From these informal beginnings everything else followed: the two *American Psychologist* issues Lazarus (this issue) mentions; the handbook edited by Snyder and Lopez (2002); two more edited volumes; the Templeton Prizes; the two national Summit meetings in Washington, DC; several cross-national studies; the first International meeting in Autumn 2002; and so on, all within the space of 3 years. And all without the need for any “marketing,” unless one uses the term in the most general sense that applies to any attempt to diffuse ideas one believes in through publications, conferences, prizes and the forming of scholarly networks. At the same time, to my knowledge, no dogma, central or otherwise, has emerged among those who share this orientation. Nor do I consider it likely any dogma will ever emerge, given that there is much more diversity in theoretical and methodological approaches within positive psychology than one would find in a typical interest group within an APA division.

I can see, though, why Lazarus (this issue) embraces what sounds suspiciously like a conspiracy account, given the enormous response to positive psychology. Evidently there has developed a huge untapped demand for these ideas, which many elders of the tribe had ignored. Personally, I was taken by surprise by how quickly our barely formulated ideas gained assent and support. I would have preferred developing theory and research for a few more years before entering the public arena to defend positive psychology against the charges of Johnny-come-lateism that entrenched interests were sure to bring up against it. I know full well that new ideas can be killed just as soon by uncritical acceptance as by opposition. Let us hope that the many enthusiastic but untrained fellow travelers will not obscure the important and timely insights of serious scholars. Unfortunately, there is a real danger that positive psychology will become, to some extent at least, an ideological movement. Although those of us involved from the beginning are resisting this outcome as much as we can, to a large extent the future is out of our hands.

Lazarus (this issue) justifies his piece with the claim that he is concerned positive psychology will become a fad that will lead to a dead end and in the meantime

waste the time of many a good psychologist. “It is this waste, incidentally, that I am mainly concerned about,” he tells us, not too convincingly. I am afraid neither Lazarus nor we can tell in advance what will turn out to be a fad and what will genuinely advance science—so perhaps it is better to relax a bit, and instead of imputing infernal machinations to those of us who believe positive psychology has a lot to offer, review the issues on their merits.

Is Positive Psychology Vulnerable to Scientific Flaws?

Lazarus (this issue) tries to justify his suspicion of positive psychology by a critique of the theory and the methods used by its proponents. This critique would have been more compelling if it had actually addressed a specific work or line of investigation identifiable as positive psychology. Instead, most of the space is devoted to interesting but irrelevant discursions on limitations of psychological research endemic to the discipline as a whole. Although the author recognizes that his “most trenchant criticisms also apply to psychology in general,” he then goes on blaming positive psychology for not being better than the rest of the profession.

Lazarus’s (this issue) first objection to positive psychology research to date is that it relies on cross-sectional methods. This seems to me a red herring, first, because no meaningful longitudinal research can be expected in such a short time and, second, because the criticism applies to most psychology, positive or not. The next “problem” is the claim that the separation between positive and negative emotions is spurious, because hope always implies anxiety, and anger can be energizing (the “God needs Satan” argument). Again, I am somewhat at a loss to understand the relevance of this argument. Does he claim that a person who is jealous, angry, bitter, and anxious most of the time is just as well off as someone who usually feels generous, friendly, satisfied, and serene?

The need for a positive psychology has never been illustrated more clearly than in his description of the three “positive” emotions of hope, joy, and love. What an impoverished notion do these paragraphs present! Clearly, as long as one thinks of them simply as coping devices, joy and love do not have to be understood, just measured. It is this poverty of understanding that positive psychology hopes to remedy.

However, contrary to Lazarus’s (this issue) characterization, positive psychology is not restricted to the study of emotions (see the Problem 4: Emotion Measurement section in Lazarus, this issue). Scholars who have been writing in this vein have studied schools, workplaces, youth groups, religions, and entire cultures in trying to understand how external conditions affect

not only subjective well-being but also academic performance, job satisfaction, family harmony, and so on. It is astonishing to me that Lazarus is able to ignore these facts in his rush to judgment. For my money, this interdisciplinary, ecologically valid aspect of positive psychology is one of its most promising features.

And this is why the argument “To produce change in a person’s thoughts and feelings from negative to positive is probably a much more difficult task than meets the eye” is so far off the mark. Lazarus should try to tell this to the Black South Africans whose satisfaction with life shot up after the abolition of Apartheid, or the Eastern Europeans after the Soviet yoke was lifted. Longitudinal studies show that environmental conditions in the family and school have an effect not only on children’s quality of experience but on the kind of activities they do (productive vs. watching TV) and their abilities to concentrate and to be motivated (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2001; Hektner, 2001). Of course, changing the valence of thoughts and feelings is always difficult, but this is especially so if one tries to use the primitive methods Lazarus (this issue) suggests, instead of considering what can be done to change the context in which people live.

Is Positive Psychology “New”? Of Course Not.

Who ever claimed it was? The problem is that even the most obvious insights have to be revisited every few generations, so that their truth can be restated within the evolving context of knowledge. In the 5th century B.C. Greek philosophers argued that all matter was constituted by fundamental particles called *atoms*—but it took 25 centuries more to verify that claim.

Perhaps the last attempt at developing something akin to positive psychology was 50 or so years ago,

when Maslow, Rogers, and their colleagues called for a new *humanistic psychology*. That valiant effort is still very much alive, especially in clinical and counseling settings. However, our sense has been that humanistic psychology has been too adamant in rejecting the scientific paradigm, which, for better or worse, defines the epistemology of our age. Positive psychology pursues a similar agenda but does so building on and contributing to the other branches of contemporary science.

Whether this effort will succeed or not is, of course, uncertain. In the meantime, I for one would be honored and delighted if distinguished colleagues such as Lazarus were willing to recognize the many similarities in our aims rather than exacerbate the differences.

Note

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What Is Positive About Positive Psychology: The Curmudgeon and Pollyanna

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Lazarus relishes the role of the curmudgeonly critic and does an excellent job in the target article of pointing to several domains where positive psychologists need to be careful in their research and theories. I very much admire Lazarus as one of the

outstanding positive psychologists of our day, even if he would resist the label. After all, is not coping well with adversity a positive topic? Coping is a strength, and good coping represents resilience! When one reads the impressive literature authored

by Lazarus (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), one beholds topics such as commitment, social support, flourishing, and well-being. Like it or not, the curmudgeon is a positive psychologist! I can think of few better role models conducting rigorous research tied to thoughtful theorizing than Lazarus; his work can be an example to all of us of how to implement the science of positive psychology. The gift that Lazarus provides us is the reminder never to slip into oversimplicity and never to let Pollyanna take control of our research and theorizing. Pollyanna can motivate us, but she should never take away from our rigor!

What Does *Positive* Mean, Anyway?

Lazarus raises an important question—What is *positive*? For example, in the realm of affect is *positive* an emotion that feels good or one that is functional? Or is *positive* an emotion that the person values and believes is appropriate? The questions about what is *positive* raise many interesting issues. For example, to what degree are the pleasant emotions also those that are most functional, and are the emotions the person values the most functional for him or her? Clearly, there are probably many instances in which the varying definitions of *positive emotions* point to different emotions as being positive in particular contexts. In our work on norms for emotions, for example, we find that individuals differ in terms of which emotions they value—and it is not always pleasant emotions. For instance, we find that certain cultural groups such as the Chinese do not value pride, which is highly valued by Americans (e.g., see Eid & Diener, 2001) and is experienced as pleasant by them. We also find that people differ in whether a fun and enjoyable day is considered to be most satisfying. Asian Americans, for example, are less likely than European Americans to say that an enjoyable day was satisfying—they more highly value days with high achievement, whereas European-American students tend to find fun days to be more satisfying. Thus, we see differences in whether individuals are satisfied with affective experiences that are enjoyable versus with other values that might be esteemed more than pleasant emotions. Different definitions of *positive* in this instance lead to different satisfaction judgments. Rather than being cause for despair that we, as researchers, can never definitively define *positive* to everyone's satisfaction, I see different approaches to defining *positive* and their relation to each other as very interesting avenues for intellectual exploration. Perhaps we will even discover principles that unite the various types of *positive*.

Positive psychologists must explore the basis of what is positive. We (Diener & Suh, 1997) borrowed

from the philosopher Brock (1993) to suggest that there are three bases by which people judge what is good or valuable:

1. People's choices are one indicant of what is good, and this is used in economics. If people consistently choose something, they must think it is good.

2. We also use people's judgments and experiences of pleasantness as an indicant of what is good, such as feelings of subjective well-being. If people feel satisfied with an outcome and pleased with achieving it, they must believe it is positive.

3. Finally, we use value systems based on norms, religious beliefs, and so forth to judge what is positive. For instance, we believe that torture is bad and curing most illness is good, based on our values. Our values tell us that some things are right or wrong, regardless of the other two definitions of what is good. For example, we believe that slavery was wrong, regardless of whether the slaves might have been happy and regardless of whether some individuals might have chosen to continue to be slaves.

Each of the three approaches to defining the good or positive points us toward some of the things that are positive; at times the three will agree and at times they will not. Economists use people's choices in the market economy as a judgment of what is good; there are clear shortcomings to this approach. Psychologists are apt to use subjective well-being as a major criterion of the good life, but there are clear limitations to this approach, too, if it is used to the exclusion of other definitions. For example, perhaps Hitler or Ghengis Khan were happy, but this would not lead us to conclude that their lives were good. The third approach, based on values, suggests that some emotions are good because we value them, or because we value the outcomes they cause. For example, they might help us achieve our goals. Once again, however, there are limitations to the value approach. For example, individuals may disagree about values and there are cross-cultural differences in people's values, as well. Furthermore, we tend to distrust most value statements when they continually seem to contradict people's choices, and we are skeptical of value systems that lead to long-term unhappiness for most people. Thus, "positive emotions" might be positive or negative, depending on the particular criteria used, and on the situation. Positive does not have to be a simple, monadic concept to be a useful heuristic one. The *positive* in *positive psychology* merely points to broad areas in need of study; once working in an area, however, the basis of positive functioning has to be carefully analyzed.

Rather than making positive psychology impossible, the three different approaches to defining *positive* make psychologists' task more intriguing. In addition, the alternative to searching for what is positive is to re-

turn to complete value relativism, which is now attacked by anthropologists such as Edgerton (1992), and which leads one to the untenable conclusion that Hitler is as deserving of our devotion as is Francis of Assisi. If psychologists adopt a stance of complete value neutrality, they will be dismissed by society as irrelevant. Although we cannot pretend to be the final arbiters about what is good, at least we can be “players” in helping society define what is positive.

An important question is the degree to which what is “good and desirable” varies by culture. It may be that there are universal desires, values (Schwartz, 1994), and virtues. Naturally, there are undoubtedly also virtues and values that vary by culture. It is our task to discover each. Research on virtues created by Peterson and Seligman (2002) is a noble quest and an interesting one. However, it remains to be seen which of the virtues they identified in their VIA taxonomy are universal. Furthermore, even if every one of their virtues is universal, it is likely that the behavioral manifestations of the virtues will be quite different across cultures, and even across individuals within a culture. Discovering the context dependency of the manifestation of desirable characteristics such as virtues is an exciting avenue for future research.

Lazarus (this issue) reminds us that what is positive is a complex issue. We need to consider what defines *positive* and whether we can discover some universals in this area. Hopefully, thinking about these questions will lead to researchable topics and also help clarify our mission. For my own part, in defining the positive life, I maintain that a preponderance of happiness is necessary, but not sufficient, for the good life. I do not believe that what makes people happy is inevitably good, and therefore happiness is not sufficient to define a good life or a good behavior. However, I do think that a life that is dominated by unpleasant emotions cannot be considered to be an ideal one. If the person herself or himself is dissatisfied, feels unfulfilled, and is depressed, then I believe that something fundamentally good and important is missing from his or her life. Thus, happiness must be included as one ingredient of a desirable life, but other elements are necessary as well.

Lost in the Dark Forest With Pollyanna and Dr. Pangloss?

One accusation is that positive psychologists have lost sight of all the misery in the world—mental illness, poverty, illness, and evil. There are two responses. First, a more apt accusation is that psychology has sometimes forgotten mental health, resiliency, virtue, and strength. Conduct a literature search as we have done (see Myers & Diener, 1995), and you will learn that most of the negative topics

have been studied much more than positive ones. For instance, there are many, many more studies conducted on unpleasant and undesirable emotional states such as depression and anxiety disorders than on joy, fulfillment, and contentment. I have no concern that psychologists will quit studying problems. Difficulties will always be with us, no matter how good things get—Lazarus (this issue) assures us of this. Thus, it seems high time that more resources be devoted to studying strengths and positives, so that we can enrich ourselves, not simply reduce the number of problems (with more and more resources devoted to smaller and smaller problems). In addition, there is the distinct possibility that developing strengths and subjective well-being is one effective method of combating problems.

The second response to the idea that positive psychology ignores problems is that perhaps we who live in economically developed nations do not realize that we are living in a golden age, that despite our problems we have conditions so excellent that we are in a unique position to improve the world. We have the opportunity and resources to create a better world. Who has more opportunity than we do to bring a psychological perspective to bear on quality of life and the desirable future for humanity! Given our abundant resources, why not go beyond merely alleviating the negative to build a science of how to live a desirable life?

A related critique of positive psychology is that the practitioners of this approach are not grounded in intellectual rigor. Are positive psychologists people who are hopelessly naive and oversimplify the human condition? I do not think so. But if so, the critical scientists among us need to continue to bring intellectual rigor and skeptical thinking to the field. Oversimplified thinking is not intrinsic to studying positive topics.

Life’s Trade-Offs

One thread that runs through Lazarus’s (this issue) target article is that we need diverse types of people in the world; there is not one right way to be a human. Thus, for example, it might not be desirable, perhaps, that everyone be an optimist—perhaps society needs some pessimists. Furthermore, it might not be desirable for an individual to be too optimistic; perhaps people are best off if they are a mix of optimism and pessimism. I think these are fundamentally important issues that should be addressed by research, although my hunch is that the answers we, as researchers, find might depend in part on how we define and measure optimism and the optimistic personality. I very much doubt that even very optimistic individuals completely ignore harbingers of danger.

Concerns about being too optimistic should be researched in order to discover the optimal amount of optimism in various contexts, and the benefits and costs of varying degrees of optimism.

I think an underlying deeper issue is that there might be trade-offs between certain desirable characteristics, so that the more one has of one, the less one might have of another. For example, it might be that assertive people have a harder time being sensitive to the feelings of others. This is obviously an empirical question, but the point is that one good characteristic might lead to less of another good characteristic. It seems to me that as long as positive psychology remains an intellectually open endeavor, questions such as this will be explored. Indeed, positive psychology will provide an impetus for the investigation of such issues. I find it a fascinating question whether certain virtues make other virtues less likely. Thus, positive characteristics should not be examined in isolation from the larger systems in which they are embedded.

A sophisticated view of positive psychology admits that what is positive is multidimensional, that there are trade-offs in life and that even desirable traits can be undesirable if carried to an extreme. This does not indicate, however, that we, as researchers, should not study virtue, happiness, love, and other positive qualities, nor should we despair in the search for the positive. To say something is complex is not to say that it does not exist or should not be studied. Instead, it means that we need the best scientific minds in the field studying “positive” topics.

Positive and Negative Affect

Lazarus (this issue) is disturbed about the use by researchers of generic positive and negative emotion, rather than the study of specific discrete emotions such as pride, affection, and joy. Dimensional psychologists and discrete emotions theorists have been going around and around about this issue for years. It appears that sometimes one can gain leverage by examining discrete emotions and not combining all the emotions of one valence. For example, the emotion of pride tends to occur with other positive emotions in American samples, suggesting that a simplification in which pride is aggregated with joy can make sense for some research questions. However, in Japan or India (e.g., Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2002) pride does not converge as strongly with joy, and therefore including it in aggregates of positive emotions is less justified.

People who frequently experience one type of negative emotion tend to frequently experience other types of negative emotion as well. Positive emotions and negative emotions tend to form strong factors, and it sometimes makes sense to simplify things and

consider certain emotions in aggregate. Without such simplification, one would be forced to break every phenomenon down into finer and finer elements. At the same time, one can often gain insights by looking at the emotions in a discrete way. When people get angry, they often are not fearful. Thus, it makes sense to examine fear and anger separately when looking at momentary emotions in a particular setting. Thus, whether one assesses broad negative affect, discrete anger, or more specific emotions such as anger with one’s parents will depend on the purposes of the study and the theoretical question being examined. We do not have to use the same level of analysis for all questions.

The Open Intellectual Atmosphere of Positive Psychology

I have raised a number of questions about Peterson and Seligman’s (2002) Values In Action (VIA) taxonomy of virtues. For example, not only do I wonder whether the VIA virtues are all universal, but I also wonder whether extreme manifestations of certain of the virtues might be vices. That is, might there be an optimal level of many of the virtues, which is not having that trait to the maximum degree? I also have wondered aloud about whether people with an extreme degree of one virtue might necessarily be low on certain other virtues. For example, might very courageous people also have some tendency to be impulsive sensation seekers, that is, short on the virtue of prudence? Another question about the virtues is whether people will make the biggest contribution to the world if they possess all of the virtues to some degree, or whether the biggest contributors to human progress are often those who have some focal devotion and who do not show many of the virtues that we value because these outstanding individuals are so focused on a single pursuit.

In raising these questions about the list of virtues created by Seligman and Peterson, I do not mean to say that I think their quest is wrong. Rather, I want to demonstrate that people within the positive psychology movement can, and do, raise challenging questions with each other, and do pursue scholarship at a high level of intellectual questioning. My commission in the positive psychology movement has not been revoked because I raise skeptical questions. Indeed, Martin Seligman has repeatedly stated that he wants the best scholarship and science as the foundation for positive psychology. My perception is that the people involved in positive psychology are open to a diverse set of ideas. They argue for this idea and against that idea, like everybody else, but they are very open to critical dialogue within the field. Unlike most fads or cults, members are free to follow their own ideas about how to pursue research in this area. I have encountered no

orthodoxy that one must follow, and this is one reason that I believe the field is thriving.

I am concerned that Lazarus (this issue), and perhaps others, are likely to see positive psychology as a monolith in which there is a specific orthodoxy and clergy. This would make fears about positive psychology justifiable. However, my view is that positive psychology is simply a loosely confederated group of psychologists from many different subdisciplines who share the beliefs that positive topics should be studied more and that psychology can help people achieve a better quality of life. Therefore, the concern that positive psychology is a fad seems misplaced because it is actually not an orthodox set of propositions that one must follow but instead is a platform for including strengths in our science.

Methodological Quandaries

I agree with Lazarus (this issue) that rigorous measurement is at the heart of science and must be at the heart of positive psychology. No scientific progress is made without adequate assessment, and good measurement is fundamentally part of theoretical scientific understanding. In trying to assess subjective well-being in my laboratory, we are not satisfied with simple self-report surveys taken at a single moment in time. Instead, we also try to obtain experience-sampling measures, reports from family and friends, and memory for good and bad events. We are adding implicit reaction time measures to the battery and hope to add biological measures in the future. It is my belief that when we assess virtues and other positive characteristics, this level of intensive measurement will eventually be needed. However, the first step in measuring positive characteristics will often be general self-report scales, and sometimes they will move us a considerable distance forward in our understanding. It remains to be seen how adequate such self-report scales are for each characteristic that is being measured. The bottom line here is that Lazarus is absolutely correct in asserting that positive psychologists need to use the most rigorous measurement methods that are available to them. Amen.

Lazarus (this issue) worries aloud about several methodological issues that are in fact endemic to most of psychology. One of those problems is that we all, at one time or another, imply causal language based on one-time cross-sectional studies. Most scientists believe that one cannot infer causality from such designs. However, I argue that in fact most psychologists have not thought deeply about what causality is, or what it means, and that in fact inferring causality from formal experiments is also tricky business. For example, modern physics has demonstrated very troubling issues with the concept of causality. This is not to say that we

should not more frequently use more experimental and longitudinal methods in positive psychology and elsewhere. What I mean to say is that each researcher needs to inform himself or herself about what causality means in the first place. Furthermore, one issue that Lazarus raises actually limits experimentation without his realizing it.

Lazarus (this issue) points to the fact that when group comparisons are made, such as those described by Gross et al. (1997), they are often interpreted in a way that does not examine the large overlap in the distributions involved. The idea seems to be that talking about group differences is compromised when the distributions for the two groups overlap. This is a characteristic that is inherent throughout all work in the behavioral sciences, including experimental work. Various groups virtually always show enormous overlap at the individual level for most dependent variables. This simply means that some things other than the group differences are also influencing the dependent variable. Because most things in psychology are multiply determined, the type of overlap to which Lazarus points is usually not seen as particularly problematical.

I believe that the overlap of groups is more problematical in a case that Lazarus (this issue) has apparently overlooked—in formal experimentation. In virtually all experiments in psychology there is tremendous overlap between the individuals in the various treatment groups. Again, this is often seen to result from the fact that there are other things that also “cause” the differences in the dependent variable. Sarason, Smith, and Diener (1975) and Funder and Ozer (1983) both found that the supposedly powerful experimental manipulations of social psychology usually do not account for more variance than do the traits of personality psychology. The reason that the overlap is more problematical in the case of experimentation is that it raises issues about what *cause* means. A person smokes and does not contract cancer; another person contracts cancer who has never smoked. What does it mean, then, that smoking *causes* cancer? Certainly, not that smoking is either necessary or sufficient for lung cancer to occur. The idea that many other things besides smoking also cause cancer does not explain why people can smoke for 80 years and never contract cancer if smoking is indeed causal. When we do experiments and conclude that the significant treatment differences reveal that *X* causes *Y*, and yet huge numbers of individuals in the two groups overlap, what does the word *cause* mean in this context? One defense of experimentation is that *X* only increases the probability that *Y* will occur. It seems to me that the admission forces a more complex view of causality on us, one that is embedded in a structured network of variables. I do believe the experimental paradigm is a powerful one in many cases; I just believe that most psycholo-

gists have not adequately considered the place of experimentation in understanding dynamical systems, and what *cause* means in these systems, which usually typify the phenomena of psychology. What Lazarus's worrying about overlapping distributions makes clear, however, is that the experimental paradigm does not get at causes in the sense that most researchers think it does.

When two natural groups on average differ on some characteristic, but the two sets of individuals overlap greatly, this does not mean that the factor separating the groups does not cause differences on the dependent variable. Age might influence emotions, despite the enormous overlap of the young and old. However, the overlap implies that other factors are at work, too, which influence the dependent variable. Nothing is caused by a single other thing, but all things are caused within a system of interacting factors. The fact that 75% of young and older people in the Gross et al. study overlap does not seem stunning to me; the fact that 25% do not overlap seems stunning. Given the nature of most psychological variables, these differences are large. Although none of this seems to be peculiar to the study of positive psychology, I do believe that the nature of causality is one that we need to examine in more depth in relation to our methodologies.

Positive Psychology and the History of Psychology

Is positive psychology a fad that will pass away? My hope is that positive psychology is a movement that will eventually disappear because it becomes part of the very fabric of psychology. Thus, it will fade as a campaign precisely because it has been so successful. There will remain many psychologists who study the problems that afflict us; there will also be a large cadre of psychologists who study the factors that make life more fulfilling, meaningful, and enjoyable. Of course there were positive psychologists before Martin Seligman, and there were positive topics being studied. However, what the positive psychology movement has accomplished is that many more of us are focusing on positive topics, on people's strengths instead of weak-

nesses, and Seligman has been brilliant in fostering the careers of young people in the field. The new discipline gives us a chance to address the challenging questions raised by the astute Lazarus (this issue). Perhaps at some point in the future there will be a majority of psychologists who, like Lazarus, are positive psychologists and do not know it.

Note

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Positive Psychology From A Coping Perspective

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For more than 45 years Richard Lazarus has spoken in a strong and clear voice about issues that are at the core of research on emotion. He can be counted on to ask searching questions that derive from a deep concern with the quality of psychological research and its intellectual underpinnings. In the target article, Lazarus (this issue) speaks out again, this time about a range of issues pertaining to what some call the *positive psychology movement*. His arguments and their tone indicate he is more troubled than pleased by this recent surge of interest in a focus on the positive. Lazarus is concerned that positive psychology is a fad and that its advocates tend to promote it to the exclusion of concern with the negative aspects of human behavior. Lazarus argues for a more balanced approach: "There is nothing wrong with giving more attention to the positive but not at the expense of the negative." Our own observation is that those who advocate the study of positive aspects of psychology do not intend that it replace concern with its negative aspects. What appears to be an overemphasis may instead be indicative of a catch-up phase for an area that has been underemphasized in recent years. Certainly, a balance between positive and negative must eventually be achieved. In his forthcoming book, *Emotions, Stress, and Health*, Alex Zautra (2003) said,

We struggle for survival, to meet basic needs every day, and we also strive for happiness, seek excellence, hope to learn and develop ourselves, and may do so every day as well, if we are fortunate enough. We attend to both sets of needs. (p. ix)

Just so, the investigation of stress, coping, and adaptation must pay attention to both sets of needs.

Our own interest in positive emotions in the stress process was fueled by a longitudinal study of caregiving and bereavement in the context of HIV–AIDS that we conducted during the 1990s. We followed 253 gay men dealing with the profound stress of caring for partners who were dying of AIDS and then losing their partners. These men reported high levels of depressed mood, which is what one would expect. However, these men also reported positive emotions at a frequency that was comparable to their reports of negative emotions throughout caregiving and bereavement, with the exception of a period surrounding the partner's death during which positive emotions were still reported but with diminished frequency.

A number of people commented that these findings were probably just a fluke due to the unusual nature of our sample. However, the finding was not a

fluke. Others have observed similar patterns of positive and negative emotions before us, including Viney (1986) and Wortman (1987). Since then, we have replicated the findings in an ethnically diverse sample of maternal caregivers (biological and nonbiological mothers) of children with HIV and other chronic illnesses.

This pattern suggests that Lazarus (this issue) may want to revise his observation that positive emotions are evident primarily in the lives of people who "live under highly favorable circumstances." As an example, consider this narrative from a participant in our ongoing study of maternal caregivers of children with HIV. Abby is the maternal grandmother and legal guardian of her 9-year-old HIV-positive grandson. She lives in a rural setting in northern California. Her daughter became infected with HIV through sexual contact when she was 16. The daughter was diagnosed when her son was diagnosed at 4 months of age. The daughter died in the past year. In this excerpt she talks about her job delivering newspapers:

I got the best job in the world. I've made it grow. And I'm doing everything I want to do, because I love driving, I love meeting people. I love being able to help our elderly, because I think they've been robbed of so much. And so for me it's been seventh heaven being able to just get them their newspaper, which is a little thing. But it means a lot to them.

Further, our observation of the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions has led to a series of questions about the functions of positive emotion in the stress process that hold promise for illuminating important questions about how people manage to get through difficult times and how they can experience both harm and benefit as a result of their experience. We are currently pursuing our questions about positive emotions in further studies of individuals who experience severe stress.

Lazarus (this issue) has very strong opinions about methodologies for studying emotion, whether positive or negative. His arguments for studying discrete emotions and identifying the valence of an emotion through an analysis of the individual's own perspective are compelling, and in general we have no quarrel with them when emotion is the focus of the research. However, the arguments get more complicated when coping is the central focus as it is in our work.

The Assessment and Analysis of Discrete Emotions in Relation to Coping

In real-life stressful situations most people experience an array of emotions depending on the complexity of the situation, the significance of various goals that are at stake, the options for changing the situation, and what else is going on in the person's life. Even in serious situations, the appraisal of harm or threat may also contain the appraisal of a personally meaningful benefit that has occurred, is anticipated, or is seen as a possibility. The appraisal of harm or threat is usually accompanied by negative emotions such as anger, sadness, or worry. The appraisal of benefit is usually accompanied by positive emotions such as relief, gratitude, or happiness, or in the case of anticipated benefit, eagerness, excitement, or hopefulness. Thus, the individual may experience a range of both positive and negative emotions, even in situations that appear grim.

A complex emotional response can be described in terms of its discrete component emotions. A person who has just been given bad news, such as a diagnosis of a serious cancer, could report feeling sad, scared, and angry, but also feeling relief that there is finally a diagnosis, hope that he or she can get into a trial for a new experimental drug, and gratitude and love for the family members and good friends who provide support. As Lazarus (this issue) writes, each emotion's core relational theme provides important information about the person's relationship with his or her environment.

Although discrete emotions can be assessed at various points during the coping process, our ability to analyze the relationship between discrete emotions and coping is more challenging. As we noted earlier, people tend to experience a range of emotions as part of their appraisal process. Although one emotion, such as anger, may be dominant, other emotions, such as fear and excitement, may also be experienced. Does any one emotion drive subsequent coping? Can a specific coping strategy be attached to a simple emotion? Or is coping driven instead by a composite emotion state that is shaped by the appraisal of harm, threat, and challenge?

Similarly, people may have complex appraisals of the outcome of a stressful encounter. A situation that has had a good resolution may be accompanied by emotions such as relief, happiness, or pride, but there may also be some threat emotions, such as worry or fear about what might happen next. A situation that has had a poor resolution may be accompanied by emotions such as anger, sadness, or guilt, but there may also be some positive emotions such as hopefulness about the future or gratitude for someone who tried to help. Although knowledge of these discrete emotions informs us about how things are for the individual, can

we attribute discrete emotions to specific coping strategies? We think that for some very intense emotions that carry a strong impulse to act, such as anger, it may be possible to do so. However, more typically, coping is most likely influenced by an appraisal that involves multiple emotions rather than by a unique emotion.

Instead of looking at the relationship of discrete emotions to coping, it may be useful to form aggregations of emotions along dimensions that are theoretically relevant to coping, which is, of course, what Lazarus (this issue) argues against. The circumplex model suggests that emotions can be classified along two dimensions: high–low activation and positive–negative valence. High-activation emotions such as excitement or anxiety, whether positively or negatively valenced, may motivate engagement in a problem and pursuit of future goals, whereas low-activation emotions are less likely to motivate behavior and may, in fact, lead to disengagement.

In addition to activation and valence, we also think duration and intensity are important to consider. Our narrative data suggest that positive emotions are more transitory than negative emotions during stressful situations. We were not able to make any inferences regarding intensity. Positive and negative emotion may be asymmetrical in both respects. It would be interesting to know whether positive emotions fulfill their adaptive functions, such as those suggested by Fredrickson (1998; e.g., cognitive broadening, physiological recovery) at a lower level of duration and intensity compared with negative emotions.

The issues we have raised about the relationship between emotion and coping should be examined empirically. Is it feasible to assess discrete emotions that uniquely affect or are affected by coping? Future work should attempt to measure and analyze discrete emotions as they influence coping and also test whether aggregating them into larger groups such as those suggested by the circumplex leads to more informative studies.

Cause–Effect

One of the universal goals of scientific research is to demonstrate cause–effect relationships. This goal is especially challenging in naturalistic research, in which the ability to control the effects of confounding and intervening variables is often quite limited. Lazarus (this issue) provides a good review of these difficulties. At one point, perhaps having grown discouraged by the difficulties inherent in determining causality in naturalistic research, Lazarus says, “One could argue sensibly that causation is given far too much attention in psychology in contrast with careful description of the phenomena and processes of interest.”

Although we agree with Lazarus (this issue) that it is difficult to demonstrate causality, we are not ready to give up on this question. An elegant descriptive study that neither offers a test of a hypothesis nor generates hypotheses about causality reminds us of a beautiful piece of art that is to be appreciated for its own sake, but we do not think this is a satisfactory goal for studies of emotion and coping. Ultimately, causality has to be demonstrated so that we can figure out how things work and where we can intervene to improve matters. Our experience in the setting in which we work—a major health sciences university—undoubtedly influences our opinion. It is not enough for our work to be interesting; it has to be useful. When we speak with nurses, social workers, and primary care physicians, the audience wants to know how what we have learned can help them in their work. This question is very difficult to answer if we do not have a good sense of causality.

There are, however, conceptual issues regarding coping and emotion that must be taken into consideration before we are ready to offer advice to populations under stress. One issue has to do with the variability inherent in coping and emotion. As we and others have pointed out, studies of coping and emotions (usually negative emotions) show that both are dynamic variables. Although there are undoubtedly aspects of these variables that are influenced by personality, they are also heavily influenced by what is going on in the environment. Our ability to determine cause and effect with respect to long-term outcomes, using a between-persons model, is constrained to the extent coping and emotion are states rather than traits. However, this does not rule out looking at cause and effect between emotion and coping within persons over time. Variability actually is a strength for within-person analyses because it is only when something varies that we can potentially track concomitant variation and identify causal relations. This intraindividual approach is one that Lazarus (this issue) strongly endorses.

A second issue concerns the reciprocal relationship between coping and emotion. They influence each other, so that an effect of coping on emotion at Time 1 is a cause of coping at Time 2. For example, efforts to resolve an interpersonal conflict that fail are likely to leave the person feeling sad, angry, or anxious. These emotions, in turn, are likely to influence subsequent coping. Further, coping and emotion occur in real time in such close proximity that it is often difficult to capture them as distinct processes. Simply because we ask about one before we ask about the other does not solve the problem.

An approach to this problem is suggested by the question put to us by our clinical colleagues, who are less interested in obtaining precise descriptions of cause-effect patterns than in trying to alter maladap-

ive emotion-coping patterns. Theoretically, given the intertwined, reciprocal relationship between coping and emotion, we, as psychologists, should be able to change the pattern by changing either variable. We can try to modify how people feel or we can try to modify how people cope. Modification of one should result in a modification of the other. Although there are ways to alter people's emotions through pharmacological intervention, except in serious cases of mood disorder we think the more promising long-term solution is to teach people to cope differently using cognitive behavioral interventions (e.g., Chesney, Folkman, & Chambers, 1996).

Until now, most interventions have not given much attention to positive emotion. The usual concern has been to regulate distress. The exceptions are cognitive behavioral therapies that include techniques for focusing on positive events (Fava, Rafanelli, Cazzaro, Conti, & Grandi, 1998; Lewinsohn, Sullivan, & Grosscup, 1980). This is a good beginning. However, there may be other techniques that people can use to generate positive emotions during stressful circumstances. Our research, for example, shows that positive affect is increased through a process of positive reappraisal in which the individual focuses on underlying values, goals, and beliefs that are engaged by a particular stressful experience (Moskowitz, Folkman, Collette, & Vittinghoff, 1996; Stein, Folkman, Trabasso, & Richards, 1997). Others have noted similar processes. Affleck and Tennen (1996), for example, reported that benefit finding and benefit reminding increase well-being in people with a variety of medical problems, and an edited volume on stress-related growth by Tedeschi, Park, and Calhoun (1998) contains a number of other illustrations. All of these suggest approaches for intervention that would fall under the rubric of positive psychology.

Our interest in incorporating what we are learning about coping and positive emotion into intervention does not lessen the importance of the regulation of distress. Our research suggests that coping strategies to regulate distress often differ from those that are used to generate positive emotion. For example, in our study of maternal caregivers, planning, positive reappraisal, respite, and emotional expression are significantly positively correlated with positive emotion but uncorrelated with negative emotion. On the other hand, distancing, self-controlling, and engaging in escape-avoidance are significantly positively associated with negative emotion but unrelated to positive emotion. This observation is consistent with recent developments in physiological studies of emotion that suggest the up-regulation of positive emotion and the down-regulation of negative emotion involve systems that have relatively little overlap.

Positive Psychology's Contribution to Coping

The new *Handbook of Positive Psychology* indicates that a number of investigators are expanding their work on coping to include its positive aspects. For example, Stanton, Parsa, and Austenfeld (2002) discussed emotional approach coping; Tennen and Affleck (2002) reviewed benefit finding and benefit reminding; Nolen-Hoeksema and Davis (2002) reviewed their work on posttraumatic growth; Masten and Reed (2002) discussed resilience; Dienstbier and Zillig (2002) discussed the process of physiological and psychological toughening in response to stress; and Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2002) discussed the benefits of writing or talking about stressful experiences.

Much of this work was developed before the positive psychology movement was given formal definition by Martin Seligman during his tenure as president of the American Psychological Association in 1998. We doubt that these investigators focused on the positive aspects of their work to the exclusion of negative aspects. However, we do think that the focus on positive psychology encourages coping researchers to think more broadly about the nature of coping and the mechanisms through which it helps people sustain themselves mentally and physically during stressful times.

As the area of positive psychology matures, empirical studies will determine whether it is useful to focus on positive emotions and associated coping during the stress process. If it turns out this focus does not prove useful in helping people cope with everyday as well as severe chronic stress, we can redouble our research efforts in the areas of pathology, distress, and depression. We do not think, however, that this will be the case. Our own data and the data from many other studies indicate that a broadened focus that includes the positive as well as negative aspects of coping and emotion will prove fruitful and will ultimately be beneficial to both clinical and community samples.

Notes

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The Ironies of Positive Psychology

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Assessing the potential value of a new “hot topic” within psychology is an inherently difficult task, one that asks us to peer into the future and speculate about whether the costs of the endeavor will be later justified by a valuable increase in our understanding of the human condition. In the present context, supporters of “positive psychology” have argued that psychology has traditionally focused on the negative or unpleasant aspects of life. An alleged consequence of this focus is that psychology has been kept from fruitfully applying its methods and theories to the parts of human experience involving achievement and enjoyment. In evaluating this claim, psychologists need to ask not only whether it is guilty of a “glass is half empty” viewpoint but, just as important, whether it even matters.

In the target article, Lazarus (this issue) devotes considerable space to some of the specific conceptual and methodological issues that he believes plague not only positive psychology but psychology in general. We find much to agree with in those comments, particularly on the complexities of measuring emotions. However, of particular interest to us are the author’s thoughts on the philosophical problems with the positive psychology movement, as highlighted by the questions summarized earlier. In the following commentary, we focus primarily on these questions and in doing so hope to illustrate some of the ironies of positive psychology, as well as some its potential strengths.

Have we as a discipline ignored the many pleasant aspects of human life and commendable human proclivities? As Lazarus (this issue) notes, the positive psychology movement seems to indicate that topics that have generated a great deal of theory and research (e.g., stress, loss, coping, cognitive errors and biases, to name just a few) have overemphasized the most tragic and unpleasant components of life, thereby

painting an overly miserable picture of what it means to be human. If such a charge is true, it raises the troubling notion that our discipline, which supposedly focuses on the entire range of human experience, has systematically avoided issues (i.e., positive aspects of life) that contribute much to that experience.

We believe and have argued previously (e.g., Harvey, 2001) that it is ironic that the positive psychology movement seems to neglect the energy and constructive developments that may accrue from human loss and pain. Accordingly, much of what Lazarus (this issue) has to say about positive psychology makes sense to us. We believe that his points along the lines that you can’t have positive without the negative and the claim that much of the traditional coping and stress literature has a very positive lean to it are justified.

Let us mention first a particular irony of positive psychology that stands out—namely, that the movement pays too little attention to the fact that death, trauma, and loss are an inherent part of human life. To love and experience the most meaningful human emotions often involve profound grief. Psychology became in the mid-part of the 20th century, and continues to be, a thriving field because it offered practical assistance in a world war in which an estimated 50 million people were killed. Psychology always has made its mark as a helping profession to address problems, writ small and large in the human psyche and human behavior. Psychology has made useful contributions to our adaptation to the horrors of September 11, 2001, because we recognize the importance of facing loss directly, often by telling our stories to close confidants, and that this process very likely is a lifelong endeavor that will have to be entered and reentered many times before we die (Harvey, 1996; Harvey, Weber, & Orbuch, 1990). The fact that such processes are often inspired by tragic events does not lead us

to conclude that psychology has become a largely “negative” field. Indeed, as Lazarus (this issue) implies, major loss events provide a context in which the most positive aspects of human life emerge.

Furthermore, as presented in some of the representative writings to date, positive psychology seems too glib about the fact that loss is so pervasive in human life. At times, the positive psychology movement seems to want to stress the positive emotions to such a degree that it can dismiss the facts of regular loss and grieving, that in time become part of most humans’ lives. Lazarus’s (this issue) reference to Hoagy Carmichael’s song “You have to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative” seems right on in this focus on the glass as half filled versus half empty. And that can be good. To overdo in our thinking all the negatives in our lives or the world may be paralyzing. If there is anything that psychology, broadly construed, has done for humanity, it is to emphasize work to achieve adaptive thinking, feeling, and behavior. Such a motif is revealed in a powerful way in work on how people construe their environments and gain a greater sense of meaning in the process by pioneers such as Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Heider (1958), Taylor (1983), and Bruner (1990).

Ironically, though, this meaning-making theme is most cogently shown in writing about loss. As suggested by Frankl (1959) in his classic analysis of how people seek meaning under the most desperate and degrading conditions, humans are imbued with the potential for accomplishment and contribution to others. On the basis of the enormous personal and collective losses Frankl experienced in Nazi death camps, he was able to articulate a unique vision of how people can transform their losses into personal growth (partially found in his logotherapy) and strength that embodies care and concern for others.

An interesting dialogue about loss and survival and rejuvenation of the human spirit has emerged in some of the ceremonies associated with the losses of September 11. At the May 2002 ceremony to commemorate the clean-up of the World Trade Center destruction, one widow of a firefighter lost that day commented on National Public Radio that she appreciated the fact that no one made a speech at the ceremony. No one used the term *closure* for what families now would feel. She noted that the concept of closure trivializes the ongoing, probably never-ending feelings of loss and missing of the loved one that many will feel.

At memorial events in 1997 for those who died on TWA 800 in 1996, Houston businessperson Joseph Lychner, who lost his wife and two young daughters—his whole family—in the disaster, was asked whether the memorial events might help him “move on” and achieve closure regarding his losses. He said there is no moving on and closure for him and that he does not want closure. Rather, he wants to continue remember-

ing and honoring the family he loved so much and to dedicate a significant portion of his life to an area in which his wife was an activist (criminal justice). Is his response in some way a small clue about problematic or complicated mourning? No, Lychner’s logic is similar to that of others who, in the wake of devastating losses, have dedicated themselves to making contributions to others based on their experiences, a logic that resonates with Erikson’s (1963) idea of generativity. To them, it is a manifestation of positive psychology to remember and learn from great loss. To often think and feel about losses that change us as people in fundamental ways is quite human—it is not to be avoided in the interests of moving on and achieving what may well be an illusion of peace. We argue that positive psychology can embrace, rather than reject or be neutral toward, this reality of the continuity of loss in the human mind.

It appears, then, that much of what is most extraordinary and admirable about people is manifested in their responses to the stressors and tragedies that threaten them. Indeed, well-researched notions of coping, account-making, and resilience, while in response to initially negative events, have centered on examining just how people do their best when confronted with the worst. From this perspective, we agree that in some ways *positive psychology* has become too much of a slogan, perhaps in an attempt to argue that the movement is brand new when in fact strands of it have been found in the literature of psychology from the beginning of the field. And perhaps this should not be surprising, as it is always a challenge for the scholar to imbed his or her work in the context of past efforts while simultaneously identifying supposedly new paths that lie ahead. We agree that the movement’s exuberance, well-intentioned though it may be, has not been balanced with enough attention to the existing significant focus on positive elements of human life in the extensive archives of psychology.

Thus, it is clear to us that a portrayal of our discipline as overly pessimistic or negative is misguided. Given this criticism of the movement, does it mean that positive psychology ultimately has “no legs”? Although perhaps tempting, drawing such a conclusion is probably too pessimistic a move itself. Instead, we argue that despite its generally overstated claim of “newness,” positive psychology raises issues that justify further inquiry, and in some ways depart from previous topics in psychology. Therefore, with our aforementioned concerns noted, there are indeed some things that are new about this trend and worthy of our attention.

First, although much of the literature on reactions to stress or loss is indeed positive in some sense (Harvey & Pauwels, 2000), this literature primarily focuses on getting people back to “normal.” Through the work of Lazarus and others, we have gained valuable insight into how individuals attempt, and in some cases achieve, the goal of getting back to their preloss level

of functioning. However, we think much less is known about how some people actually get to levels of functioning superior to that of their prestressor life. For example, what factors determine whether a parent who loses a child at a young age eventually returns to some degree of emotional “normalcy” or, alternatively, dramatically transforms his or her life in the aftermath. For example, how did such a transformation occur for John Walsh, whose son Adam was kidnapped and murdered, and who subsequently became an influential leader in child-protection issues and the host of television’s *America’s Most Wanted*?

Similarly, the work on perceptions of psychological growth following traumatic events is relatively recent but has already raised interesting issues about the conceptual nature of such growth, its relationship to broader personality variables, and how such growth may be assessed (e.g., Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998; Tennen & Affleck, 1998). Issues regarding why such growth does or does not occur, whether it is determined by specific coping strategies or more general personality dispositions, and whether such growth can be actively encouraged in people who have experienced extreme loss are important questions that have traditionally garnered little attention. Certainly, the emergence of this topic did not occur in a vacuum. Many of the questions mentioned here have their roots in the so-called negative psychology of years past, and scholars owe a debt of gratitude to that tradition. Nonetheless, we believe the topic of psychological growth and transformation is one example of positive psychology that offers avenues for research and theory that have largely been left untended.

Second, Seligman’s notion of “nurturing what is best” is a point to which we do not think Lazarus (this issue) gives enough credit. The stress and coping literature, among other types of work, certainly gives us an idea of how to pull someone back from the brink when faced with great threats, but we know relatively little about getting an initially “normal” or highly functioning person to become even better. This point reminds us of the merit of Maslow’s (1962) classic self-actualization notion. However, a strong empirical base that describes this high state of achievement has largely eluded us. In the thriving field of close relationships work, as an illustration, we argue that psychologists have done little to examine how “normal” or simply satisfactory relationships can be made much more enjoyable (Harvey & Pauwels, 1999). The relationships field has focused more attention on identifying the factors that can help us simply to “get by” and survive rather than thrive in a relationship. Of course, it should be recognized that often the individuals who perceive their relationships to be in decline are in need of more psychological assistance than those pursuing the “luxury” of a highly fulfilling rela-

tionship. However, it would be illuminating to have more information about how some people are able to cultivate their relationships so as to achieve great health and happiness.

Besides evaluating whether proponents of positive psychology have really portrayed the discipline of psychology accurately, or whether there are indeed new directions that have not been given adequate attention, we, as psychologists, must ask ourselves bluntly whether we should even care about positive psychology as a movement. Is there something meaningful to be gained by describing a set of presumably interesting questions as a *movement*, or is it indeed just “happyology?” As suggested at the beginning of this commentary, it is nearly impossible to evaluate the importance of positive psychology, or any movement for that matter, at such an early stage, but it is important for us to make our educated if imperfect guess, simply because we have to decide what our discipline should “do” next, and where we should invest our resources. In short, we think it is indeed valuable to continue the emphasis on positive psychology, even if that means occasionally hearing voices that may overstate the movement’s claims to newness.

It is true that many of the concerns of the positive psychology, including those we have described, are already the province of various well-known self-help agents. Although probably well-intentioned, these agents do not systematically study or assess the literature of work on human behavior, and psychologists sometimes view their advice with a healthy skepticism. Whether these self-help specialists advise the public on the merits of positive thinking, improving their relationships, or illuminating the habits of successful-happy-wonderful people, the fact is that there is indeed a large audience listening. It is in this domain that an emphasis on the scientific study of “positive” human experience seems particularly important to us. We think that psychology has a responsibility to investigate these issues precisely because the public is often so engaged in them. Granted, what we study should not be dictated by public whim, but just because the public is interested in a topic does not exclude it from serious scientific inquiry or relegate it to fad status. Our concern here is that when the general public looks for voices to advise them on how to move life from “just okay” to something considerably better, scientific psychology does not always have much to say. To rectify this state of affairs, it may be necessary for us, as psychologists, to at times use terms like *movement* and *new* in the hopes that our discipline can put more resources into generating sound, scientifically based advice for those seeking it. The process of creating a presumably new and valuable movement in psychology is often difficult for those undertaking such an endeavor. They must temper their enthusiastic hopes with realistic expectations and acknowledge what they share with

their predecessors, all the while keeping their focus on what real changes they wish to create. Although we believe that the strongest proponents of the positive psychology movement have not always successfully navigated these challenges, we do see considerable value in the attempt.

In conclusion, like Lazarus (this issue), we have reservations about whether there are many unique qualities of positive psychology as enunciated in relevant writings to date. Most important, we have reservations about how positive psychology does not appear to give the facts of loss and grief their due as stimulants of growth and the quest to give back to others based on lessons of loss. However, it is too early to make a final judgment about the general fate of positive psychology and about whether what can be invested into it will produce an acceptable return in our understanding of human thought and behavior. But given the importance of issues emphasized by positive psychology for many people in the general public, we believe it is worth the time and effort to find out.

Note

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Some Truths Behind the Trombones?

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Years ago as a graduate student flying home for a visit, I struck up a conversation with my seatmate, who was on a business trip. We chatted about our respective journeys, our lives, relationships, and so forth, sharing the kinds of details that get shared between strangers on planes.

About 20 minutes into our conversation, she asked me, quite innocently, “So, what are you studying to be?”

“A psychologist,” I replied.

She blanched. Her jaw dropped. There was a moment of silence, and then, with a gulp, she said, “So,

we’ve been talking all this time. I had no idea.” Steeling herself for my reply, she continued, “So, what do you know about me? Just tell me. What’s wrong with me?”

It turned out that this would be the first of many such experiences, on planes, trains, busses, at dinner parties, talking to colleagues from other fields, and so on. And certainly I am not unique. Even undergraduates in my classes have shared such experiences—what happens when someone finds out you are “one of them.” Granted, most people may have the impression that all psychologists are clinical psychologists, but the

gist of these conversations is clear: People think psychology is the study of what is wrong with them. Over and over, I have found that people want to know what I, as a psychologist, know about which experiences have permanently wrecked their lives, what sort of diagnosis they might be looking at, and so forth. They fear my insights into the nuances of the dark and twisted underbelly of their (deceptively?) happy, normal lives. And, frankly, the nonpsychologist's concern about the psychologist's tendency to pathologize is not entirely without foundation, even in nonclinical areas. In social and personality psychology, we, as psychologists, have managed to transform a multitude of the "goods" of life into weaknesses and problems. Worrying about doing well on an important assignment is "having contingent self-esteem." Being happy is merely a reflection of denial and defensiveness. Feeling that one has grown through a difficult experience is cognitive dissonance. We are often more comfortable with positive illusions than positive realities. Our concern with the counterintuitive has led to an utter disdain for the intuitive: If people think it is so, it certainly must not be. Furthermore, a focus on problems, which is, to some extent, justifiable, has led to a dearth of research on strengths. A subtle misanthropy has entered into our discourse about human behavior.

The implications of the assumption that psychology is about what is wrong with people are considerable for psychologists interested in studying human strengths. In my own work, in which I ask people to share the stories of their life experiences, I have certainly found myself forced to argue against the notion that, as a psychologist, I am interested in uncovering the psychopathology that lurks in ostensibly good lives. It is a challenge to assure people that I assume that they are doing pretty well and I am interested, in fact, in how they managed it.

My interest in positive psychology came about in no small part because of these experiences. When asked, "What's wrong with me?" my response had always been "I'm not that kind of psychologist." What kind of psychologist am I, then? Positive psychology provides at least a sense of the answer. In this commentary, I take a few points made by Lazarus (this issue) in his provocative target article critiquing positive psychology and address how I think positive psychology has something important and useful to offer psychology. Essentially, I argue that although Lazarus makes excellent points about the importance of setting the highest standards for empirical research in positive psychology (or all psychology), his portrait of positive psychology is limited and misses what is to me the "big picture" of the promise of the positive psychology movement. Positive psychology may be seen as a step toward achieving a more integrated field of psychology that acknowledges the emotional richness of human life.

Like Lazarus, I find the idea of a bandwagon (worse yet, one I've actually jumped on!) to be somewhat strange and perhaps even distasteful. Yet, I hope to point out at least a few of what I see as the truths behind the "76 trombones."

The Scope of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is much broader in scope than Lazarus (this issue) presents. It is not about positive thinking above all else, nor is it about positive emotions, only. In addition, positive psychology is not reinventing interest in human strengths and capacities without acknowledging the extant literature on these topics. Research on topics such as happiness, goal striving, altruism, resilience, wisdom, competence, optimism, hope, and love has been going on for some time. One purpose of positive psychology is to acknowledge that these diverse research programs involve a common focus on the goods of life and that bringing together these individual strands of research may lead to provocative and important scientific research. (Furthermore, presenting these well-established bodies of literature to the public as positive psychology allows for some much-needed public relations.) Good, important research in positive psychology is just good, important research in psychology. I strongly recommend that anyone who is interested in seeing what this means check out the annotated bibliography on the positive psychology Web site (<http://www.positivepsychology.org/ppappend.htm#App A: Bibliography>). The diversity of research represented there is indicative of the breadth of the movement as well as the firm existing empirical foundation for the study of human strengths. (Ironically, Lazarus's, 1991, classic book *Emotion and Adaptation* is included there.)

Positive Psychology Encourages A Research Agenda Reflective of the Breadth of Human Experience

Positive psychology is concerned with identifying important research that has already been conducted but also with drawing attention to gaps in the existing literature and encouraging a research agenda that fills those gaps. Lazarus (this issue) calls for an acknowledgment of both the positives and the negatives in life. I concur completely—and have argued for this point myself (King, 2001b; King & Pennebaker, 1998). Recognizing both aspects of life is vital to a more complete understanding of human experience. However, the existing body of literature hasn't always presented a balanced view. I have pointed out what might be called a misanthropic bias that exists in a great deal of psychological research. This bias has important implications for empirical research. What we learn from our research is, at least in part, a function of the questions we

ask. Fredrickson (1998) argued persuasively that positive states have not enjoyed the kind of attention in the research literature that negative states have received. The problem-focused nature of much social psychological research has led to a tendency to miss potentially important research questions. For instance, in social psychology, there is an impressive, well-developed literature on prejudice. Yet, it is interesting that the benefits of cultural diversity, which are largely assumed to exist, have not been well documented by empirical work.

Putting together a syllabus for a seminar on positive psychology is an exercise in discovering uncharted research topics that could profitably be studied. Some research topics have been well studied and continue to be (e.g., delay of gratification, goal striving, resilience, happiness). Others have received only scant or insufficient empirical attention (e.g., courage, gratitude, awe), and others have been all but completely ignored (e.g., humility, generosity). In general, the ambivalence of everyday life has not always been reflected in research—and typically the positives have received short shrift.

Lazarus's (this issue) arguments about the importance of balance—of including both positive and negative constructs in research—are well taken and serve, to my mind, as an excellent justification for the importance of positive psychology, itself. Indeed, one might go farther and suggest that positive psychology will open the door to outcome measures beyond happiness. In contrast to Lazarus, who suggests that positive psychology is too concerned with happiness, I submit that a broader study of human strengths might free us from our dependence on happiness as the major outcome variable of interest. Too often, the “goods of life” that serve as criterion measures in our studies are limited to questionnaires that tap feeling happy. If other positive aspects of life are more fully developed in the literature, we might see research programs that incorporate a multitude of worthwhile outcomes. Such research might better track the value of happiness versus other important goods (e.g., wisdom, maturity, generativity, meaning) as individuals navigate the demands of life (cf. King, 2001b; Ryff, 1989). Thus, positive psychology might spur research that incorporates an array of valued outcomes so that we can come closer to capturing “the good life” in its many possible forms.

In addition to identifying gaps in the current research, positive psychology can draw attention to biases in present research. An example of the subtle yet pervasive nature of the negative bias in research is provided by studies of the health benefits of writing about traumatic life events. Pennebaker (e.g., 1997) has shown that writing about one's most traumatic life events is associated with health benefits (and a variety of other benefits; see Lepore & Smythe's, 2002, edited volume). Tracing the origins of this large body of research led me to a fascinat-

ing conclusion: There is no legitimate theoretical or empirical justification for asking people only about their traumatic life events (King, 2002). For decades, researchers have posed this question to participants, without really justifying the necessity of writing about trauma to attaining the health benefits of writing.

My students and I have been conducting a variety of studies that demonstrate that the “healing power of writing” can be obtained by writing not only about negative topics but about more positive topics as well. For instance, in one study we asked participants to write only about the positive aspects of a traumatic life event (King & Miner, 2000). In that study, we found that individuals who wrote only about the positive demonstrated health benefits identical to those who wrote about trauma only. Furthermore, in another study (King, 2001b), we found that writing about a decidedly nontraumatic topic (i.e., one's best possible future self) was associated with enhanced positive mood, increased subjective well-being, and health benefits. It is important to note that the explanatory mechanisms previously suggested for writing benefits relied on notions of catharsis, disinhibition, extinction, and habituation. They are plausible mechanisms if one is focusing on traumatic memories (though none of these have been borne out by empirical research on potential mediators). However, they cannot be applied to health benefits obtained in writing about exclusively positive topics (Burton & King, 2003).

It is not surprising that the writing paradigm first embraced trauma as an appropriate topic for study. It almost seems natural that what is negative is what is most important in human beings' lives, that examining negative life events holds important information. However, our instinctive focus, as researchers, on the negative led to a potential scientific dead end. If writing has a general power to organize human experience (Pennebaker & Seagal 1999) by enhancing self-regulation, for instance, we would miss this general effect by studying only writing about negative topics.

Does God Need Satan? It's An Empirical Question

Lazarus (this issue) suggests throughout his critique that it makes no sense to examine the positives without the negatives because positive states are meaningless without the negative ones to balance against. Lazarus forcefully declares, “God needs Satan.” At first blush this sounds enormously persuasive. And, again, one might assert that, as psychologists, we have spent more time studying Satan than God, and positive psychology would only fill a nagging gap. Upon reflection, however, one realizes that there is actually not a great deal of data to support the notion that you must have both types of experiences to appreciate each—or that, at the

very least, the studies haven't been done. Individual differences in affective traits do bias our emotional lives one way or another. Indeed, research by Taylor and colleagues has shown that, to some extent, a positively biased organism may be better off in a variety of ways than one that is balanced or negatively biased (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). Clearly, how much God needs Satan remains a provocative topic for study.

Final Thoughts

Many of the criticisms leveled by Lazarus (this issue) at positive psychology are certainly words of wisdom for all areas of psychological research. It is difficult to take issue with these general criticisms because they refer to problems endemic to psychological research (i.e., overreliance on cross-sectional data, misuse of research in popular outlets). Indeed, I appreciate the no-nonsense tone of Lazarus's common sense critique. Yet, these general problems do not negate theoretical and empirical advances that have been made in psychology in general and positive psychology in particular. The idea of a movement is, perhaps, a bit strange. However, there is value in a movement that encourages emerging research in a variety of areas, inspires previously unexplored collaborations, and provides a means of drawing attention to that work.

Is positive psychology a fad that will one day fade like feathered hair, acid-washed jeans, and Norman Vincent Peale? Clearly, only time will tell. However, at least fading need not be taken as a sign of failure. If positive psychology is a meaningful step toward a more fully integrated field of psychology, one can imagine a time when it will have served its purpose—a time when psychology in general is reflective of the rich and varied (positive and negative) character of human life. I think the movement will have succeeded if a stranger on a plane can ask the psychologist in the next seat “So what is it you study?” imagining that he or she has revealed not only scars from the past, biases, weak-

nesses, and problems but also strengths, capacities, and abilities. This critique by Lazarus (this issue), coming fairly early in the process, will, I hope, set for positive psychologists in all areas the highest possible standards of scientific rigor toward which to strive.

Note

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Positive Psychology's Legs

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What Positive Psychology Is and Is Not

Positive psychologists are committed to investigating the factors that allow individuals, families, and communities to flourish, to thrive, to function in an optimal way. Thus, positive psychologists conduct the science of optimal human functioning, focusing renewed attention on the sources of psychological wellness—for example, on positive emotions and positive experience, on individual differences in human strengths and virtues, on positive institutions, and on what makes lives worth living. Positive psychology does not, as Lazarus (this issue) suggests in his target article, advocate being positive and happy and Pollyannaish all the time. It does not only focus on individuals in favorable circumstances. It does not only concern itself with the study of emotion. And, last but not least, positive psychology does not compete with or negate so-called negative psychology.

Lazarus (this issue) argues that the “message” or “premise” of positive psychology is the power of positive thinking and feeling as sources of health and well-being. To the contrary, we submit that the message of positive psychology is the importance of refocusing research energies to study the positive side of life alongside the negative side of life. Whether or not positive emotion and optimistic thinking are the secrets to positive mental health, to happiness, to virtue, or to optimally functioning communities and institutions is an empirical question, one that positive psychologists are currently rigorously addressing.

Separating the Positive From the Negative

One of Lazarus's (this issue) most persuasive and important points is that care should be taken not to thoughtlessly and arbitrarily separate the “positive” from the “negative.” For example, the negative-sounding scientific study of stress, and how people cope with stressful circumstances, can illuminate how people bring order and meaning to adversity (e.g., Taylor, 1983) or what character strengths are associated with rising to the occasion (e.g., Singer, King, Green, & Barr, 2002) or the factors contributing to resilience (e.g., Masten, 2001). It is thus not surprising that, in the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2001), close to a dozen chapters are de-

voted to research on coping with stress, loss, and trauma. As a further example, Lazarus eloquently illustrates how seemingly unambiguously positive emotions may not always be positive. Although we do not find some of his specific arguments compelling (e.g., the presumption that joy is not a positively valenced emotion because it does not last), the basic message is well taken.

Debating what is truly positive and what is not, however, is not terribly productive. One need only contemplate the myriad discoveries and theories—representing the recent fruits of the efforts of positive psychology researchers—to recognize the value of the movement. Another way to discern its significance or worth is to conduct the thought experiment: What research would have been conducted (or, more precisely, would not have been conducted) if positive psychology had not come into being, if Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) had never made the call to action? Of course, one can only speculate about the research of other individuals, but we can freely argue in favor of our own work. For example, two ongoing research projects, described in the following sections of this commentary, were entirely conceived and developed at meetings with other positive psychology researchers (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2002; Sheldon, Lyubomirsky, & Schkade, 2002). Indeed, we cannot imagine an alternate research environment that would have encouraged and facilitated such work.

Increasing and Sustaining Happiness

As a case in point, I (Lyubomirsky) have been investigating happiness for more than a decade. However, at no time did I ever seriously consider a research program to attempt elevating and sustaining over the long term the happiness levels of individuals—this, despite innumerable laypersons and journalists with whom I have discussed my work inquiring how and whether permanent increases in happiness can be achieved. As Lazarus (this issue) acknowledges, “to produce change in a person's thoughts and feelings from negative to positive is probably a much more difficult task than meets the eye,” and this challenge has kept myself, and most others, from attempting to do so.

Indeed, remarkably, almost no well-controlled research to date has investigated whether it is possible

to reinforce or enhance an individual's personal happiness or whether sustainable increases in happiness are even attainable. Moreover, the general conclusion of the existing work is that the pursuit of happiness may be largely futile. Two critical developments support this pessimism—first, the idea of a genetically determined set point for well-being (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) and, second, the notion of hedonic adaptation (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999). Both of these ideas suggest that, even after profoundly positive events or changes in life circumstances, people are ultimately destined to return to their previous happiness “baseline.”

In contrast, my collaborators and I believe that durable increases in happiness are indeed possible and attainable by the average person (Sheldon et al., 2002). To this end, we are exploring how the cognitive and motivational processes and biases associated with relatively greater happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2001) can be nurtured, acquired, or directly taught—that is, what the mechanisms are by which a chronic happiness level higher than one's genetically determined set point can be attained and sustained. According to our conceptual model of well-being, an individual's chronic happiness level is governed by three classes of factors: (a) his or her happiness set point, which is fixed (e.g., Lykken & Tellegen, 1996); (b) happiness-relevant circumstances (such as location, income, and marital status), which may be difficult and impractical but not impossible to change (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999); and (c) intentional cognitive, motivational, and behavioral strategies that can influence happiness and that are feasible but effortful to deploy.

It is through the effortful, volitional strategies in the third class that we believe people can achieve sustainable increases in happiness. An ongoing experimental program of research, in which participants' cognitive and motivational strategies are systematically retrained, is testing this important question. These intervention studies are longitudinal, using numerous within-subject measurements across time, as well as multiple convergent measures of self-reported and peer-reported positive emotions and well-being. In addition, our studies are attempting to determine the critical properties of effective happiness-enhancing activities, as well as testing their cross-cultural applications. The significance of these investigations is supported by the argument, made by numerous researchers and thinkers, that the ability to be happy and contented with life is a central criterion of positive mental health and psychological adjustment (e.g., Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998; Jahoda, 1958; Menninger, 1930; Taylor & Brown, 1988; cf. Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

The Many Benefits of Happiness

Whether or not positive psychologists should devote research energies to understanding the architecture of sustainable happiness is a question that is, not entirely coincidentally, addressed by another of our research programs. This second research question, inspired and cultivated by positive psychology, is as follows: Is happiness a good thing, or does it simply feel good subjectively? Accordingly, our effort involves examination of the consequences of well-being. So far, a comprehensive review of all the available literature (Lyubomirsky et al., 2002) has shown that happiness does indeed have numerous positive by-products, which appear to benefit not only individuals but families, communities, and the society at large. In this article, prior research on happiness is reviewed with an eye to interpreting (with great caution) cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental findings as evidence of the outcomes of happiness and well-being. The analysis has revealed that the benefits of happiness include higher income and superior work outcomes (e.g., George, 1995; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1995); larger social rewards (e.g., Berry & Hansen, 1996; Harker & Keltner, 2001; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984); more activity, energy, and flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991; Mishra, 1992; Watson, Clark, McIntyre, & Hamaker, 1992); better physical health (e.g., a bolstered immune system; Dillon, Minchoff, & Baker, 1985; Stone et al., 1994); and even longer life (e.g., Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001; Maruta, Colligan, Malinchoc, & Offord, 2000; Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000).

The literature, we have found, also suggests that happy individuals are more creative (e.g., Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1994); are more cooperative, charitable, and self-confident (e.g., Cunningham, Shaffer, Barbee, Wolff, & Kelley, 1990; Isen, 1970; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 2001; Williams & Shiaw, 1999); and show greater self-regulatory and coping skills (e.g., Aspinwall, 1998; Carver et al., 1993; Chen et al., 1996; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Of course, because the case for the causal effects of happiness on beneficial outcomes is still primarily suggestive rather than definitive, future research in positive psychology has to include more longitudinal and experimental studies to establish the causal direction of these findings.

Is There A Need for Pessimists?

As Lazarus (this issue) observes, a growing and thriving area of positive psychology is the investigation of the correlates, consequences, and adaptive

value of optimistic thought. Optimists appear to show advantages over pessimists in a variety of domains. In particular, researchers have provided evidence for the adaptive value of optimism for health (Achat, Kawachi, Spiro, DeMolles, & Sparrow, 2000; Kubzansky, Sparrow, Vokonas, & Kawachi, 2001; Kubzansky et al., 2002; Maruta et al., 2000), including greater immune functioning (Segerstrom, 2001; Segerstrom, Taylor, Kemeny, & Fahey, 1998). Optimists also appear to be more responsive to threatening health information (Aspinwall & Brunhart, 1996) and to be more persistent in pursuing health goals in the face of chronic illness (Affleck et al., 2001). Other benefits of optimism are manifested in the workplace, with optimists showing higher work productivity (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), decreased risk of job burn-out (Chang, Rand, & Strunk, 2000), and more problem-focused coping in response to job-related stress (Strutton & Lumpkin, 1993). Research suggests that it is optimists, rather than pessimists, who tend to remain engaged with problems and actively seek solutions (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). In one study, for example, optimists abandoned unsolvable tasks more quickly than did pessimists, redirecting their efforts toward alternatives that could be solved (Aspinwall & Richter, 1999).

Apparently ignoring this mounting evidence, Lazarus (this issue) asserts in the target article that pessimism is no less adaptive, and possibly even more adaptive, than is optimism:

Given the world in which we live, I would venture to suggest, however, that we need pessimists even more than optimists. Pessimists, or realists, as many would prefer to think of themselves, mobilize valuable outrage against human depravity and its banality.

We disagree with this speculation on several levels (as discussed later), yet we concur with the following: Optimism and pessimism and possibly all psychological constructs are undoubtedly culturally shaped. Being an optimist may yield good health and well-being in a culture that promotes and supports and values it, but it may not produce advantages in an environment that is hostile or indifferent to such an outlook. This notion is nicely illustrated by a quote from Eva Hoffman (1989), who described in her autobiography her personal experience emigrating at the age of 13 from Poland to Vancouver. She wrote as follows: "My father's fatalism, I explain to myself carefully, was perfectly suited to his conditions. But in my less threatening world, I need to develop the art of optimism and of benign expectations" (p. 249). Not surprisingly, the cultural specificity of optimism versus pessimism is also a focus of research of positive psychology (e.g., Chang, 2001).

Pessimism and "Realism"

Recently, Lyubomirsky (2001) proposed a distinction between two hedonically relevant motivations—the desire to be happy and the desire to be "right." That is, some people are primarily motivated to perceive the world in positive ways—to value themselves and to appreciate others, to like the world around them and to be grateful for what they have rather than focusing on what they do not have (cf. Taylor & Brown, 1988). In contrast, the principal motivation of other individuals is to perceive themselves, other people, and the universe around them in a realistic manner (i.e., "to see things as they really are"), to strive to understand themselves and their world, and to maintain a consistent and accurate self-image (cf. Swann, 1983). The latter category is reminiscent of Lazarus's (this issue) pessimists, also known as "realists." Unfortunately, these individuals are also more likely to be chronically unhappy and to suffer a host of adverse outcomes (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Lyubomirsky et al., 2002). Thus, again, we revert to the conclusion that whether pessimism or realism or optimism is more adaptive, or whether pessimists or optimists are more "realistic," can only be resolved with well-controlled empirical investigations.

Optimists, Not Pessimists, Will Change the World

In a memorable scene from *Annie Hall* (Joffe & Allen, 1977), Woody Allen's character approaches an attractive, giddy couple on a Manhattan street.

"You look like a very happy couple. Are you?" he asks pointedly.

"Yeah," the young woman replies.

"So, how do you account for it?"

"I am very shallow and empty, and I have no ideas and nothing interesting to say," says the woman.

"And I am exactly the same way," adds the man.

Lazarus (this issue) implies that it will be pessimists who will change the world. With due respect, we strongly differ with this opinion. Lazarus's argument reflects a recurring theme in literature and popular media and folk wisdom, and as portrayed in the scene from *Annie Hall*, that promoting happiness and optimism is akin to issuing opium to the masses, rendering otherwise reasonable people silly and foolish and stupid. Yet, as we write this, positive psychology researchers are gathering persuasive evidence that promoting happiness and optimism, even among indi-

viduals suffering oppression or adverse conditions, does not translate into encouraging those individuals to passively accept their situation. Indeed, happy people are energetic, creative, socially engaged, healthy, altruistic, likable, and productive (Lyubomirsky et al., 2002), and these are the very characteristics, we argue, that could help them change the dire conditions of their lives or mobilize themselves “against human depravity and its banality.”

Concluding Remarks

Lazarus (this issue) asks whether the positive psychology movement has legs. What does it mean for a movement to have legs? If, by *legs*, he means solid footing, a strong foundation to stand on, then positive psychology researchers are working on building and fortifying that foundation. As Lazarus persuasively and forcefully argues, it is imperative that the hypotheses proposed by positive psychologists be put to rigorous empirical test. By adopting the highest standards for science, for measurement, and for methodology, the research efforts of positive psychologists hold great promise for advancing the study of optimal psychological functioning and the positive side of human life. If, by *legs*, Lazarus means legs to run on, then, absolutely, yes, positive psychology has great momentum today. Indeed, this movement is already invigorating research on positive emotions, positive character, and positive institutions, imparting to both young and experienced investigators renewed purpose and impetus to pursue work in this area. Taking advantage of that momentum may lead to great advances in science and in improving the lives of individuals, families, communities, organizations, and the society at large.

Note

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Negative Appraisals of Positive Psychology: A Mixed-Valence Endorsement of Lazarus

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We find many areas of agreement with Lazarus's (this issue) target article. Indeed, it is a little surprising that such an article has to be written at all. It is hard to conceive of understanding any of the major challenges of life, from falling in love to building a successful career, without attention to both potential benefits, challenges, hardships, pressures, threats, and losses, and the positive and negative emotions that ensue as a result of the appraisal process. The source of the mistake may be the current zeitgeist in Western (and especially American) culture that emphasizes personal growth, self-actualization, and the enjoyment of high self-esteem in preference to the more stoic virtues of emotional restraint, self-denial and tolerance of adversity. Much of the work done under the banner of positive psychology is of scientific value, but we sense the hand of popular culture as a guiding force.

We commence this commentary by linking the issues raised in the lead article to our past research on coping (Zeidner & Endler, 1996) and emotional intelligence (EI; Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002). We move on to discuss a number of points of convergence and divergence with the ideas expressed in Lazarus's (this issue) commentary as they relate to (a) research methodology, (b) positive and negative emotional states, and (c) positive and negative affective dispositions.

Coping Research

According to Lazarus's cognitive-motivational model of emotion (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stress is not a direct reflection of objective events but stems, in part, from the frame of mind of the person experiencing the event. In his milestone book *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process* (1966), Lazarus proposed a view of coping that synthesized insights from psychodynamic models with those from the then-new field of cognitive psychology. Coping responses are determined jointly by people's attributes (resources, sense of efficacy, beliefs, commitments, values), knowledge of coping options, and their beliefs about the usefulness of those options. Coping effectiveness is related to its appropriateness to the internal-external demands of the situation. This "matching" hypothesis suggests that adaptive coping requires a good fit between the person-environment transaction, the person's appraisal of the transaction, and the consequent coping behavior

(Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Inappropriate appraisal of a situation may result in unnecessary coping or, conversely, a lack of necessary anticipatory coping. A good fit between the objective realities of the situation and coping methods is important. Problem-focused coping is more adaptive in situations that are changeable and personally controllable, whereas emotion-focused coping is best used in unalterable situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping must also be matched to personal values and goals; optimal functioning may require that one stay with or abandon goals depending on circumstances.

As we see it, Lazarus's (this issue) transactional perspective on stress and coping is not necessarily antagonistic to the positive psychology zeitgeist but develops a similar theme. Accordingly, coping is more than simple adjustment; it is the pursuit of human growth, mastery, well-being, and differentiation, allowing human beings to evolve in a ever-changing world (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). Functional coping behavior both buffers the immediate impact of stress and ensures a sense of well-being, self-worth, and wholeness with one's past and anticipated future challenges. Lazarus's model posits that the majority of life events have the potential for evoking negative or positive appraisals, adaptive or maladaptive coping processes, and positive or negative emotions. Accordingly, *primary appraisals* (seeing event as challenging or threatening) as well as *secondary appraisals* (seeing event as controllable or manageable), coupled with adaptive coping behaviors, may have a major influence on one's sense of well-being and happiness and overall satisfaction with one's life. Appraisal of an event as controllable or manageable (partly reflecting objective contingencies), coupled with appropriate coping behaviors, results in a sense of mastery and well-being. We are in perfect agreement with Lazarus's view that coping strategies should not be prejudged as adaptive or maladaptive on an a priori basis. Rather, the concern must be for whom and under what circumstances a particular coping mode has adaptive consequences rather than the wholesale categorization of coping as adaptive versus maladaptive. Coping is a process embedded in context, and coping responses may therefore vary across contexts and change over time in response to life conditions and as a function of the skill with which it is applied (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). Furthermore, we concur with Lazarus's view that

coping behaviors, wherever appropriate, should be assessed in context. A contextual definition of *coping effectiveness* (i.e., what is said, thought, or done in a specific situation) is demanded by interactional models. Thus coping efficacy is determined by its effects and outcomes within a particular situation. As Lazarus also emphasizes, coping with events unfolds dynamically, over time, so the same life challenge may be a source of both distress and well-being at different times.

The Interface of EI and Positive Psychology

Our recent work on EI has addressed the positive psychology zeitgeist (e.g., Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, in press). Popular approaches to EI represent a microcosm of the difficulties of the popular psychology movement described by Lazarus (this issue). Goleman (1995) alluded to EI as a new paradigm for psychology: a positive model that allows people to flourish in their lives, in their jobs, in their families, and as citizens in their communities. Indeed, he defines EI in very broad terms that touch all the bases of positive psychology, including well-being, flow, optimism, and community values, in language that closely resembles that of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000).

In our critical review of EI (Matthews et al., 2002; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2001; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002), we found various specific failings of the work of Goleman (1995) and others, including conceptual incoherence, neglect of measurement issues, and a tendency to make grandiose claims without supporting evidence. In fact, the number of hyperbolic generalizations regarding the practical value of EI in educational (Zeidner et al., 2002) and occupational (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, in press) settings currently exceeds the number of tenable and supported claims. Of more immediate relevance is the dialectic of positive and negative emotion in popular conceptions of EI. The surface message of Goleman's best-selling book is highly positive. However, just as a preacher needs to elaborate on the fires of hell to encourage the congregation toward the pearly gates, so too Goleman needs an underlying threat. Chapter 15 of his book is devoted to a lurid account of the social and emotional malaise of the United States, a nation allegedly foundering in a welter of school shootings, drug abuse, mental illness, and emotional isolation. Lazarus's (this issue) contention that God needs Satan is found even within this branch of positive psychology. Goleman's book also tends to conflate scientific accounts of emotion with value judgments of the desirability of culturally shaped "civic virtues."

In fairness, interest in EI has stimulated productive attempts at rigorous measurement and validation of the construct, with an evenhanded approach to positive and negative emotions (e.g., Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). However, in the present context, the issue of subjectivism raised by Lazarus (this issue, The Issue of Subjectivism section) raises methodological concerns about Mayer et al.'s principles of measurement. A major barrier to the development of tests of EI is setting criteria for scoring test items, that is, deciding whether an answer is judged right or wrong. Mayer et al. advocated the use of *consensus scoring*, that is, the more the individual's answer resembles the modal answer of some large normative group, the higher the score assigned to the response. These authors claimed that "large numbers of people, when their observations are pooled, seem to become reliable forecasters" (p. 327). Roberts et al. (2001) questioned this claim on both empirical and logical grounds. Lazarus's pithy account of consensus as shared illusion further calls into question the validity of scoring emotional competence on a consensus basis.

At the intersection of our two points of contact with positive psychology, coping and EI, we note that Lazarus's (this issue) focus on coping and adaptation is in harmony with our analysis of coping processes as a possible basis for EI (Matthews & Zeidner, 2000). We explored a conception of EI as "coping in action" that linked EI to competence in choice of coping strategy in managing both positive and negative events. However, a number of difficulties were identified. First, there is little evidence to suggest there is a single master competence for adaptive coping: Indeed, the effectiveness of the individual's coping style varies from situation to situation, and gains on one outcome criterion are often obtained in terms of costs on another. Empirical studies suggest that coping through avoidance or distancing may have benefits in reducing immediate distress and pressure (e.g., among parents of children suffering from cancer) but also longer term costs in failing to address underlying issues (see Matthews & Zeidner, 2000). Typically, we cannot "have it all"; negotiating the challenges of life requires personal, value-dependent choices of what gains are to be optimized and what costs are to be tolerated.

Methodological Issues

Although we endorse Lazarus's (this issue) principal conclusions, we also feel that the wisdom of separating positive and negative affects may depend on the level of analysis of data chosen. There is, at least, a case to be made that positive and negative affect are psychometrically distinct and correspond to different biopsychological systems. Prior to discussing these issues, we briefly comment on some relevant methodological issues in research on stress, emotion, and cop-

ing. Our theme here is that stress and coping research have been plagued with many of the same methodological problems that Lazarus identified in research on positive psychology, and there is no single methodological solution.

Normative Versus Ipsative Methodology

Lazarus (1991) sought a “picture of whole persons relating and adapting to the world in which they live” (p. 437), rather than using standard trait measures that assess personal characteristics but not persons adapting in the world. His aim was to apply nomothetic principles (each emotion has a fixed core relational theme) via idiographic methods (establishing the core relational theme requires investigation of individual life circumstances). The Lazarus (1991) theory has informed much of our own research on stress and emotion, and we endorse the value of studying individuals longitudinally. We also believe that nomothetic approaches based on measurement of general state and trait dimensions are equally important, because they identify reliable statistical regularities that psychological science should explain. For example, it may be true that on occasion anger can be experienced as a positive emotion. However, it is significant that these occasions are unusual; normally, anger and unpleasant mood occur together (Matthews, Jones, & Chamberlain, 1990). Psychological theory has to explain both such regularities and the circumstances under which the exception proves the rule.

In addition, it may be telling that most of the emotions that Lazarus (this issue) cites as having no fixed valence are complex and intrinsically equivocal. Joy is different, as a basic emotion, but Lazarus argues that joy is not necessarily positive because the life circumstance that provoked joy frequently generates other negative emotions soon afterward. However, joy has constant valence; it is unequivocally positive at the time it is experienced. Disgust and depression might be examples of emotions that are unequivocally negative. The categorical approach also tends to blur the extent to which different emotions may be experienced (more or less) simultaneously, given the complex nature of real-life circumstances and appraisals. If “righteous” anger is experienced as positive, it may not be the anger itself that is positive but other concurrent emotions, such as pride, or cognitions, such as mastery, that feed into joy. The dimensional approach is helpful in identifying concurrent, multiple emotions. If researchers measure an individual as experiencing some quantity of anger, but no joy, pride, or other positive emotion, the experience is demonstrably negative.

Most coping outcome studies, many emanating from the Berkeley stress group headed by Lazarus, use normative or interindividual comparisons. As noted by

Zeidner and Saklofske (1996), the apparent relations between appraisal and coping processes may differ depending on whether one studies coping responses within persons (ipsative) or across persons (normative). We can usefully assess both an individual’s overall level of coping compared with that of other individuals and how the individual copes relative to his or her previous baseline coping. Both ipsative and normative measures have their place in both emotion and coping research, depending on the particular goals of the researcher and constraints of the sample and context.

Reliance on Self-Report in the Assessment of Coping

Much as is the case in studies of emotional states, there is heavy reliance on self-report measures (e.g., questionnaires, checklists) to determine both coping behaviors and outcomes. Hence, common method variance may yield inflated correlations between self-reported coping and outcome responses. Retrospective self-reports may also suffer from memory distortions. Further, outcome may bias retrospective reports of the perceived adaptiveness of the coping behaviors. Multi-method and multi-source data would reduce the method variance problem and effects due to memory and attitudes.

Cross-sectional Research

Lazarus (this issue) laments that most emotion research has been based on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal designs. However, as Lazarus acknowledges, most coping research has also been cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in design for a variety of practical and technical reasons. This design, as pointed out by Lazarus, provides weak evidence of causality because coping and outcome variables are correlated at any given time, hampering the pinpointing of direction in the coping–adjustment relationship. Thus, in the coping domain, the question remains: Does the association of a particular strategy with fewer symptoms or lower distress mean that coping reduces distress (coping → distress) or that people with fewer problems or in better mental health tend to use a particular strategy (distress → coping)?

The Grain Size Problem

Lazarus’s theory (Lazarus & Goleman, 1984) provides a strong basis for understanding the role of emotions in individual lives through the specific relational meanings that underlie a particular emotion. Lazarus (this issue) is averse to aggregating emotions into positive and negative categories because the spe-

cific relational meanings of emotions are lost. A similar problem is found in coping research, with the tendency to combine a number of coping behaviors into one category, therein losing valuable information regarding each specific coping behavior. Thus, certain global categories espoused by Lazarus (e.g., problem-focused or emotion-focused coping) prevent the more refined and differentiated analysis that might come from examining specific strategies (humor, confrontation, information seeking, etc.) that are subsumed under these categories. Different coping tactics within a general category may have different implications for a person's coping success. Adaptive coping may be positively associated with one subclass of emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive reinterpretation or emphasizing the positive side of a situation) and inversely related to others (e.g., denial or wishful thinking). Clearly, we, as researchers, need to find a "grain size" that permits meaningful generalizations about coping–outcome relations. In many contexts, this may indeed be an examination of how the individual copes with unique circumstances. However, it may also be worth investigating superordinate classes of coping strategy to gain greater parsimony and discover reliable high-level generalizations among broader categories.

Positive and Negative Affective States

A full account of emotion requires the multiple levels of explanation provided by the "classical theory" of cognitive science (e.g., Newell, 1982). Emotion may, with equal validity, be characterized as a biological state, as in animal models of basic emotions; as a state of cognitive architecture, as in computational appraisal theories; and as a state of self-knowledge, as in the theory of Lazarus (Lazarus & Goleman, 1984), which emphasizes personal meaning and dynamic self-regulation in a changing environment (Matthews, 1997). The level of explanation of choice depends on the research context. Perhaps the functional organization of neural and cognitive architectures is based on separate positive and negative systems. At the biological level, there may be separate brain reward and punishment systems that control emotion and personality. At the cognitive-architectural level, stimulus valence (i.e., positive vs. negative symbolic content) may control how information is processed. We look, first, at the nature of transient affective states (e.g., positive and negative affect) and, second, at personality traits (e.g., positive and negative affective dispositions). We emphasize that, even if such biological or cognitive systems are shown to exist, they are complementary to the knowledge-level account of emotion provided by Lazarus (1991, 2002). The structure of affect may appear different at different levels of analy-

sis, and discriminating positive and negative affect may be coherent at the lower levels.

In North America, the most widely accepted psychometric structure for affect is two-dimensional—that is, there are distinct, largely orthogonal dimensions of positive affect and negative affect (Schimmack & Grob, 2000; Watson, 2000). Experimental and field studies suggest that the two dimensions differ in their antecedents, biological bases, and behavioral consequences. We do not review this work in any detail here, although we note briefly that three-factor models of affect, distinguishing pleasure, tension, and energy as correlated axes, may be more viable psychometrically (Matthews et al., 1990; Schimmack & Grob, 2000). The neuroscience is also open to challenge in that biological models based on animal work tend to neglect cortical systems for discrete attentional processes that may be integral to emotional functioning (Matthews, Derryberry, & Siegle, 2000). The relevance of the two-factor model is that it suggests a level of organization of affect at which it might be sensible to develop a separate positive psychology.

The Watson (2000) theory supposes that stress responses can be characterized two-dimensionally; "stress" might be experienced as either an increase in negative emotions, such as tension and sadness, or as a decrease in positive emotions, such as energy and happiness. Recent work suggests that this hypothesis is oversimplified. Matthews et al. (in press) investigated the subjective affective, motivational, and cognitive responses elicited by a variety of task stressors. Psychometric and experimental studies showed that state changes occurred on three largely independent dimensions, termed *task engagement*, *distress*, and *worry*. None of these dimensions could be characterized as positive or negative in any simple way. Task engagement contrasted positive feelings of energy and task interest with negative feelings of tiredness, apathy, and distractibility. Distress contrasted pleasant mood and confidence with unhappy and angry mood. Worry included negative cognitions such as intrusive thoughts about task failure but also more neutral or ambiguous cognitions relating to personal concerns and inner mental life.

The affective components of task engagement and distress appear to roughly correspond to positive and negative affect, respectively, but each dimension represents a contrast between positive and negative state components. Matthews et al. (in press) also suggested that the three dimensions may be interpreted relationally as indexing one of three adaptive themes that may dominate task situations: commitment of effort to the task (task engagement), handling unavoidable overload of cognition (distress), and pulling back mentally from the task to engage in self-reflection (worry). That is, states are best characterized by the adaptive challenge they index, rather than in terms of the simple

positive versus negative dichotomy. Indeed, Matthews et al. (in press) found that the three stress state dimensions related to different patterns of appraisal and coping, which may be more proximal influences on affective state than brain systems (see Lazarus, 1991).

Perhaps the positive versus negative affect distinction would work better in explaining objective performance data that reflect distinct influences of positive and negative “biobehavioral systems” on parameters of information processing. Again, a reasonable case may be made that positive- and negative-valent items are processed differentially, derived from numerous studies of phenomena such as mood congruence, perceptual defense, and cognitive bias (e.g., Kitayama, 1997). However, it is questionable whether valence effects can be attributed to some fundamental division of the cognitive architecture for handling emotion into positive and negative subsystems. Work on selective attention bias, using techniques such as the emotional Stroop task (Stroop, 1992), illustrates some of the difficulties. Typically, persons who are anxious show enhanced attention to threat stimuli. However, it is unclear whether the stimulus attribute controlling bias in selection is valence, threat, emotionality, or congruence with personal concerns. Furthermore, in at least some cases, bias reflects not some inbuilt property of the architecture when handling emotive stimuli but high-level strategies for monitoring the environment for self-relevant information (Matthews & Wells, 1999).

Valence is only one of several key stimulus attributes that may control information processing, depending on the processing function concerned. Within a modular architecture, it seems plausible that different modules are tuned to operate on different symbolic codes, which include valence but also other attributes such as novelty, goal relevance, coping potential, and norm–self compatibility (Leventhal & Scherer, 1987). Again, it seems that differentiating positive and negative processing systems, although having some superficial appeal, is too simple a hypothesis to explain the empirical evidence.

Affective Dispositions (Traits)

Perhaps the simple positive versus negative dichotomy has utility at the level of personality. It is claimed that the traits of extraversion–introversion (E) and neuroticism (N) are directly isomorphic to positive and negative affect, respectively (Watson, 2000). E, reflecting sensitivity of an underlying brain reward system, may predispose a person to positive experiences, that is, to be lively, sociable, carefree, and energetic. By contrast, N is based on a punishment system predisposing a person to negative experiences, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and guilt. In a simplistic way, there does seem to be some correspondence between positive and negative traits and states. Indeed, questionnaire measures

of EI often appear to assess little more than a blend of extraversion and emotional stability (Matthews et al., in press). However, there are also severe limitations to such a view. We note briefly that the evidence for high correlations between matched trait and states is often overstated: They may be inflated by failure to control for situational influences, timescale of affect, and item overlap. Furthermore, the psychobiological theory of E and N is only weakly supported by evidence of psychophysiological studies (Matthews & Gilliland, 1999).

As with states, though, our major criticism is that equating E and N with positive and negative affectivity is of very limited utility in explaining empirical data on personality (see Matthews & Gilliland, 1999, for a review). As Matthews et al. (2002) discussed, the expressions of both E and N are distributed across different levels of explanation. Although both traits have important biological components, they seem also to relate to packages of discrete information-processing attributes (Matthews, 1999; Zeidner & Matthews, 2000). For example, being extraverted entails proficiency in divided attention, verbal short-term memory, and speech production, balanced by poorer sustained attention and reflective problem-solving: that is, multiple biases that may or may not relate to stimulus valence (rather more so in the case of N than E). Both traits also relate to constructs at the knowledge level of explanation, including characteristic self-beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy), styles of coping, and metacognitions. Again, both traits relate to qualitative differences in personal concerns; for example, maintaining personal security and social standing may be more important to high-N persons.

The cognitive-adaptive theory of personality (Matthews, 1999; Zeidner & Matthews, 2001) claims that the major traits represent adaptive specializations (shaped by both genes and social learning) to the most salient features of human social environments. Extraversion–introversion represents a choice of whether to adapt to high-pressure social environments or to socially undemanding situations. Neuroticism–stability represents a choice of whether to anticipate and avoid potential threat (neuroticism) or to handle threats as and when they arise (stability). The individual differences in neural and cognitive architectures associated with each trait provide a platform for acquiring the skills that are required for the adaptive specialization; for example, the processing characteristics of extraversion facilitate learning social skills. The knowledge-level attributes of the traits facilitate successful, in-context application of cognitive skills.

In the cognitive-adaptive theory of personality, the emotional concomitants of personality are a by-product of adaptive specialization, not a central defining feature. Thus, individuals who are extraverted are more prone than are those who are introverted to positive emotion because components of their cognitive readiness for demanding environments, such as biases toward challenge appraisal and task-focused coping, tend to increase positive emotion. Similarly, the nega-

tive emotionality linked to neuroticism is in large part a consequence of the tendency of the person who is high in N to amplify threat appraisal and use self-critical emotion-focused coping strategies, which support the functional aim of maintaining awareness of threat, especially social threat. Within the five-factor model of personality, we might also link agreeableness to cooperation versus competition, conscientiousness to systematic endeavor versus opportunism, and openness to intellectual analysis versus reliance on traditional wisdom (see Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002).

In sum, there may be a rough empirical correspondence between E and N, on the one hand, and positive and negative affect on the other. However, this perspective on personality overlooks what may be a more fundamental organization of personality traits around the key adaptive challenges of life, each one of which challenges may provoke both positive and negative emotion, depending on circumstances. There is an unfortunate tendency in personality trait psychology to characterize traits as being adaptive or maladaptive, culminating in the absurdity of trying to rank order people on the basis of a single questionnaire dimension of EI. Characterizing individuals as having, in effect, different levels of positive and negative personality is a little closer to the data but still highly oversimplified.

Conclusion

We strongly endorse Lazarus's (this issue) position that it is unwise to separate the positive and the negative as two separate branches of psychology. We also favor his general theoretical stance, that affect is a reflection of the coping process, so that the same life challenge may provoke both positive and negative affect, depending on the appraisal process and how coping efforts support or damage the person's adaptation to external demands. We described how research on coping presents some of the same pitfalls Lazarus observes for emotion research, and how emotional intelligence provides a case study of how the positive psychology zeitgeist leads to misconceptions of emotional functioning. However, we also raised the possibility that Lazarus's focus on the individual may lead to a neglect of the potential value of separating the positive from the negative in nomothetic research directed toward the functional organization of neural and cognitive architectures, for example, separate brain systems for handling reward and punishment signals.

Our conclusion was that the separation was worth exploring, but, in practice, has failed to provide good explanations for data, at both state and trait levels. It might have worked, but it has not. Psychometrically, it is, arguably, useful to distinguish positive and negative affect as transient subjective states. However, this model fails to accommodate the transactional nature of nomothetically defined state responses. At the trait level, E

and N may be approximately identified with other positive and negative affectivity, respectively. Again, this model obscures the transactional nature of traits as representing adaptive specializations. In fact, separating the positive from the negative will not take us very far at either the nomothetic or the idiographic level. We need both high quality nomothetic and idiographic research in coping, emotion, and personality domains to help push the research envelope to the next stage.

Notes

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Positive Psychology as the Evenhanded Positive Psychologist Views It

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We welcome the opportunity to comment on the target article by Richard Lazarus (this issue). We offer here what we hope is a substantive and evenhanded contribution, characterizing positive psychology as we see it, agreeing with Lazarus in places and disagreeing in others. We also try to answer the question that Lazarus poses—“Does the positive psychology movement have legs?”—by suggesting what the field has, what it does not have, and what it should not have.

What Is Positive Psychology?

The field of positive psychology was christened in 1998 as one of the initiatives of Martin Seligman in his role as President of the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1998, 1999). The trigger for positive psychology was the premise that psychology since World War II has joined forces with psychiatry and focused much of its efforts on human problems and how to remedy them. The yield of this focus on pathology has been considerable.

Unprecedented strides have been made in understanding, treating, and preventing psychological disorders. Widely accepted classification manuals—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.), sponsored by the American Psychiatric As-

sociation (1994), and the *International Classification of Diseases*, sponsored by the World Health Organization (1990)—allow disorders to be described and have given rise to a family of reliable assessment strategies. There now exist effective treatments, psychological and pharmacological, for more than a dozen disorders that in the recent past were frighteningly intractable (Nathan & Gorman, 1998; Seligman, 1994). Lagging behind but still impressive in their early success are ongoing efforts to devise interventions that prevent disorders from occurring in the first place (e.g., Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 1999).

However, there has been a cost to this emphasis. Scientific psychology has neglected the study of what can go right with people and often has little more to say about the good life than do pop psychologists, inspirational speakers, and armchair gurus. More subtly, the underlying assumptions of psychology have shifted to embrace a disease model of human nature. Human beings are seen as flawed and fragile, victims of cruel environments or casualties of bad genetics, and if not in denial, then at best in recovery. This worldview has even crept into the common culture, and many of us have become self-identified victims, trying to survive but not to flourish.

Positive psychology proposes that it is time to correct this imbalance and to challenge the assumptions of the disease model. Positive psychology calls for as much fo-

cus on strength as on weakness, as much interest in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as much attention to fulfilling the lives of healthy people as to healing the wounds of the distressed (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The concern of psychology with human problems is, of course, understandable. It will not and should not be abandoned; people experience difficulties that demand and deserve scientifically informed solutions.

Proponents of positive psychology are “merely” saying that the psychology of the past 60 years is incomplete. However, as simple as this proposal sounds, it demands a sea change in perspective. Psychologists interested in promoting human potential need to start with different assumptions and to pose different questions from those of their peers who assume a disease model.

The most basic assumption that positive psychology urges is that human goodness and excellence are as authentic as disease, disorder, and distress. We can parse the concerns of positive psychology into three related topics: the study of positive subjective experiences (happiness, pleasure, gratification, fulfillment, well-being), the study of positive individual traits (character, talents, interests, values) that enable positive experiences, and the study of positive institutions (families, schools, businesses, communities, societies) that enable positive traits and thereby positive experiences (Seligman, 2002).

The good news for positive psychology is that our generalizations about business-as-usual psychology over the past 60 years are simply that—generalizations. There are many good examples of psychological research, past and present, that can be claimed as positive psychology. For example, we can point to the trend-bucking work by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) on flow, by Diener (1984) on happiness, by Snyder (1994) on hope, by Scheier and Carver (1985) on dispositional optimism, by Seligman (1991) on optimistic explanatory style, by developmentalists on resilience (e.g., Masten, 2001), by Vaillant (2002) on successful aging, by Ryff (1989) on psychological well-being, by Gardner (1983) on multiple intelligences, by Baltes and Staudinger (1993) and Sternberg (1998) on wisdom, and by Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1994) on values. We can point to the insights offered a generation ago by humanistic psychologists (Taylor, 2001) and by Jahoda (1958) in her prescient treatise on positive mental health. And we can certainly point to the important work by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) on how people successfully cope with stressful circumstances.

Positive psychologists do not claim to have invented the good life or even to have ushered in its scientific study. As we see it, the contribution of positive psychology has been to provide an umbrella term for what have been isolated lines of theory and research and to

make the self-conscious argument that the good life deserves its own field of inquiry within psychology, at least until that day when all of psychology embraces the study of what is good along with the study of what is bad.

Our experience with positive psychology is that everyday people find it exciting and the sort of thing psychology should be doing (cf. Easterbrook, 2001). Everyday people seem to know that the elimination or reduction of problems is not all that is involved in improving the human condition. In contrast, the academic community is more skeptical of positive social science. Contributing to skepticism are the aforementioned assumptions about human nature as flawed and fragile, notions more widespread and explicit among social scientists than the general public. From this starting point, positive psychology can only be seen as the study of fluff—perhaps even as dangerous fiddling while the world goes to pieces.

Social scientists who study human problems have the best of intentions: They want to eliminate suffering. However, the unstated corollary of this good intention is that well-being can be taken for granted. Indeed, the study of people who are happy, healthy, and talented may be seen as a guilty luxury that diverts resources from the goals of problem-focused psychology. From the perspective of positive psychology, we suggest a different possibility, namely, that a better understanding of well-being will allow psychologists to help all people, troubled or not.

Another stumbling block is the umbrella term itself—*positive psychology*—because many psychologists hear what they have been doing throughout their careers dismissed as negative psychology. This automatic juxtaposition is unfortunate, and positive psychologists intend no disrespect. We prefer the term business-as-usual psychology to describe work that focuses on human problems. As we have emphasized, business-as-usual psychology is important and necessary and, in any event, what we have spent most of our own careers pursuing.

To call someone a *positive psychologist* is but a shorthand way of saying that he or she studies the topics of concern to the field of positive psychology. It does not mean that the positive psychologist is a “positive” (happy, talented, virtuous) person, and it certainly does not imply that other psychologists are “negative” people. After all, social psychologists may or may not be social, and personality psychologists may or may not display a scintillating personality.

An evenhanded positive psychology does not deny disorder and distress or the circumstances that produce them. A reciprocal or dialectical view of good and bad, like the one implied by Lazarus (this issue), may well be a sophisticated one that positive psychologists should consider. However, turnabout is fair play, and so too should business-as-usual psychologists consider it.

The argument of positive psychology is that this has not occurred frequently enough in psychology's recent history.

Perhaps it is useful to remind our skeptical colleagues that positive psychology is still science and cannot have a quarrel with the scientific method. We believe that the use of tried-and-true scientific techniques to investigate the good life is what will make positive psychology viable.

There are individuals attracted to some of the premises of positive social science but who are not enamored of the scientific method; they like the "positive" but overlook the "science." It is therefore important to emphasize that positive psychology is not an ideological movement or a secular religion. Our world has enough of these. To be sure, many will provide some insights into the good life that positive psychologists should explore, but the emphasis has to be on the exploration of these insights with the tools of science to see which square with the facts of the matter and which do not. Positive psychology is not Esalen for the 21st century, the power of positive thinking rendered by 7-point scales, or a smiley face with summer salary support.

The goals of positive psychology are description and explanation as opposed to prescription. The underlying premise of positive psychology is of course prescriptive in that it says that certain topics should be studied: positive experiences, positive traits, and positive institutions. However, once the study begins, it has to be hardheaded and dispassionate. The routes to the good life are an empirical matter. Indeed, whether what seems positive is always desirable is also an empirical question.

Investigations of optimism have documented many benefits of positive thinking (happiness, health, and success in various achievement domains) but at least one notable downside: Optimistic thinking is associated with an underestimation of risks (Peterson & Vaidya, 2003). Should someone always be optimistic? The empirically based answer is certainly not if one is a pilot or air-traffic controller trying to decide if a plane should take off during an ice storm (Seligman, 1991; Seligman & Pawelski, this issue). Here, the data advise caution and sobriety—pessimism, as it were.

The task for positive psychology is to provide the most objective facts possible about the phenomena it studies so that everyday people and society as a whole can make an informed decision about what goals to pursue in what circumstances. Not all of the news will be upbeat, but it will be of value precisely because it provides an appropriately nuanced view of the good life.

For example, in interviews of individuals with notable strengths of character, we have discovered that almost all of those to whom we have talked report occasional problems when they act in accordance with their

most signature strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2002). Kindness may invite exploitation; honesty can produce resentment; playfulness sometimes ruffles feathers. However, without exception, our research participants accept these consequences as the price to pay for being true to their nature. The fulfillment that characterizes strength-congruent conduct is not always fun, but perhaps only a prescriptive approach to the good life would expect it to be.

Some of us within positive psychology have raised eyebrows within the academic community by failing to acknowledge fully the contributions of our intellectual predecessors (Cowen & Kilmer, 2002; Lazarus, this issue; Taylor, 2001). Such acknowledgment must of course occur; nothing begins in a vacuum. Not only is it good scholarship to keep the intellectual record straight, it is also an excellent way to make a new field less exotic and thereby less threatening. At the same time, we see no benefit in strenuously documenting the unlikely thesis that positive psychology is but a footnote to Lao-tzu, Confucius, Aristotle, Aquinas, William James, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, or Abraham Maslow. Positive psychology has a unique identity and makes novel contributions that go beyond its ancestry, distant and immediate.

Does Positive Psychology Have Legs?

Lazarus (this issue) wants to know if positive psychology has the requisite apparatus to go anywhere. We think that it does. Positive psychology has a destination (the study of the good life). Positive psychology has a strategy for getting there (the scientific method). And positive psychology has established an impressive infrastructure to support scholars along the way (Peterson & Seligman, in press).

Perhaps the infrastructure—a steering committee, conferences, training institutes, special issues of journals, edited volumes, handbooks, a teaching task force, awards, seed grants, electronic mailing lists, and Web pages—strikes some as too elaborate and deliberate at this early stage in the field's development. Regardless, positive psychology should not be confused with its infrastructure. We look at the creation of an infrastructure as akin to gassing up one's car and checking its oil before embarking on a cross-country trip. However, the trip itself entails nitty-gritty science. What is there to be learned about the good life that Sunday school teachers and grandparents do not already know? What are the causes, correlates, and consequences of the phenomena of concern to positive psychology? What are the disabling factors and downsides? How can the good life be encouraged, for individuals and societies?

We believe the journey has begun, and positive psychology has already identified a number of studies with findings both important and nonobvious (cf. Seligman & Pawelski, this issue). When we think of

good examples of positive psychology research, we find that they often share three features: (a) They are longitudinal; (b) they take seriously what research participants have to say by studying narratives, stories, accounts, or archived material that is inherently meaningful; and (c) at the same time, they look at external variables—hard measures, so to speak, that are not redundant with self-report. What is it that makes these features so compelling?

We believe an answer is provided by considering a typical definition of virtue:

Virtue is...a disposition to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing. Moreover, virtuous activity involves choosing virtue for itself and in light of some justifiable life plan. (Yearley, 1990, p. 13)

Flourishing is a process that takes place over time—hence the need for longitudinal research. Human excellence is part of a justifiable life plan—hence the need for studying what people have to say about the good life. And human excellence shows itself in behavior broadly construed—hence the need to go beyond the justifiable life plan to include measures, for example, of physical health, of sustained relationships, or of achievement. We assume that Lazarus (2000, this issue) is in accord with these features of good research.

It is worth emphasizing that if our interest is in the good life, we must look explicitly at indices of human thriving. We have studied depression by using a standard depression inventory in which the best one can do is to score zero, indicating the absence of depressive symptoms. However, not all zero scores are equal. There is a world of difference between people who are not suicidal, not lethargic, and not self-deprecating versus those who bound out of bed in the morning with shiny faces and twinkling eyes. These latter individuals cannot be fully understood unless we explicitly measure their happiness and zest (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Positive affect and negative affect are largely independent of one another, which means that exclusive focus on negative emotions cannot allow—even by inference—conclusions about positive emotions (Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988). Along these lines, optimism and pessimism are semantic opposites but not always psychological opposites (Chang, D’Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 1994). Measures must allow researchers to break through the zero points of the indicators favored in business-as-usual science (Peterson, 2000). Positive social psychologists must go beyond surveys of prejudice and discrimination and experiments demonstrating the irrationality of social cognition (Krueger & Funder, 2002); positive educational psychologists must go beyond the documentation of school violence,

failure, and dropout (Moore, 1997, 2002); and positive organizational psychologists must go beyond the tracking of workplace theft, absenteeism, and turnover (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, in press).

Does the positive psychology movement have legs? We think so. We believe that it also has a heart, a brain, and considerable courage in challenging the status quo. However, the positive psychology movement is not a trip over the rainbow to Oz. As we have said, *positive psychology* is simply an umbrella term. What positive psychology does not have at present is a common vocabulary for speaking about the good life or deep theories that explain it. An avenue we think worth exploring is an account of when human excellence entails phasic activity (rising to the occasion or “coping” as studied by Lazarus and his colleagues) and when it entails tonic activity (steady-state behavior as studied by trait psychologists). Positive psychology does not yet have enough compelling empirical findings to convince skeptics that the positive is more than the absence of the negative (cf. Robinson-Whelen, Kim, MacCallum, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1997). And positive psychology does not yet have articulated applications or interventions like the treatment and prevention strategies devised and tested over the years by business-as-usual psychologists (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). We hope that these will all emerge as the field develops. What positive psychology should not have is an imperialist attitude that prescribes one way to the good life or that dismisses the grim realities experienced by all members of our society some of the time and some members all of the time. And despite our attempt to speak about positive psychology per se, the field even in its eventual maturity should not have a fixed or monolithic identity (cf. Diener, this issue). If the target article by Lazarus (this issue) does nothing more than caution positive psychologists against consensus by decree, we are thankful for it.

Note

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A Reply to Dr. Lazarus, The Evocator Emeritus

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A Disagreement

“Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here. This is the War Room!”

—President Merkin Muffley
in *Dr. Strangelove* (Kubrick, 1964)

There are two themes in the target article by Professor Lazarus (this issue). One offers a constructive and insightful critique of positive psychology, and the other launches an obloquy at a person or group of people associated with positive psychology. We comment on some aspects of the latter theme before addressing the former.

Upon reading the target article, it was unclear to us what has triggered the ire of Professor Lazarus (this issue). In the words of an old country tune, it appears that “somebody done somebody wrong.” Perhaps someone criticized the stress and coping field of research. Professor Lazarus informs us that these stress and coping studies “need no defense,” and any such criticisms are “foolish ideological attacks” (Moman & Butler, 1975). Unfortunately, Lazarus offers no detailed information about what specific criticisms he takes issue with or why he believes they are off target. He states only that someone somewhere branded his work as *negative psychology* and that the particular criticism is specious.

Furthermore, Lazarus (this issue) uses the target article to denigrate certain people and the field positive psychology. First, he quotes Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) as stating “The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from *preoccupation only* [italics added] with repairing the worst things in life to *also* building positive qualities.” Although this quote clearly defines positive psychology as only a movement attempting to focus more attention on human strengths without abandoning our investigation of human frailty, Lazarus does not seem to believe it. Instead, he claims that the “implicit” message is to separate the positive from the negative. On the basis of this unspoken intent rather than on the basis of evidence, Lazarus concludes that positive psychology is a naive, misleading, dogmatic, regressive, Pollyannish fad and fantasy.

Professor Lazarus (this issue) also laments the fact that a handbook is being published for a field that is not yet well-established and lacks solid theory and empirical foundations. It is clear, however, that Lazarus did not review said handbook prior to denigrating it. Alas, the actual contents of this volume illustrate several facts that run counter to his concerns.

First, many of the theories within positive psychology represent the career-long efforts of some of the top researchers and theorists in all of psychology. Their ideas are not just fads but represent the culmination of years of work and investigation by serious-minded scholars and scientists.

Second, emotions are only a portion of the phenomena that are researched in the field of positive psychology. Only 9 of the 55 chapters in the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2002a) concern themselves specifically with emotions and their impact on well-being. The vast remainder of the chapters focus on personal strengths such as personality traits, interpersonal relationships, biological characteristics, thought processes, coping strategies, and special populations. Hence, even if all of Professor Lazarus’s (this issue) criticisms are on target (and we do not think they are), they only apply to a small portion of the field of positive psychology as represented in this handbook that he reviles.

Third, Lazarus (this issue) asks why resilience is not considered a positive resource. His point is that positive psychology overlooks the importance of adversity in developing strengths. Again, a perusal of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2002b) shows that resilience receives considerable attention. Not only is there a chapter devoted to the resilience to which he refers (see Masten & Reed, 2002) but there also are writings about the positive aspects of negative life events such as personal loss (see Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 2002; Tennen & Affleck, 2002) and acquired disability (see Elliot, Kurylo, & Rivera, 2002). Without belaboring our point, Professor Lazarus’s treatment of the contents of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* is as unscholarly as it is unfair.

As was mentioned previously, Professor Lazarus (this issue) also does Martin Seligman the disservice of ignoring his stated definition of positive psychology and attacking him based on Lazarus’s interpretation of the goal of positive psychology. If Lazarus is going to base this debate on what he thinks others mean rather than on what they say, then this exchange becomes an editorial (and not a very good one) rather than an enlightening exchange of scholars’ differing actual views.

Lazarus (this issue) goes on to denigrate Seligman as being a “Johnny-come-lately” for criticizing psychology’s tendency to pathologize ordinary problems in living. If the message is important, what is to be gained from belittling the messenger for lack of origi-

nality? Furthermore, if this criticism applies to one psychologist, so too should it apply to others. Notice that Lazarus spares himself such condemnation when he admits that the appraisal portion of “his” cognitive–motivational–relational theory of emotions is a “mundane idea, versions of which have been around for many millennia.”

However, Lazarus (this issue) is not finished with Martin Seligman. At the conclusion of the target article, after ranting about Seligman’s audacity to criticize stress and coping research, Lazarus chides him for altering his stance in response to rebuttal. We argue that such willingness to change one’s theoretical position based on incoming information represents the best of science. The science of psychology would benefit greatly if more of us were willing to modify our precious theories and hypotheses to accommodate the evidence. If Martin Seligman has changed his criticism for the better, then he is to be applauded rather than ridiculed for such flexibility.

Finally, Lazarus (this issue) belittles protagonists of positive psychology (e.g., Martin Seligman) for rallying people to study phenomena within its rubric, likening these efforts to those of a con man. In response, we argue that science is not the dispassionate accumulation of theories and associated facts, but instead it is almost as messy as politics in that the people involved play a major role in which theories and facts have gained favor and survived. Martin Seligman is a magnificent scientist who may be an even more stellar leader in his ability to get scholars to undertake the study of human strengths. In this regard, Seligman already has marshaled copious monetary and human resources to study and advance the positive psychology view. As such, this represents the interaction of an environment that was ready to embrace positive psychology and an exceedingly capable person who could serve as a prime mover in this environment.

Although the current spate of interest in positive psychology may fade as researchers habituate to its ideas, we see the more important possibility being that researchers will routinely investigate their world from a positive along with a negative frame of reference. This latter resolution is the true test of the enduring role of positive psychology. Just as we believe that Lazarus’s (this issue) pessimism about the eventual impact of positive psychology is unwarranted, so too would we hasten to caution those who are optimistic about the future of positive psychology. We simply cannot tell at this early stage what will happen.

What Positive Psychology Is and What It Is Not

“I find this very difficult to understand.”

—President Merkin Muffley
in *Dr. Strangelove*

Given the comments of Professor Lazarus (this issue), we feel that it is important to clarify our views about the field of positive psychology. We focus on Professor Lazarus’s specific concerns and criticisms. Contrary to Lazarus’s opening remarks, we feel that it is an overstatement to say that American psychology is enmeshed in the positive psychology movement. A quick investigation on PsycINFO helps to clarify this point. We examined the ratio of positive to negative subjects over the course of psychology publications (beginning in 1872). For example, a comparison of all citations with happiness versus sadness in the subject line reveals a ratio of 2.59:1. The same analysis done only over the past 10 years yields a ratio of 2.27:1, and for the past 5 years it is 2.11:1. Thus, the proportion of writings devoted to this so-called positive versus negative issue appears to have been fairly stable. This pattern of ratios is similar for other dialectic pairs (e.g., hope–hopelessness = 0.74:1 overall, 0.81:1 for the past 10 years, and 0.94:1 for the past 5 years; optimism–pessimism = 2.17:1 overall, 2.83:1 for the past 10 years, and 2.78:1 for the past 5 years). The point of this minor investigation is to demonstrate that the relative amount of work devoted to investigating human strengths appears to have remained constant, even with the recent emergence of the positive psychology movement.

Our view is that the positive psychology movement has been successful at increasing the amount of attention given to its research findings. In other words, although the proportion of positive psychology research in comparison to the rest of psychology does not appear to be changing over the years, more attention does seem to be given to issues on human strengths. Therefore, although positive psychology currently is a salient area of inquiry, it is far from being the only game in town.

Lazarus (this issue) also states that the goal of positive psychology is to abandon the study of the harsh and tragic. According to him, researchers of positive psychology believe that by studying human strengths they will find “a magic elixir of health and well-being.” The grounds for this presumptuous statement remain a mystery to us. Certainly the researchers in our laboratory do not have such simplistic ideas about finding a magic bullet through positive psychology. We also would venture that few of our colleagues in positive psychology hold this naive belief. Our view is that the proponents of positive psychology are more prudent and measured in their claims. As we write at the close of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, “Positive psychological science could guide us in our pursuit of mental health at the personal and community levels” (Snyder & Lopez, 2002a, p. 751).

Lazarus (this issue) also insinuates that positive psychology is an ephemeral fad that risks disappearing like the morning fog, perhaps because he thinks it is not

built on solid scientific foundations. Positive psychology is a field, and it is not built upon any single theory any more than the field of social psychology. We believe that positive psychology is about drawing much needed attention to long-standing research that has been conducted on human virtues. As such, positive psychology is not the new kid in town, but it is having a scientific coming out party.

The fact that much of the research labeled as *positive psychology* has been around for decades should allay some of Lazarus's (this issue) concerns about a new field becoming too popular too fast. In response to his statement that positive psychology has no really new ideas, we partially agree. There really is nothing new under the sun; however, the theories that reside within the rubric of positive psychology are innovative ways of looking at human characteristics. This is how scientists and other creative minds have always worked. Their innovation is a "new" perspective or paradigm that they want to make viable. This is part of the human need for uniqueness, of which science is a prime example (see Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

In a related point, Lazarus (this issue) takes issue with the publication of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2002) before the field is well established. Our view is that science is an ever-evolving field, and thus if we waited until we had all of the answers before we publish the current state of knowledge, we would never publish at all. In addition, because Lazarus chooses to critique this publication without having read it, we again provide the information that its contents represent the career-long endeavors of many researchers. In fact, many of the contributors to the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* are recognized as some of the top scholars in all of psychology. Their models are well-founded on solid theories and research evidence. Indeed, it should be noted that Professor Lazarus's influential research is cited favorably in 10 different chapters. In criticizing this volume, so too is Professor Lazarus dismissing the views of these chapter authors who laud his previous work. The irony here is palpable.

Positivity and Negativity

"It is not only possible, it is essential!"

—Dr. Strangelove
in *Dr. Strangelove*

Lazarus (this issue) paints with an overly broad brush when he states that the entire field of positive psychology is concerned with emotions only as defined by being positive or negative. As we previously stated, only a portion of the researchers in positive psychology specifically investigate the effects of emotions

on health and well-being. Our own research on hope examines a traitlike way of thinking about goals. Emotions are included as part of the model but serve only as information regarding the goal pursuit. In this context, emotions are easily defined as positive or negative based on the feedback that they provide the goal pursuer. Positive emotions (e.g., happiness, satisfaction, etc.) are indications that progress is being made or that a goal has been achieved. In contrast, negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, sadness, etc.) are indications that a goal pursuit is impeded or that a goal has been lost (see Snyder, 2002). Differing from our theoretical views about emotions, we would hasten to note that many researchers in the positive psychology field do, in fact, conduct research and have theories based on distinct emotions such as happiness (e.g., subjective well-being—see Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002; joy, content, fear, and arousal—see Frederickson, 2002).

However, contrary to Professor Lazarus's (this issue) admonitions about the concepts of positive and negative emotions, we believe that the scientific evidence does not support the viability of discrete emotions. First, there is not compelling evidence that people reliably experience distinct emotions. Indeed, the mere presence of the words *anger*, *happiness*, and *sadness* in the English language does not guarantee their existence. The presence of the words *unicorn*, *chimera*, and *dragon* has not sent biologists scurrying to incorporate these animals into their theories and classification systems. Frederickson (1998, 2002) has previously argued that some emotions involve such a wide range of related behaviors that they are too diverse to be considered discrete. In addition, there are no reliable measures of all the discrete emotions, making their use in any model problematic. Moreover, the experience of emotions beyond the general positive or negative level may be so idiographic as to prevent sound research into their functions. Thus the burden of proof lies with those who hold that distinct emotions beyond positive and negative affect are, in fact, useful constructs.

Even if the distinction of specific emotions does turn out to be pragmatic (and we remain open to this possibility), this does not preclude researchers from using a broader emotional category that is more inclusive. We may find that certain emotions have certain aspects in common. To suggest that we can only study each separate emotion is tantamount to saying that biologists can only study horses, cats, and dogs, but they dare not make any generalizations about mammals. This suggestion, of course, seems foolish.

Lazarus (this issue) presents his version of hope, stating that it is a combination of a wish for the future and anxiety that it will not occur. Our research into hope over the last 15 years (with six books, 27 chapters, and 37 articles) has never found such evidence that anxiety is a part of hope. It seems more accurate to

restate that in dealing with future, most people have different combinations of hope and anxiety. The advantage of lumping the emotion of anxiety into the hope construct is unclear. In fact, it seems to contradict Lazarus's own desire to conceptualize emotions as discrete phenomena. Our research, in fact, shows that although people do experience positive and negative emotions simultaneously, their relationships appear to be rather circumscribed. For example, in a recent experiment, we discovered that trait hope influenced the experience of positive emotions after both success and failure but had no influence on the experience of negative emotions (Rand & Snyder, 2002). Our findings consistently show that hope is a beneficial trait, and it influences positive emotions while having little influence on the experience of negative emotions. We consider this as evidence that there is value in studying emotions as positive and negative phenomena.

The distinctions between positive and negative emotions constitute only a convenient, higher order distinction. With time, it is our intent to more closely examine the role of distinct emotions in terms of how they function as feedback. Research may show that although anger and sorrow are both negative emotions (as defined by hope theory), one emotion may be more likely to be adaptive in the face of goal blockage. It may also be the case, as Lazarus (this issue) argues, that some negative emotions may not be unpleasant experiences (i.e., righteous anger). However, the enjoyment of the emotion is not at the core of its classification in hope theory. The possibility that the investigation of more specific emotions may yield more specific information does not invalidate the usefulness of examining emotions on a more general level (i.e., positive vs. negative). Research progresses from general to specific, and with time the possible importance of assessing distinct emotions in hope theory will be addressed.

On a related point, we disagree with Professor Lazarus's (this issue) contention that one cannot examine the positive without including the negative. Of course one can. Although we appreciate the philosophical notion that dialectics (e.g., God vs. the Devil, happiness vs. sadness) are necessary in order to truly appreciate each extreme, it is entirely reasonable for researchers to specialize in happiness, for example. In fact, in this age of burgeoning information, specialization is almost a requirement. Of course, there is a need for people to take the separate information and synthesize it into a meaningful whole, but there is still a need for the specialists who are collecting the data. If, as researchers, we follow Lazarus's reasoning to its logical conclusion, then we end up in the following trap: We cannot study emotions without including cognitions, we cannot study cognitions without including social influences, and we cannot study social influences without including culture, until we finally conclude that we cannot study anything without including everything!

Lazarus (this issue) also should be wary of considering certain emotional pairings (e.g., happiness and sadness) as opposite sides of the same coin. We may find that it is more useful to think of them as separate but related constructs. Might it not be possible for people to experience both sadness and happiness simultaneously? As we have recently learned from research on optimism and pessimism, what we used to think of as polar opposites may be better understood as independent concepts (see Chang 1998; Chang, Maydeu-Olivares, & D'Zurilla, 1997).

Issues With Methodology in Positive Psychology

"I don't think it's quite fair to condemn a whole program because of a single slip up."

—General "Buck" Turgidson
in *Dr. Strangelove*

Lazarus (this issue) makes his most trenchant criticisms of positive psychology in the context of its methodology. We agree with many of his criticisms directed toward research in positive psychology. On these, however, he is the Johnny-come-lately (insert tongue in cheek here). We previously have stated our concerns with the methodology of our research on hope in particular (see Shorey, Snyder, Rand, Hockemeyer, & Feldman, 2002; Snyder, 2000) and positive psychology more generally (Snyder, 2000).

First, Lazarus (this issue) is concerned that positive psychology relies too heavily on cross-sectional research designs and small, statistically significant cohort differences to fuel its theories. We remind Professor Lazarus, however, that science and humanity in general seek knowledge that will apply to as many people as possible. We do not think that this is a bad thing, but it may be too heavily influencing our field (see Snyder, Tennen, Affleck, & Cheavens, 2000). One can rightfully criticize positive psychology for ignoring the importance of individual variation.

As positive psychology progresses as a field, it makes sense to start out with broad cross-sectional research on groups. These methods are faster and cheaper. Why would someone conduct research on the causal relationship between two variables if one wasn't sure of whether they were correlated? The abundance of cross-sectional and correlational research simply reflects the process that all specialty areas go through. Scientific investigation progresses from simple to complex. In that regard, we beg for Dr. Lazarus's patience.

There are emerging efforts within positive psychology to use research designs that are longitudinal and idiographic. With our own research on hope, we also have been wary of overreliance on cross-sectional designs. In response, we are conducting

more studies that rely on the longitudinal and intraindividual designs that Lazarus favors. As an example, we point to a study on Division I college track athletes. Hope Scale scores were obtained at the beginning of the season, and State Hope Scale scores were taken before each meet (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997). Taken together, trait hope and state hope accounted for 56% of the variance in the actual performance at the meets, even after the influence of innate athletic ability had been removed statistically.

Although this is not a true experiment, it does allow us to show that an antecedent variable (i.e., Hope Scale scores) predicts subsequent events (i.e., performance at the various track meets). In addition, by examining state and trait hope, we were able to monitor both stable and variable psychological phenomena within the individual. Studies such as this should answer some of the concern that Lazarus (this issue) has about positive psychologists ignoring the fluctuation of phenomena within individuals. One further point: We believe that accounting for 56% of the variance in performance is more than just a statistically significant finding. It has practical significance as well.

In addition to the aforementioned study, longitudinal research designs have been used by our laboratory to show that hope predicts subsequent academic performance during a semester (Snyder et al., 1991, 1997) and graduation and drop-out rates over a 6-year period (Snyder, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2001; Snyder, Wiklund, & Cheavens, 1999).

One problem with researching a personality trait such as hope is that it is impossible to conduct true experimental research (i.e., manipulate people's level of dispositional hope). However, we have increased the number of quasi-experimental designs in our lab in order to better test hope theory. For example, we have discovered that people with high hope are able to tolerate the pain of a cold-pressor task twice as long as people with low hope (Snyder, Odle, & Hackman, 1999; Snyder, Taylor, et al., 2001). In addition, we recently completed several experimental investigations examining the role of hope in recovering from failure experiences (Rand & Snyder, 2002). Our goal is to continue to implement experimental designs to advance the understanding of our particular research interest. We are confident that our colleagues in positive psychology are following similar research programs.

Common Goals

"And remember, there's just one thing. We are all in this together."

—President Merkin Muffley
in *Dr. Strangelove*

In the brilliant satire *Dr. Strangelove*, the world is destroyed when the two superpowers initiate a doomsday war through a series of paranoid delusions, absurd policies, and misinformed prejudices. The moral is that when, as human beings, we try too hard to destroy our enemy, we destroy ourselves. This is all the more absurd when we realize that we all share the same goals. As professionals, we share the goals of promoting human welfare and eliminating suffering. Although we may have theoretical differences, as scientists we are all after the same thing: increasing our understanding of how people operate. In the end, it is in the best interest of everyone to find common solutions that best fit the available information.

We have followed closely the contributions that Professor Lazarus has made to the science of psychology throughout his marvelously innovative career. Although we take exception with many of his assertions in this latest scholarly effort (Lazarus, this issue), we heartily embrace a theme that plays a major role in his essay. Namely, he cautions the proponents of positive psychology to be prudent in their claims and research methodologies. We could not agree more. As a potential movement that has an impact on the wider field of psychology and society more generally, positive psychology must adhere to the very highest standards of scientific methodology and inference. Likewise, small claims that are faithful to the database and its associated results are absolutely crucial. Grandiose statements should not be a part of positive psychology. Positive psychology will lose its credibility within psychology and the public sector if it moves too quickly with skimpy research, along with claims that are too bold. The same can be said for psychology in general. This is the important message that we will take from Professor Lazarus's comments.

Note

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Corners of Myopia in the Positive Psychology Parade

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I, too, have complaints with the recent positive psychology fanfare, but my objections have little to do with what Lazarus (this issue) identifies as key problems in the target article. In this commentary I therefore first offer an evaluation of the key points in the Lazarus critique. Following that, I provide a summary of my own views of the strengths and limitations of this “movement” to correct psychology’s preoccupation with the negative.

The Lazarus Critique

The Lazarus (this issue) portrayal—of positive psychology as a Pollyanna-land of happyologists intent on

excising human suffering from scientific consideration and further bent on castigating those who study the downside—is a caricature. Those articulating the goals of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) have been clear: The aim is not to replace or supplant the long-standing attention given to pathology but to complement it with a focus on what constitutes healthy, adaptive functioning and how it comes about. Surely this is a worthy goal.

Issues of subjectivism are also not central to appreciating what is right or wrong with positive psychology. That researchers confront tensions between subjective and objective assessments pertains not just to work under the positive umbrella but to all fundamental topics (e.g., emotion, cognition, motivation, person-

ality, development, mental health) that engage the best minds in psychology. Subjectivism is thus a thorny issue, not only in appraisal of life stress as described by Lazarus (this issue) but throughout much contemporary psychological research. Positive psychology suffers no more, and no less, from the frequently frustrating reality that most interesting topics have both subjective and objective components, both of which have to be considered.

It is in his methodological and conceptual critique that Lazarus (this issue) offers the most detailed observations. A first concern pertains to the overriding prevalence of cross-sectional research designs, which provide “an undependable demonstration of antecedent–consequent contingencies.” Again, this is not a problem unique to research on positive psychology. Experimentally manipulating variables is one response to the dilemma, but given the correlational nature of much of this work, Lazarus emphasizes the need for longitudinal studies. Developmentalists, studying processes in both childhood and adulthood, have long appreciated that repeated assessments on the same individuals do, indeed, sharpen understanding of patterns of intra-individual change and stability. Along the way, however, they have become aware that longitudinal data are not a causal panacea. Why? Because what frequently occurs is that purported antecedents and consequents both change through time, making it difficult to discern which one preceded the other or if they changed simultaneously.

The typical longitudinal analysis controls for baseline assessments such that purported antecedents predict not single-point-in-time associations with outcomes but cross-time change (gains or losses) in dependent variables. Although this constitutes an advance over cross-sectional inquiry, it does not fully resolve questions of causal directionality. To do that, investigators need also to analyze their data with the purported antecedents and consequents reversed. One of our recent investigations (Kwan, Love, Ryff, & Essex, 2003) did just this, and we found empirical support for both causal directions—that is, A predicting changes in B, and B predicting changes in A. Presumably, many processes studied by behavioral and social scientists involve such reciprocal relationships, despite the fact that guiding theories and empirical tests of them rarely address alternative causal scenarios.

The second major problem raised by Lazarus (this issue) is that of emotional valence, which he formulates as the tendency to adopt dimensional (positive, negative) rather than discrete models of emotion and the failure to consider how one discerns whether a particular emotion is positive or negative. Emotion researchers have long debated whether dimensional versus discrete models of emotion best capture the phenomenon of interest and have further asked whether positive and negative affect are best characterized as independent or as inversely

correlated. The extent to which measurement error obscures these issues, as well as distinctions between the frequency versus intensity of reported affect, have also received considerable attention (see Ryff & Singer, 2003, for a review). Numerous point–counterpoint publications on these questions long preceded the recent hype on positive psychology.

Nonetheless, Lazarus (this issue) is correct in arguing that the essential task is not to pull apart positive from negative emotions (whether formulated dimensionally or in terms of multiple discrete emotions) but to figure out how these realms interact, or come together. His solution is to assert that all emotions have the potential of being both positive and negative. Thus, hope, he claims, combines desired wishes with anxiety that they will not occur; disappointment frequently follows on the coattails of joy and happiness; and pride likely goes before a fall. This argument is not persuasive—the examples provided do not reveal blends but rather reveal the sequencing of positive and negative emotions, with one frequently following the other.

A better way of framing these issues, and in particular the task of putting positive and negative emotion together, is to ask what constitutes healthy emotional functioning. In answering this question, we suggest (see Ryff & Singer, 2003) that emotion researchers must first give greater attention to what emotions are about—that is, to the experiences that give rise to them. Although frequently assessed as free-floating affective states disconnected from life, emotions, it is important to remember, evolved for their “adaptive value in dealing with fundamental life-tasks” (Ekman, 1992, p. 171). Parenthetically, we surmise that a focus on the contexts and challenges that prompt emotion will lead in the direction of more discrete rather than dimensional models, given the variety of life experiences involved.

To then ask what constitutes healthy emotional functioning in dealing with major tasks of living will inevitably involve a diversity of both negative and positive feeling states. That is, bad things happen to people, and the healthy response is to feel the sadness, pain, frustration, fear, disappointment, anger, or shame resulting from adverse experience. However, good things also happen to people, and the healthy response is to feel joy, pride, love, affection, pleasure, or contentment from such positive experiences. Thus, the capacity for experiencing and expressing both realms of emotion is central to healthy functioning. However, this observation leaves untouched the interplay between the two realms, about which less is known. Lazarus (this issue) is to be commended for drawing attention to this omission.

Work that brings positive and negation emotion together seems to encompass two varieties of inquiry. The first is research by those who study how positive emotion may help to undo the aftereffects of negative

emotion (Fredrickson, 1998) or, relatedly, how positive experience may prevent relapse of major depression (Fava, 1999; Fava, Rafanelli, Grandi, Conti, & Belluardo, 1998). The second is research in which negative emotion is viewed as a precursor to positive emotion, as in how the expression and acceptance of negative emotion in primary relationships contributes to the sense of intimacy between partners (Reis, 2001); how the expression of negative emotion in childhood, can, via skilled parenting, contribute to healthy emotional development (Gottman, 2001); how the expression of negative emotion about illness (i.e., cancer) is linked with subsequent reductions in psychiatric and physical symptoms (Spiegel & Kimerling, 2001); or how adversity and traumatic experience may contribute to positive outcomes, such as personal growth, purpose and meaning (Ryff & Singer, 2002b; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Further investigation of such positive and negative interplay is essential to an understanding of healthy emotional adjustment.

The third problem identified by Lazarus (this issue) is the widespread tendency for emotion researchers to overstate group differences and thus give inadequate attention to individual differences. This critique, given the research in subfields of psychology such as personality psychology, is hard to fathom. Top personality journals have been, for years, full of articles elaborating individual differences in emotional responses—for example, as a function of traits, coping styles, life outlooks, attributional styles, social comparison processes, gender, age, cultural background, and so on. Thus, the basis for the individual-differences complaint seems questionable. Certainly, those contributing to the aforementioned literatures do not view individual differences as “an embarrassment in the search for generalizations” (Lazarus, this issue).

In addition, the lengthy attention given to a single article on age differences in emotion does not support the point intended—for two reasons. First, age is a meaningful dimension of individual differences, and second, a growing literature (both longitudinal and cross-sectional) documents that affect and well-being vary systematically as a function of age (Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). Other factors assessed in these investigations (e.g., traits, educational status, work and family circumstances) also contribute to individual variation in affect, thereby further undermining the claim that research in emotion is biased toward documenting broad generalities.

The fourth problem identified by Lazarus (this issue) is the absence of careful, in-depth measurement of emotion, which he subsequently describes primarily in terms of the need for greater distinctions between emotion traits and states. In many areas (e.g., anxiety—Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970; positive and negative affect—Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), this

is well-worked measurement territory. How personality traits predispose individuals to experience particular emotions in response to life stresses or challenges is also well-established territory (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Thus, the essence of this complaint appears to lack substance.

Taken as a whole, the central points raised by Lazarus (this issue) are either ill-founded in themselves or inappropriately linked to positive psychology. Although he notes at the beginning of his essay that “my most trenchant criticisms also apply to psychology in general,” one must ask why the whole argument was framed around whether positive psychology “has legs.” None of the central methodological or conceptual criticisms are relevant to evaluating positive psychology per se. The concluding section about philosophical problems is also not about philosophy but is a repetition of the power-of-positive thinking litany and its abandonment of the negative, hence, repeating the caricature with which the essay began. The net effect is that the positive psychology movement has not, in itself, been evaluated. This is a worthy exercise to which I now turn.

What Has the Positive Psychology Movement Contributed?

On the credit side of the ledger, the positive psychology movement has brought together in the same forum, be it special issues of the *American Psychologist* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) or recent edited volumes (e.g., Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2002; Keyes & Haidt, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2002), a number of research programs that address positive, healthy, adaptive features of human functioning. These are valuable integrative contributions. That said, it is important to remember that everything assembled under the positive psychology umbrella came from well-established, long-standing programs of research. That is, the studies used to exemplify this “movement” are not new. Stated otherwise, the research covered in these publications did not materialize as a result of flag-waving about positive psychology—it was already there.

This brings me to the debit side of the ledger. A serious limitation of how positive psychology has been presented has been its profound neglect of past contributions as well as the broad scope of current research dealing with positive, healthy, adaptive functioning. This myopia about past and present is damaging not for the superficial reason of taking credit for advances already contributed by others but for more serious problems of increasing the likelihood of reinventing wheels, both conceptual and empirical, such that science fails to be incremental and cumulative. This is particularly troublesome with regard to efforts to forge

new measures to assess positive psychology, a point to which I return shortly.

What are the historical precursors (see Ryff & Singer, 2002a)? Before psychology emerged as a scientific discipline, there were centuries of scholarly efforts to depict the more noble attributes of humankind (see Coan, 1977). Socrates and Aristotle wrote of the triumphant human capacity for reason and rationality; St. Augustine elevated the virtue of achieving close contact with the divine; Michelangelo embodied the heights of creative self-expression that defined the Renaissance; Wordsworth, Raphael, and Goethe captured the passionate sensitivities of the Romantic era, and closer to our own period were those who found greatness in the human struggle. Sartre and Camus, for example, called for transcendence of suffering via the existential responsibility to find meaning amid the chaos and absurdities of life. The Western version of the redeeming features of our species can be further contrasted with Eastern depictions that elevate the human capacity for enlightenment, selfless action, compassion, and oneness with nature (Coan, 1977).

Psychology, itself, also reveals enduring concern for the positive. William James's eloquent writings (1902/1958) on the psychology of *healthymindedness*, which he juxtaposed with a characterization of the *sick soul*, provide compelling evidence that the positive-negative contrast was there from the beginning. He described those who passionately fling themselves into the goodness of life—they have souls of a “sky-blue tint” (p. 77) and are exemplified by individuals such as Walt Whitman, who possessed optimism that was both “voluntary and defiant” (p. 82). James also wrote about the *mind-cure movement*, a blend of religious and philosophical perspectives that endorsed the “all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes, such as the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust” (p. 88). Foreshadowing current complaints about positive psychology, he criticized this movement as being “so moonstruck with optimism and so vaguely expressed that an academically trained intellect finds it almost impossible to read” (p. 89).

With regard to the negative, James (1902/1958) depicted morbid-minded individuals who could not so swiftly throw off the consciousness of evil. They know that “all natural goods perish; riches take wings, fame is a breath; love is a cheat; youth and health and pleasure will vanish” (p. 120); and ultimately “the skull will grin at the banquet” (p. 121). Thus, he formulated two primary emotion types:

The sanguine and healthy-minded live habitually on the sunny side of their misery line, the depressed and melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension. There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle of champagne inscribed to their credit, whilst others seem to have been born close to the pain

threshold, which the slightest irritants fatally send them over. (p. 117)

James also elaborated their views of each other. The happy souls seem “unspeakably blind and shallow” (p. 137) to those who live in darkness. And the healthy-minded view the other type as follows:

[The way of the] sick soul seems unmanly and diseased. With their grubbing in rat-holes instead of living in the light; with their manufacture of fears, and preoccupation with every unwholesome kind of misery, there is something almost obscene about these children of wrath. (p. 137)

These rich accounts from a century ago powerfully illustrate that both positive and negative emotions are core features of the human condition. James (1902/1958) was deeply aware of the sunny and dark sides of life, although his own efforts to unify or integrate them were curiously limited. Mapping the deeper dialectic between the darkness and the light is thus central to the needed strides forward in the present era. As noted earlier, it is in calling for this integration, which positive psychology has largely missed, that Lazarus (this issue) makes his most compelling point.

Beyond James (1902/1958), numerous others in the history of psychology carried forward a concern with the positive. Many were reacting against Freud's dramatically negative view of the human psyche entangled in emotional conflict. Jung (1933; Von Franz, 1964) was among the first to challenge this grim account and instead emphasized the harmonious integration of one's good and bad features via the process of individuation. Erikson's (1959) bold vision of psychosocial development carried the idea of continuing growth and development across the life course; Buhler (Buhler & Massarik, 1968) articulated the basic life tendencies through which human fulfillment occurs; Allport (1961) offered a conception of maturity that encompassed such qualities as self-extension, warm relating to others, emotional security, and realistic self-perception; Maslow (1968) detailed the characteristics of those who are self-actualized; Rogers (1961) described the fully functioning person; and Jahoda (1958) drew on many formulations to enumerate positive features of mental health.

These many portrayals of healthy human functioning have not been gathering dust in psychology's back room. Ryan and Deci's (2001) review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being summarizes extensive work situated in many of the aforementioned traditions. The multidimensional model of psychological well-being that I have developed (Ryff, 1989) is also conceptually grounded in these diverse formulations of positive human functioning. Studies of ego de-

velopment (Leovinger, 1976) also integrated numerous prior theories, with measurements of ego development featuring prominently in subsequent adult personality research (e.g., Helson & Srivastava, 2001). Current research on generativity (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1998), the concern for guiding and directing the next generation, is a flourishing realm built on Erikson's (1959) observations about continued development in adulthood. New work on the human quest for meaning (Wong & Fry, 1998) is rooted in Frankl's (1959/1992) logotherapy, which emerged from his experience in a Nazi concentration camp. It was there he concluded that what differentiated those who lived from those who died was the capacity to find meaning in the horror endured.

Thus, a wide swath of current inquiry rests on formulations of human strengths generated by psychologists working many decades ago. Apart from studies strongly linked to early versions of positive psychology are extensive areas of contemporary inquiry explicitly focused on adaptive, healthy functioning. Examples include research on proactive self-development (Brandstadter & Lerner, 1999), research on midlife development (Lachman, 2001), studies of effective coping and self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), and the proliferating research on resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2002b; Werner, 1995), as well as growth through trauma (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). These exist in addition to the wide array of topics covered in the recent positive psychology collections.

Taken as a whole, this impressive array of current and past research on the upside of the human condition leaves one wondering what all the fanfare has been about. Positive psychology is alive and well, and it most assuredly has legs, which stretch back into the distant history of the discipline. It is only from particular vantage points, such as clinical or abnormal psychology, that the positive focus constitutes a novelty. For other subfields, especially life-span developmental and personality psychology, there has always been concern for healthy, optimal human functioning. Perhaps the main message in the positive psychology initiative is thus how deeply entrenched and divided are the subfields within which psychologists work.

Although positive psychology is far from new, it is decidedly the case that funding agencies have been slow to endorse and support large-scale research on healthy human functioning. Most institutes at the National Institutes of Health are built around specific diseases. When psychosocial and behavioral factors have been brought into their scientific agendas, it has primarily been to document the ways in which psychosocial dysfunction and maladaptive behaviors undermine health and contribute to illness, if not mortality. The deep-seated bias against studying how good health comes about and, by extension, how it might be pro-

moted speaks volumes about the need for reallocation of research dollars toward prevention and positive health promotion (Singer & Ryff, 2001).

Apart from the need to channel greater research support toward the positive, there remains the question of whether attempts to create an initiative that already exists are problematic. A primary danger is that of duplication of measures, theories, and findings. In fact, one of the major current challenges, given the plethora of positive topics under consideration, is discerning the boundaries between them. What is the extent of overlap and redundancy, for example, in conceptions and measures of positive emotion, effective coping, self-regulation, efficacy, emotion-regulation, well-being, goal orientations, personality development, optimism, and adjustment (see Ryff, Kwan, & Singer, 2001)? That is to say, constructs and measures to assess effective functioning were already proliferating well before positive psychology was announced as an innovative new direction.

This abundance points to two critical needs. First, psychology needs to organize its house of strengths—this is a call for theoretical and measurement work to integrate and distill these many areas. As an illustration, we recently addressed issues of potential redundancy in assessments of different types of well-being, showing that hedonic versus eudaimonic conceptions are empirically related, but distinct, and are differentially predicted by age, education, and personality traits (Keyes et al., 2002). More work of this variety across the aforementioned areas of assessment is needed. Second, there is need to be circumspect about generating new assessments of positive psychology. Those who would add to the many tools already available need to be clear that they are not contributing to clutter—that is, generating instruments that are redundant with extant measures.

Beyond the task of properly mapping the domain of optimal human functioning, there is a need to devote greater attention to the question of how these diverse strengths are nurtured—that is, how they have come about—as well as how they are sustained, particularly during times of challenge and adversity. Building on those findings, there is a great need for developing interventions, including public education programs that promote, among ever greater numbers of Americans, experiences of being effective, self-regulated, purposefully engaged, closely tied to others, optimistic, and capable of prevailing in the face of adversity. Finally, a major new direction for science is to probe the mechanisms and processes through which these psychosocial strengths influence health—that is to say, how the positive characteristics described in this essay contribute protective benefits at the level of neurophysiological processes and thereby extend years of quality living (Ryff & Singer, 1998). This is a call to take positive psychology beyond the confines of the discipline where it began—to link psychosocial strengths to positive health

outcomes and thus to the enhanced functioning of families, communities, and society.

Note

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Positive Psychology: FAQs

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As positive psychology gathers momentum, several frequently asked questions (FAQs) have surfaced. Lazarus's (this issue) target article provides a version of some of these, so we distill these FAQs and some of the answers that are emerging with emphasis on some of Lazarus's specific critiques. We do not address several of Lazarus's other points: the need for longitudinal studies (because the bulk of the literature in the fields of optimism and of flow consists of longitudinal studies), that Seligman is a "Johnny-come-lately" (perhaps 40 years of studying these issues seems "lately" to someone who worked on them for 50-plus years), that the literature is already "well-balanced" between the negative and the positive (because there have been 70,856 articles on depression since 1887 vs. 2,958 on happiness; Myers, 2000), and his pervasive aggravation that his own theory has forked no lightning within positive psychology (coping, stress, and appraisals do not seem particularly well-suited concepts to illuminate positive emotion and positive traits). Rather we concentrate on several meatier issues whose resolution is more likely to advance the field.

One note on terminology first: Lazarus (this issue) uses the term *negative* psychology to denote what positive psychology is alleged to oppose. We do not accept this. Lazarus's juxtaposition is his own, and it is unfortunate; positive psychologists intend no disrespect to the many academics and practitioners who have spent the bulk of their careers investigating negative states (Seligman is one of them and is proud of the accomplishments of this field; contrary to Lazarus's invention, we have written no "diatribes" against "negative" psychology). We prefer the term *psychology as usual* to describe work that focuses on human problems. Lazarus claims that positive psychology advocates that we "abandon the negative and focus on positive human qualities." As we have taken pains to

emphasize, psychology as usual is important and necessary, and positive psychology is intended as a supplement, another arrow in the quiver, and not a replacement for this endeavor.

Are the Positive and the Negative Separable, Discrete Classes?

Lazarus (this issue) holds that it is "unwise and regressive" to divide emotions into positive and negative. Thus, a negative emotion like shame or anger, for one person at one time in one culture, can be negative, but at another time or for another person or in another culture, it can be positive. More generally this FAQ doubts the division of emotions, traits, or institutions into negative and positive. This FAQ comes in several forms: (a) that understanding the negative will lead to an understanding of the positive, because the positive is merely the absence of the negative; (b) that positive emotions are opponent processes of negative emotions—for example, the joy that the parachute jumper feels on landing is just the slave process of relief from fear (Solomon & Corbit, 1974); (c) that positive emotions and traits are always intertwined with the negative, and the two cannot be studied separately; and (d) that a food pellet is not truly positive for a hungry animal but just a reliever of the negative state of hunger. If the positive were just the absence of the negative, we would not need a positive psychology, just a psychology of relieving negative states. Similarly, if the positive were just the obverse of the negative, we would not need a positive psychology, because we could deduce everything we needed to know about the positive merely by attaching a negation sign to what we discover about the negative. These are deep

and important objections to a field that advocates the investigation of the positive.

That the same discrete emotion is sometimes negative and sometimes positive is often (but not always, e.g., agony, bliss) true, but this intriguing fact cuts no ice against positive psychology. Rather the scientific issue is the understanding of those emotions under the conditions that they are positive versus negative. This in turn depends on the venerable and difficult question of whether *indifference* can be well-defined. If it can, the states and traits and institutions “north” of indifference are positive and those “south” of indifference are negative. If indifference cannot be well-defined, an enterprise that claims that the positive can be scientifically understood in its own right collapses.

The basic intuition underlying the several attempts to define an indifference point is that there are some (very large number of) events that when added to or subtracted from a particular concatenation of circumstances do not make that concatenation more or less aversive or more or less desired. Those events (e.g., turning the lights down 2% as I write this sentence) are “neutral,” or “indifferent,” in that concatenation. Events that make that concatenation more aversive are negative, and those that make it more desired are positive. Change the concatenation, and there is nothing to prevent the events from changing their intensity or even switching valence. Thus, I believe indifference is definable, and therefore the positive can be well-defined. For related attempts at defining indifference see Nozick (1997, pp. 93–95), and Irwin (1971).

There seems to be value in studying positive emotions and positive traits in their own right, and not as always the slave process to some negative state. Sometimes, of course, positive emotions and positive traits are simply the other end of some bipolar dimension (e.g., agony and relief), but often the positive is not yoked to the negative, only to the absence of the positive. Joy does not seem to be the absence of sadness, because it need not arise when all sadness is removed (the underlying dimension for joy ends at the absence of joy, not the presence of sadness, which is an additional process), nor does sadness seem to be the absence of any positive state (the underlying dimension for sadness ends at the absence of sadness, with the presence of positive states being an additional process).

Theoretically, the idea that positive and negative emotions are different in kind is attractive. Just as negative feeling is a firefighting “here-be-dragons” sensory system that alarms one, telling one unmistakably that one is in a win–lose encounter and one should get rid of the noxious stimulus, the feeling part of positive emotion is also sensory. Positive feel-

ing is a neon “here-be-growth” marquee that tells you that a potential win–win encounter is at hand. By activating an expansive, tolerant, and creative mind-set, positive feelings maximize the social, intellectual, and physical benefits that will accrue (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman, 2002). On this account, if true, positive emotion is an entirely different system with an entirely different function from negative emotion.

Parallel considerations hold for traits and institutions. My satisfaction at seeing a perfect hybrid tea rose is not the relief of any aversive state, such as beauty deprivation, and the presence of civility in a deliberative body provides benefits (e.g., friendship) over and above the mere removal of the costs of incivility (e.g., revenge). Thus we conclude that although the understanding of a positive sometimes hinges on the understanding of an obverse negative, that state of affairs is far from universal, and therefore the positive must—at least sometimes—be understood in its own right.

Is Positive Psychology Just “Happiology”?

Lazarus (this issue) thinks that positive psychology is almost entirely about the study of positive emotion, and the target article seems largely a vehicle for the promotion of his own theory of emotions. Indeed, positive psychology holds that the scientific understanding of subjective well-being—pleasure, contentment, joy, mirth, ecstasy, ebullience, and the like—is important. We believe, however, that positive psychology is not only the study of positive feeling but also the study of positive traits and positive institutions. Within the study of positive emotion itself we divide it into emotion about the past (satisfaction, contentment, pride, and the like); the present, which is commonly termed *happiness* by the layperson (pleasure, ecstasy, joy, and the like); and the future (hope, optimism, trust, faith, and the like). Seen this way, although happiness in the lay sense is one important subject of positive psychology, it forms only one third of the area of positive emotion, which in turn forms only one third of the domain of positive psychology.

Positive psychology on this view is about more than just *hedonics*, the study of how we feel. We believe that simple hedonic theory, without consideration of strength, virtue, and meaning, fails as an account of the positive life. A simple hedonic theory claims that the quality of a life is just the total good moments minus the total bad moments. This is more than an ivory tower theory, because very many people run their lives around exactly this goal. The sum total of our momentary feelings turns out to be a very poor measure of how good or how bad we judge an episode—a movie, a vacation, a marriage, or a life—to

be. How well an episode ends, how intense the peak of pleasure or pain, the trajectory of the episode—worsening or improving—are all documented violations of hedonics, and they easily override the sum of the feelings in an experience (Fredrickson, 2001; Schkade & Kahneman, 1998).

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great Anglo–Viennese philosopher, was by all accounts miserable. A collector of Wittgensteinabilia, Seligman has never found a photo of Wittgenstein smiling. Wittgenstein was depressive, irascible, and scathingly critical of everyone around him and even more critical of himself. In a typical seminar held in his cold and barely furnished Cambridge rooms, he would pace the floor muttering, “Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein, what a terrible teacher you are.” Yet his last words give the lie to hedonics. Dying alone in a garret in Ithaca, New York, he said to his landlady, “Tell them it’s been wonderful!” (Malcolm, 2001).

We want to suggest that positive character, the deployment of strength and virtue, is a road to the good life, a life different in kind from the pleasant life, but no less wonderful and no less positive (Peterson & Seligman, in press). The Wittgenstein story illustrates that a life of strength and virtue can override grim hedonics. Flourishing is the centerpiece of positive psychology, and Robert Nozick’s “experience machine” shows that positive experiences alone are not sufficient for flourishing (Nozick, 1974). Nozick imagined a machine that can give a person any experience desired. By placing the person in a floating tank and hooking up electrodes to the brain, talented neuropsychologists could use this machine to give the feeling of writing a great novel, making a new friend, or reading an interesting book. Although we may long for such experiences, few of us would agree to hook up to this machine for life. Nozick argued that this is, in part, because we want to have these feelings only as a result of our actually doing these activities. It is not just positive feelings we want, we want to be entitled to our positive feelings. We want to construe, “appraise” perhaps, our good feelings as stemming from personal strengths and virtuous action (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

Thus positive psychology is not, and has never been, just happiology. It is the study of three very different kinds of positive lives: the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life (Seligman, 2002).

Miss the Mark?

Wealthy cultures invent myriad shortcuts to feeling good. These produce positive emotion in us without our going to the trouble of using our strengths and virtues. Shopping, drugs, chocolate, loveless sex, and television are all examples. Positive psychology does not deny that these shortcuts, along with many others,

can result in positive emotion. However, following Nozick (and Aristotle), positive psychology is principally interested in the emotions that result from the exercise of strengths and virtues.

We are not puritan or sophomoric enough to suggest eliminating shortcuts. There is a cost of getting happiness so cheaply, however, when the shortcuts become one’s principal road to happiness. Positive emotion alienated from positive character leads to emptiness; to a lack of meaning; and as we age, to the gnawing fear that we are fidgeting unto death. It is possible that the spiritual malaise and the epidemic of depression that has swept all the wealthy nations (Seligman, Reivich, Gillham, & Jaycox, 1996) have at their core the use of the shortcuts displacing the use of the strengths to produce positive emotion.

Isn’t Positive Psychology Just Positive Thinking Warmed Over?

Positive psychology has a philosophical but not an empirical connection to positive thinking. Both are relevant to the hoary free will–determinism issue. This issue finds its way into Western theology through the Arminian heresy (Jacob Harmensen, 1560–1609). The Arminian view holds that human beings can participate in their own grace, that grace is not predestined but depends—to some extent at least—on the individual. The individual can choose actions that will get him or her into heaven. This was a heresy because it denied that God alone bestows grace and that the individual cannot participate in grace by choosing good or evil. This heresy is at the foundation of Methodism, and Norman Vincent Peale’s positive thinking movement grows out of this heritage. Positive psychology is also wedded at its foundations to the individual freely choosing. Without such a premise the notion of positive strengths and virtues would make no sense. In this sense, both endeavors have common roots. However, positive psychology is also different in three significant ways from positive thinking.

First, positive thinking is an “armchair” activity. Positive psychology, on the other hand, is tied to a program of empirical and replicable scientific activity. Second, positive thinking urges positivity on us for all times and places, but positive psychology does not hold a brief for positivity. Positive psychology recognizes that in spite of the several advantages of positive thinking, there are times when negative thinking might be preferred. Many studies correlate optimism with later health, longevity, sociability, and success, but pessimists may be able to do at least one thing better: Much of the experimental evidence

suggests that in many situations negative thinking leads to more accuracy (Alloy, Abramson, & Chiara, 2000). This is true of real life as well: when accuracy is tied to potentially catastrophic outcomes. When a pilot is deciding whether to deice the wings of his or her airplane, one wants one's pilot to be a pessimist.

The third distinction between positive thinking and positive psychology is that many leaders of the positive psychology endeavor have spent decades working on the “negative” side of things—depression, anxiety, victims, trauma, and oppression. We do not view positive psychology as a replacement for psychology as usual, or as a “paradigm shift”; rather we view positive psychology merely as a normal science supplement to the hard-won gains of “negative” psychology.

Is Positive Psychology Elitist?

Many of the scientists who work on positive psychology are affluent, White, middle-aged intellectuals (although the majority of the 12 Templeton Positive Psychology Prize winners have been female). However, this does not mean the substance of the science reflects such a bias. First, in its classification of the strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2003), a major inclusion criterion is the ubiquity of the strengths as positively valued across almost all cultures. The success of positive psychology will be dependent on its ability to identify and study strengths and virtues that are valued by persons regardless of their culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and nationality. It is for this reason that the classification of the strengths and virtues includes strengths like kindness and perseverance, but not punctuality and wealth. Unlike punctuality and wealth, kindness and perseverance are valued by virtually everyone, regardless of accidents of culture, class, or gender.

Second, affluent, middle-class academics hardly have a corner on strength, virtue, and happiness. People in Rwanda and Calcutta, contrary to popular myth, are enormously concerned with achieving strength, virtue, and happiness (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001). Being poor or oppressed does not extirpate the needs for integrity and honor and kindness and pleasure. Masten (2001), by documenting the sheer ordinariness of resilience, provides persuasive testimony of the importance of positive psychology for all people.

Is Positive Psychology Discovering Anything Surprising?

We believe that much of the value of any science is the discovery of surprising facts, and research in

positive psychology is yielding some unintuitive results. Just to name a few: In one study, researchers asked widows to talk about their late spouses. Some of the widows told happy stories; some told sad stories and complained. Two and a half years later, researchers found that the women who had told happy stories were much more likely to be engaged in life and dating again (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Researchers have also found that physicians experiencing positive emotion tend to make more accurate diagnoses (Isen, Rosenzweig, & Young, 1991); that optimistic people are more likely than pessimists to benefit from adverse medical information (Aspinwall & Brunhart, 2000); that in presidential elections over the past century, 85% were won by the more optimistic candidate (Zullow, Oettingen, Peterson, & Seligman, 1988); that wealth is only weakly related to happiness both within and across nations (Diener & Diener, 1996); that trying to maximize happiness leads to unhappiness (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, et al. 2002); that resilience is completely ordinary (Masten, 2001); and that nuns who display positive emotion in their autobiographical sketches live longer and are healthier over the next 70 years (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

Doesn't Human Suffering Trump Human Well-Being in Its Demand on Our Sympathies and Attention?

Positive psychology holds that one of the best ways to help suffering people is to focus on positive things. Persons who are impoverished, depressed, or suicidal care about far more than merely the relief of their suffering. These persons care—sometimes desperately—about strength and virtue, about authenticity, about meaning, and about integrity.

Furthermore, positive psychology holds that the relief of suffering very often depends on the building up of happiness and of strengths. Fredrickson (2001) reviewed her findings on positive emotion as “undoing” negative emotion and as the building blocks of resilience that combats physical illness. Lyubomirsky's (2001) illumination of what conditions enhance happiness has direct relevance for the practice of clinical psychology and the relief of mental disorders. These strengths function as a buffer against misfortune and against the psychological disorders, and they may be the key to resilience (Masten, 2001). The birthright of a psychologist is not merely to heal damage and treat disorder but also to guide people toward the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life.

Note

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While Accentuating the Positive, Don't Eliminate the Negative or Mr. In-Between

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Lazarus's (this issue) trenchant critique of positive psychology in the target article is sure to galvanize the movement's adherents. We suspect that we were asked to provide a commentary as representatives and defenders of positive psychology. Yet we find ourselves agreeing with the premise and nearly all details of Lazarus's argument. We begin with three quibbles and then offer elaborations of what we consider Lazarus's most telling criticisms.

Quibble 1: Surely You're Joking, Dr. Lazarus!

Our first quibble, with tongue in cheek, is with Lazarus's (this issue) implication that positive psychology is

not sufficiently developed to warrant special issues and special sections in psychology's flagship journal and that it has yet to make sufficiently ample contributions to have a handbook devoted to its accomplishments. Lazarus's comments betray his adherence to a view of science that assumes that progress emerges over time; that findings build on one another; that unanticipated findings are embraced; and that paradigm shifts, if they exist, emerge from the accretion of incontrovertible evidence and not from whole cloth. Dr. Lazarus, get with the program! Have you not read the positive psychology "manifesto" (Sheldon, Frederickson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, & Haidt, 2000) or its "declaration of independence" (Snyder & Lopez, 2002)? Do you not know that positive psychology's scientific agenda is being established at conferences, institutes, and summits;

through networking; and via “pod” formation (www.positivepsychology.org) and that the *American Psychologist* articles to which you refer to are part of a publication strategy targeting high-profile outlets to promote positive psychology’s mission (www.positivepsychology.org)? Have you not heard about the American Psychological Association book series *Advances in Positive Psychology*? While you wonder about whether positive psychology is sufficiently established to warrant a handbook, the field is already documenting its advances in 13 planned volumes. And several self-help books (e.g., Seligman, 2002) have been published based on the knowledge explosion positive psychology has already created. Certainly, if this area of inquiry is sufficiently developed to bring its findings and their life altering implications directly to the people, it is sufficiently developed to warrant a handbook for scientific colleagues. Dr. Lazarus, the positive psychology train has left the station, and you apparently have missed the last boarding call.

Quibble 2: Categorizing Emotions by Their Valence

Lazarus (this issue) takes issue with what he views as a widespread tendency among positive psychologists and others to categorize and group emotions based on their valence. He asserts that an emotion’s valence depends on its context, so that emotional valence cannot be determined a priori, and that grouping emotions by their presumed valence leads us to overlook the advantages of studying discrete emotions. As we are not emotion researchers, we may be stretching here, but it seems to us that discrete emotions have been the primary target of emotion researchers, whereas affects have been productively grouped by their valence.

Although the field is not in complete agreement, there seems to be some consensus that emotions and affect can be distinguished (cf. Fredrickson, 2001). Emotion, but not affect, is tied to the personal meaning of an experienced event, person, or situation and should therefore be conceptualized in discrete categories. Discrete affects, conversely, have generally been studied not individually but rather along the pleasantness and activation dimensions. We believe that distinguishing positive from negative affect has considerable potential, and we offer one example (though there are many) of psychological phenomena that are best conceptualized by distinguishing positive and negative affect.

Zautra and colleagues (e.g., Zautra, Smith, Affleck, & Tennen, 2001) have examined a dynamic affect model that posits that the relationship between positive and negative affect changes as a function of ongoing events. The model predicts that

under ordinary circumstances positive and negative affects will be relatively independent, whereas during stressful encounters an inverse correlation between positive and negative affect may increase precipitously. In other words, this model leads to the prediction that the structure of affect is a function of the individual’s circumstances. In several studies using the longitudinal and ipsative–normative designs endorsed by Lazarus (this issue), Zautra and associates have found support for the dynamic affect model—support that could have been garnered only by grouping affects according to their valence. We acknowledge that part of the problem rests in the tendency of investigators, including yours truly, to use the terms *affect* and *emotion* interchangeably. We agree with Lazarus that the attributes of emotions make the study of discrete emotions a wise choice. Similarly, the attributes of affect suggest that there is wisdom in combining affects based on their valence.

Quibble 3: Portraying Stress and Coping Theory as *Negative Psychology*

Our third quibble is with Lazarus’s (this issue) complaint that stress and coping theory has been misconstrued as *negative psychology*. He refers to this appellation as naive, misleading, inaccurate, and a red herring. Lazarus cites a number of studies guided by his theory that include personal strengths, and he asserts that the best coping research includes a balance between positive and negative, that is, personal characteristics that aid or hamper effective coping.

We agree that many of the most important empirical contributions to the stress and coping literature have come from studies that have examined “positive” personality moderators of stress–coping–outcome linkages. Nonetheless, we believe that there remains a “negative” aspect of coping theory that has fueled the current positive psychology movement. Lasch (1984) characterized this negative aspect as the “infiltration of everyday life by the rhetoric of crisis” (p. 64). By arguing that coping strategies used by individuals facing extreme situations (such as life in a concentration camp) are used by people facing everyday annoyances, Lazarus and colleagues (e.g., Benner, Roskies, & Lazarus, 1980) and most of us involved in the study of coping have inadvertently implied “that everyday life has taken on many of the qualities of a struggle for survival” and that in our daily lives we are “under siege” (Lasch, 1984, p. 64).

This unintended link between crisis and everyday life is, unfortunately, consistent with a now common “survivor mentality” (Lasch, 1984). Both experts and laypersons have come to interpret even life’s most

mundane obstacles or disappointments as indicators of victimization, and when these commonplace tribulations are endured, we take it as evidence that the “victim” is, in fact, a survivor. In the years since Lasch’s observations, allusions to “surviving” everyday life permeate every aspect of popular culture, including song lyrics, TV shows, autobiographies, and self-help books. This “rhetoric of crisis” has fueled or at least emboldened positive psychology. As Lazarus (this issue) notes (albeit in a different context) God needs Satan. Coping theory has become for positive psychology a Satan or antithesis that helps the movement define itself. Those of us dedicated to the study of stress and coping helped set the stage for this unfortunate situation.

So much for quibbles. In the remainder of our commentary we offer support for and elaboration of several of Lazarus’s (this issue) major points.

Positive Psychology—Yet Again

Positive psychology has been described as a new paradigm and a change in focus for social science (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). At the same time, its proponents have, to their credit, made passing note of previous efforts to examine the positive side of human experience (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; McCullough & Snyder, 2000). Lazarus (this issue) also makes passing reference to previous efforts within psychology to focus on the positive. We now extend Lazarus’s portrayal of positive psychology in historical context by documenting the remarkable similarities between long-defunct movements aimed at promoting a positive psychology and the “new paradigm” we are now witnessing.¹ If we are to learn from previous false leads (learning from the past is certainly a virtue according to the new positive psychology), we need first to acknowledge what those blind alleys were about and consider why they failed to achieve their goals.

Nearly 50 years ago Allport (1955) lamented the prominence of theories of human experience based on weakness, despair, and pathology, and he, like his modern counterparts, called on psychologists to investigate positive characteristics such as courage and wisdom. Frankl (1967) proposed that a “height psychology” be added to Freud’s depth psychology in order to do justice to the positive side of human functioning. And Maslow (1968) advocated for the “direct study of... healthy rather than sick people” (p. 156). His designation for this field of inquiry that would focus on psychologically healthy individuals was, in fact, *posi-*

tive psychology. More than 30 years ago Wilson (1972) described Maslow’s work as “revolutionary” precisely because it focused on psychological health. Rogers (1961) too viewed as revolutionary the “growing recognition that the...deepest layer of... personality...is positive in nature” (p. 91). Were it not for the decades-old citations, one might easily misattribute these quotes to the current throng of positive psychologists, and for good reason: The message, in almost every detail, has not changed. Jacoby (1975) described the human qualities extolled by Allport, May, Fromm, Maslow, and Rogers, and more recently by the new generation of positive psychology advocates, as “the full litany of virtues that the rich once preached to the poor...restored to service” (p. 51). Jacoby’s cynicism aside, his complaint seems justified when one considers many of the virtues celebrated by the current incarnation of positive psychology, including contentment, optimism, courage, perseverance, moderation, and work ethic (see Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A focus on these virtues is not, in our opinion, a fresh approach to psychological inquiry. Rather, it is a venture that leaves the impression of innovation while taking us back to an earlier vision of human experience and behavior.

Another similarity between earlier versions of positive psychology and the current movement is the proposed substantive independence of positive psychology from traditional psychological inquiry. This independence is implied in positive psychology’s “change of focus” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5) and is explicit in its recent “declaration of independence” from current psychological approaches to adaptation (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Proponents of positive psychology extol this independence as part of what makes it new and distinctive. Yet decades ago, Allport (1960) advanced the idea that there is “a discontinuity between normal and abnormal motivation, and...we need a theory that will recognize this fact” (p. 105). Like his 21st century counterparts, Allport reminded his readers just how progressive it was to initiate a separate line of inquiry that distinguished human strengths and virtues from frailties and pathology.

Jacoby (1975), on the other hand, reminded us that that it is everyday wisdom and not some new insight that distinguishes psychological health and psychopathology: “One of Freud’s greatest contributions was his insistence on the reverse, that normal and abnormal, healthy and sick formed a continuum. Differences were merely quantitative, but not qualitative” (p. 56). By asserting that human strengths and weaknesses are qualitatively distinct, positive psychology has rediscovered the worldview of the 19th century cloaked as 21st century perspicacity. This qualitative distinction between strengths and weaknesses is not only regressive but genuinely surprising, because many investigators now identified with positive psychology have justified their use

¹Psychologists working within the humanist tradition have argued that the new positive psychology is historically misinformed (e.g., Taylor, 2001). We agree, but for different reasons.

of convenience samples such as college students to study psychopathological processes such as depression by invoking the notion that psychopathology and mental health represent a continuum (Tennen, Eberhardt, & Affleck, 1999).

Psychological Science as the Difference That Makes A Difference?

The new generation of positive psychology adherents has been quick to distinguish previous incarnations of positive psychology from its current version by noting that the new positive psychology has science on its side. We have been told that “humanistic psychology did not attract much of a cumulative empirical base” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7), that what distinguishes positive psychology from its predecessors “is its reliance on empirical research to understand the human condition” (Peterson & Steen, 2002, p. 252), and that unlike previous failed versions of the same endeavor, “[a] viable and enduring positive psychology will be founded...on carefully crafted hypotheses that can be tested empirically and analyzed with the latest statistical procedures” (Snyder & Lopez, 2002, p. 753). Thus, what distinguishes the new positive psychology from previous and now foreclosed positive psychologies is not its substance but its methods. We find it ironic that the new positive psychology distinguishes itself from earlier versions based on its methods, as it was on the basis of method that the superseded humanistic version of positive psychology distinguished itself from other psychological approaches of its era.

Turning to Ipsative–Normative Designs

We believe that positive psychology’s decision to turn to negative psychology’s approach to empirical research as a way to distinguish itself is misguided. Lazarus (this issue) provides an incisive critique of the psychological research methods upon which positive psychology plans to draw its inspiration and distinctiveness. He reminds us, for example, of the inferential hazards associated with cross-sectional designs. Although this may seem like old news, at least four literature reviews over the past 20 years have demonstrated that cross-sectional designs, applied to questionnaire data and using late adolescent convenience samples, continue to be the norm in social–personality–health, that is, negative, psychology studies. Lazarus also highlights the limitations of psychology’s (including positive psychology’s) focus on interindividual or normative designs, and he (yet again) urges us to turn to a combination of between-persons and within-person designs. Despite the lucidity and repetition of his argu-

ment, Lazarus’s call for these ipsative–normative or idiographic–nomothetic designs (Lazarus, 2000) has not been heeded by vulnerability and coping researchers or by adherents of positive psychology.

Many human strengths are best conceived as processes rather than as static experiences. Indeed, most studies of thriving, growth, and flourishing explicitly describe these phenomena as processes. As processes, they cannot be understood through “snapshots,” even two or three snapshots. Rather, they require regular longitudinal monitoring. Nonetheless, investigators in these new fields have quickly come to accept the snapshot version of scientific inquiry so common in the vulnerability, stress, and coping literatures. If these and other positive psychology constructs are to genuinely broaden our view of human strengths, we believe that investigators must make a serious effort to rebuke rather than embrace psychology’s empirical tradition of nomothetic inquiry and broaden their conceptual and methodological lenses to include intraindividual processes unfolding over time.

Lazarus’s (this issue) distinction between normative and ipsative approaches is not simply academic carping. We (Tennen & Affleck, 1996) demonstrated that between-persons and within-person correlations can differ not only in magnitude but also in direction and that a statistically significant positive between-persons correlation can emerge when not a single individual in the group shows a positive within-person association! Although it is common in the coping literature, and more recently in studies of thriving, growth, and flourishing, to draw within-person inferences from between-persons associations, between-persons and within-person associations address different questions. We believe that some of the most interesting questions in areas staked out by positive psychology demand within-person analysis, and therefore investigators must break from rather than extol the traditions of vulnerability and coping research to consider human strengths as unfolding intraindividual processes.

Reinventing the Wheel?

Another unseemly characteristic of psychological research involves the use of identical or nearly identical research designs, methods, and even dependent measures across substantive areas of inquiry and interpreting identical findings as distinct new psychological phenomena. We (Tennen & Affleck, 1998) documented how this phenomenon is manifested in negative psychology. More recently we (Tennen, Affleck, & Tennen, 2003) demonstrated that the same problem has already found its way into positive psychology. Specifically, positive psychology has examined hope, optimistic explanatory style, optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and problem solving as pre-

dictors of precisely the same positive outcomes including academic and athletic performance, illness prevention efforts, treatment adherence, psychological adjustment, and psychotherapy outcomes. With few exceptions the redundancy among these constructs has been ignored. By modeling its methods on those of negative psychology, positive psychology is already producing a plethora of redundant theories of human strengths and virtues.

On those relatively rare occasions when redundancies have been noticed, the solution has invariably been to examine the unique contribution of the investigators' favorite strength by controlling statistically for one or more related strengths. This is another of the "latest statistical procedures" favored in the traditional psychological literature that positive psychology now emulates. However, we wonder what precisely is left of hope after self-efficacy expectations have been controlled statistically. And what is left of optimism after controlling for the variance it shares with the capacity to generate ways to attain one's goals and the belief that one can sustain movement toward those goals—that is, after controlling for components of hope? Whatever remains after such statistical maneuverings bears little resemblance to the original positive psychology construct. In this regard positive psychology is well on its way to amassing a "cumulative empirical database" no different from that of traditional psychology.

At first blush it may seem as though positive psychology adherents could avoid these pitfalls and simply draw on the noblest psychological research traditions. Unfortunately, that would be like closing the barn door after the horse escapes. In its short history, positive psychology has already inherited negative psychology's worst methodological habits. Its enthusiastic reliance on nomothetic study designs and its frenetic generation of redundant findings leave us skeptical about a new positive psychology that hopes, based on its empirical methods, to distinguish itself from long-defunct positive psychologies.

Separating Life's Positive and Negative Aspects

Lazarus (this issue) challenges positive psychology's implicit separation of people's positive and negative characteristics. Individuals' positive and negative qualities represent, according to Lazarus, "two sides of the same coin of life," and he asserts that we need to continue to focus on the negative side of human existence to gain a more complete perspective on the valued experiences and characteristics for which positive psychology advocates.

Lazarus's (this issue) assertion that people's positive and negative qualities are inextricable is extremely

important and warrants elaboration. A number of theorists (e.g., Klein, 1975) have argued convincingly that an individual's capacity to sustain an integrated and textured experience of himself or herself and others is an indicator of emotional maturity. This ability to appreciate personal and interpersonal complexities, experience simultaneously positive and negative emotions toward the same person or situation and appreciate the good in people who hurt one could easily join positive psychology's catalogue of human strengths. Indeed, individuals who cannot retain a positive mental representation of another person when that person frustrates his or her needs lives a chaotic existence. Yet how does a psychology that separates positive and negative characteristics study a human strength that involves their integration?

Another widely regarded human strength is the capacity to bear negative emotions when they are warranted, for example, the capacity to tolerate depression in the face of significant loss (Zetzel, 1965). How will positive psychology advance our knowledge of this universally recognized strength? A more complete appreciation of the capacity to bear negative emotions requires a framework that includes both the negative emotion and the capacity to tolerate that emotion. We suspect that many human strengths require such integrative frameworks.

A widely admired virtue is the ability and willingness to make reparation. Reparative efforts are essential for enduring relationships and increasingly, for enduring societies. At the core of reparation is a sense of personal or collective guilt or regret. How will a positive psychology that excludes negative qualities include reparation in its register of virtues? How will it understand reparation without embracing guilt and regret as a target of investigation? There remains little consensus regarding the nature of guilt. Whereas some theorists have viewed it as a relatively mature emotion (Klein, 1975), others believe it is an irrational encumbrance (Ellis, 1962). Even among emotion theorists there are fundamental disagreements regarding whether guilt should be limited to one's actions (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) or extended to include one's intentions (Landman, 1993). If positive psychology's path is going to be, as its proponents assert, independent of current work in the study of negative experiences, we cannot imagine how this emergent field will tackle complex human strengths such as the ability to experience emotional ambivalence and endure negative emotions when necessary, and how it will study virtues such as the capacity to make amends. Those of us at work in negative psychology are sufficiently challenged trying to understand emotions such as guilt without the added burden of losing valued colleagues who have decided to pick up their marbles and play elsewhere.

The A Priori Determination of Strengths and Virtues

In a related vein, Lazarus (this issue) makes a convincing case against positive psychology's a priori categorization of emotions as positive or negative, and he demonstrates that whether an emotion is positive or negative depends on its context. Lazarus's argument can be expanded beyond the categorization of emotions to include the categorization of many of positive psychology's strengths and virtues. The literature documenting abrupt personal transformations begins to speak to the disadvantages of deciding in advance which characteristics are strengths or virtues, as positive psychology does in its Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2001).

From their fascinating review of what is known about abrupt personal changes, Miller and C'deBaca (1994) concluded that such changes, which are often associated with the development of forgiveness, generosity, helpfulness, honesty, and humility, typically emerge among individuals who experienced only a modest degree of personal control in their lives prior to their abrupt personal change. Although in direct contrast to current theorizing about perceived personal control representing a strength, this finding is perfectly consistent with William James's (1902) contention that the perception of external control is essential for abrupt positive personal transformations. If experiencing little control over one's life can set the stage for abrupt positive changes, is a sense of external control a human weakness or a strength?

Miller and C'deBaca (1994) found that most individuals who experienced abrupt positive changes noted that they had been at a relatively low point in their lives. Whereas current conceptualizations of crisis-related growth associate optimism with positive change in the face of adversity, James (1902) suggested that abrupt positive change is often preceded by despair. And Premack (1970) suggested that a sense of humiliation may trigger abrupt positive personal changes. Of interest, humiliation is more common among field-dependent individuals (Lewis, 1971). We find appealing the idea that a characteristic like field-dependence, which increases the likelihood of rumination and distress during times of relative stability, might at stressful times trigger abrupt personal growth. Thus, qualities we would typically consider weaknesses, including perceived lack of control, pessimism, and field dependence can trigger abrupt positive personal changes. These findings support Lazarus's (this issue) assertion that an emotion's valence cannot be reliably determined without considering its context, and they extend this assertion beyond emotions to presumed human strengths. We hope that positive psychology will consider the possibility that many apparent hu-

man weaknesses are, in certain circumstances, fountainheads of strength. Such considerations will require an integration of positive and negative aspects of human experience.

Conclusion

In their introduction to an *American Psychologist* special issue on positive psychology, Sheldon and King (2001) lamented the movement's skeptical reception and attributed it to "psychology's reductionistic epistemological traditions, which train one to view positivity with suspicion, as a product of wishful thinking, denial, or hucksterism" (p. 216). The good news for positive psychology is that Lazarus's (this issue) critique and our commentary are based neither on suspicion nor on the assumption that positive psychology reflects hucksterism on the part of its proponents. The bad news is that these critiques present, we believe, a far more formidable challenge. A positive psychology that declares its independence from research in the areas of stress, coping, and adaptation; that insists on making qualitative distinctions between seemingly positive and negative human characteristics; that determines a priori and without attention to context those characteristics that will be studied as strengths; that follows psychology's most intractable methodological bad habits and then wears those habits as a merit badge; that distances itself from its predecessors; and that dismisses its critics as suspicious or closed-minded is, to use Lazarus's terminology, a movement without legs. If positive psychology intends to follow Johnny Mercer's² advice to accentuate the positive, we urge the movement's proponents to attend to the issues Lazarus raises and to eliminate from their work neither the negative nor Mr. In-Between.

Note

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²Lazarus (this issue) attributes these lyrics to Hoagy Carmichael.

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Response to Lazarus

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It is difficult to respond to an essay (Lazarus's, this issue, target article) with which I am in total agreement. First, I must say, "Bravo!" I have rarely encountered such a well-written, clearly argued, and logically presented case for or against a position or theory in psychology. However, I have to say something more than "Yes," and so I want to comment on how Lazarus's perspective resonates with my own in my work as a psychoanalytic psychologist and in my thinking about the nature of suffering—the subjective experience of our discontent—that is addressed through psychotherapy and counseling. Both of these topics are particular elaborations of Problems 2 and 4 in Lazarus's account. Before I turn to these I would like to make a brief comment on the overall impact of his article and offer some praise for his discussions of Problems 1 and 3.

Complexity in Subjective Life

Lazarus (this issue) begins with a line from a Hoagy Carmichael song that invites the listener to "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative," and not "mess with Mr. In-Between." Of course, Lazarus then proceeds to show the essential importance of Mr. In-Between. The four major problems that Lazarus so aptly delineates in his article all involve reducing the complexity of our emotional and relational experiences into methods and categories that are too simplistic. Researchers mistakenly proceed with such methods and categories because they try too hard to imitate certain kinds of quantitative findings in the natural sciences and to impress others too quickly and naively with the importance of results that may be embedded in a bigger picture that remains hidden. One reason that Lazarus's research has been so interesting to psychoanalysts over time is that he has consistently adhered to complex formulations that work well in real-life settings such as psychotherapy.

In his discussion of the limitations of cross-sectional research and the inadequate attention paid to individual differences, Lazarus (this issue) displays an inimitable clarity. His criticisms should be, as he mentions, addressed to all contemporary psychological researchers, not just those who are investigating positive psychology. Specifically he says,

The dominance of cross-sectional, interindividual research must be widely recognized. The interpretations

drawn from such research can be misleading—for example, with respect to causation and, even more important, with respect to how to describe those persons who fit the hypothesis and those who do not. Our field needs to find a way to resolve this problem. . . . of too much being made of too little . . . which also applies to research on emotion and health and the role of personality in adaptation and health outcomes. (p. 32)

The goal of being both elegant and meaningful is uniquely difficult for psychological research because, as researchers, we are most often studying subjective experience. Making objective our subjective experience—knowing the proper boundaries and domains to investigate scientifically—is a unique scientific problem.

Solid psychological science requires much more than an adequate acquaintance with quantitative methods and tools of investigation. It requires a refined analysis of assumptions that we, as researchers, make; an ability to see the context in which we are asking our questions; and a knowledge of the implications of our hypotheses in relation to our assumptions and our context. In other words, we need a sound philosophical understanding of the ways in which we attempt to study ourselves. I agree with the eminent hermeneutic philosopher Charles Taylor (1985) when he argued against a tendency he finds in "an influential family of theories in the sciences of man":

The common feature of this family is the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences. Theories of this kind seem to me to be terribly implausible. They lead to very bad science: either they end up in wordy elaborations of the obvious, or they fail altogether to address the interesting questions, or their practitioners end up squandering their talents and ingenuity in the attempt to show that they can after all recapture the insights of ordinary life in their manifestly reductive explanatory languages. (p. 1)

Taylor admonished psychological researchers to be patient enough to investigate subjective experience on its own terms, not as an imitation of the natural sciences. Lazarus (this issue) is a very good example of a scientist who has done just that. He obviously knows what he talks about, both from a methodological and from a logical perspective.

In Praise of Negativity

In addition to praising Lazarus, I want to praise negativity. My comments are directed to expanding Lazarus's (this issue) accounts of Problems 2 and 4, which involve the manner and assumptions that we bring to the study of emotions. My concerns here are more philosophical than methodological, but they involve both. As Lazarus states, the positive psychology movement seems to fault psychotherapists and others for being too negative in our approach. I agree with Lazarus when he says quite emphatically that past research and theory of stress, coping, and adversity do not shortchange a positive view of human possibilities for thriving. Indeed, the complaints about "negative psychology" are, as he says, "just another red herring" (p. 41).

And yet there is much to recommend a negative approach to understanding ourselves and our condition as human beings, in our efforts both to make a sound science of psychology and to ameliorate human suffering. If we begin with a focus on the negative, by which I mean our suffering and symptoms and complaints, we find that the positive qualities of human beings are revealed. As Lazarus (this issue) says, adversity and stress can be motivators for strengths. We study the negative conditions of our lives primarily to become free from them, not in order to indulge ourselves in negative explanations for our actions.

A recent essay by Woolfolk (2002), entitled "The Power of Negative Thinking: Truth, Melancholia, and the Tragic Sense of Life," emphasizes the ways in which a knowledge of reality and happiness are gained from recognizing and even embracing the necessary suffering and loss that are inherent in human life. Much of what is considered to be wisdom begins with the acknowledgment of what is not going well. Disease, disorder, and defect have been studied by human beings over time in order to understand health, order, and wholeness. As Lazarus (this issue) says, "one would not exist without the other."

The fact is that we humans experience more negative than positive feelings in our daily lives, as Csikszentmihalyi (e.g., 1993) made abundantly clear through his and others' findings in experience sampling:

When attention is not occupied by a specific task, like a job or a conversation, thoughts begin to wander in random circles. But in this case "random" does not mean that there is an equal chance of having happy and sad thoughts. [T]he majority of thoughts that come to the mind when we are not concentrating are likely to be depressing. (p. 35)

As humans, our attention moves more readily to what is wrong or missing, what is emotionally nega-

tive, than it does to what is right and complete. We are all naturally skilled in being critics of our experience.

This human hyperalertness to negativity appears to have promoted a desire for constant "improvement" that may have benefited our species in our early adaptation, allowing us quickly to dominate our environment and overtake other species. This condition has created a kind of instinctual push for "progress" that is now a threat to our survival as we exhaust the resources that are needed for our own life supports. To recognize and to study our inherent negative evaluations of experience may be significant for understanding both our personal emotions and our survival as a species.

Moreover, many philosophical systems that underlay our sciences begin in doubt and skepticism rather than faith and ease. Our early emotional conditioning in relation to actual and learned danger, as well as our powers of reflection, poise us to notice what is wrong or missing on our horizons. To be skeptical, to be alert to what is wrong, is arguably the strength of Western scientific thinking and the main tool that most of us use to make judgments in our everyday lives.

In my work as a psychoanalyst and couples therapist, I proceed largely by way of negative reasoning: I listen for what is missing, for what is left out. I am on the lookout for unintended and unrecognized emotional meanings in peoples' communications about themselves and others. I do this, whether my focus is our immediate communication or the report of a dream or a relationship outside of therapy, by noting the discontinuities and gaps. Who and what seem to be left out of the story? What is not mentioned though it obviously has an impact? These give me clues for what might be emotionally motivating, though outside conscious awareness. (I believe that this is what is meant by "listening with the third ear.") Of course, this is not a foolproof method because I myself may be leaving out something that is important. I use the same skeptical method of looking for omissions and gaps in my own thinking and assumptions during therapy. I regard this to be a hermeneutic method that allows the client and me to probe symptoms, defenses, and disorder in order to reveal an underlying order. Through a shared process of discovery, the client and I form hypotheses and theories about the purposes, reasons, and meanings of otherwise strange behaviors and actions. Such understanding brings compassion and the freedom to change.

I have been, for many years, a student of Buddhism, which is a philosophy and worldview whose first principle is negative: Human life is filled with suffering. *Suffering* here refers to what we, as human beings, add to our actual experience: discontent, dissatisfaction, freezing up, and negative evaluations. We might say that Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues have discovered scientifically the first principle of Buddhism: Negative evaluations and discomforts occur all of the

time. Becoming aware of this allows us to understand how we can free ourselves of this tendency.

We also discover very quickly, if we pay careful attention, that optimistic attitudes, pleasures, and joys cannot free us from suffering. As the Dalai Lama (1997) has said,

Their pleasurable status is only relative. If they were truly joyful states in themselves, then just as painful experiences increase the more we indulge in the causes that lead to pain, likewise, the more we engage in the causes that give rise to pleasurable experience, our pleasure or joy should intensify; but this is not the case. (p. 52)

Even the things and experiences that please us most—the loves that we hope for, the successes and good health that we might have—eventually bring us disappointment and difficulty. Our positive experiences also reveal our tendency toward discontent.

These universal negative aspects of human experience mean, I believe, that we, as clinicians, cannot proceed simply by assessing competence and strengths. People who arrive in our consulting rooms demand to be seen and experienced as suffering and vulnerable. They see themselves this way, and we do them a disservice if we too quickly try to reverse their views. I (Young-Eisendrath & Wiedemann, 1987) advocated at one time for a competence model, but I have modified my thinking about this issue. I certainly believe that we should come to see the strengths and competence of everyone who seeks our help, but we should discover these together and not impose them from the beginning. They will not be primary in a client's experience, as suffering will be. I also believe that we must continue to study stress, vulnerability, and coping in order to understand the strengths of human development. These are all rooted in negative experiences.

Finally, I want to emphasize that I regard my work as a psychoanalyst to proceed from a serious scientific base. There is already a broad base of scientific investigation into our subjective lives (e.g., defense mechanisms, ego development, moral development, psychoanalytic conflict theory, and others) that has been proceeding in a manner that respects the complex and embedded nature of human emotion. As I said earlier, the research of Lazarus and his colleagues is also exemplary of this kind of complexity. As a science of subjectivity, psychoanalysis—like other Western sciences—begins with skepticism and doubt, and looks for the gaps

and omissions in what people present consciously. This is a negative and ironic method, not a romantic one.

In my clinical and theoretical work and writing, I have come to embrace the importance of negative thinking: It is natural for us as human beings to evaluate our experiences negatively. When we become aware and accountable for our negative evaluations, we can begin to free ourselves from difficult emotional states, as well as draw on the strengths of critical mindedness. My work as a psychoanalyst is primarily to reveal, in the moment it is happening, how people create suffering and how this suffering can be transformed into knowledge and compassion (see, e.g., Young-Eisendrath, 1997). The creation of suffering through negative evaluation and discontent is a universal human condition, not a personal matter nor a specific cognitive distortion. When individuals and couples see how they create unnecessary suffering, they have the possibility of becoming free of it. I would like to close with a quote from Woolfolk (2002) that puts a frame around my praise of negativity:

I want to suggest ... that there may be worse things in life than experiencing negative affect. Among those worse things are ignorance, banality, credulity, self-deception, narcissism, insensitivity, philistinism, and isolation, all of which the program of positive psychology, as it is presently constituted, potentially seems to promote. (p. 20)

Note

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