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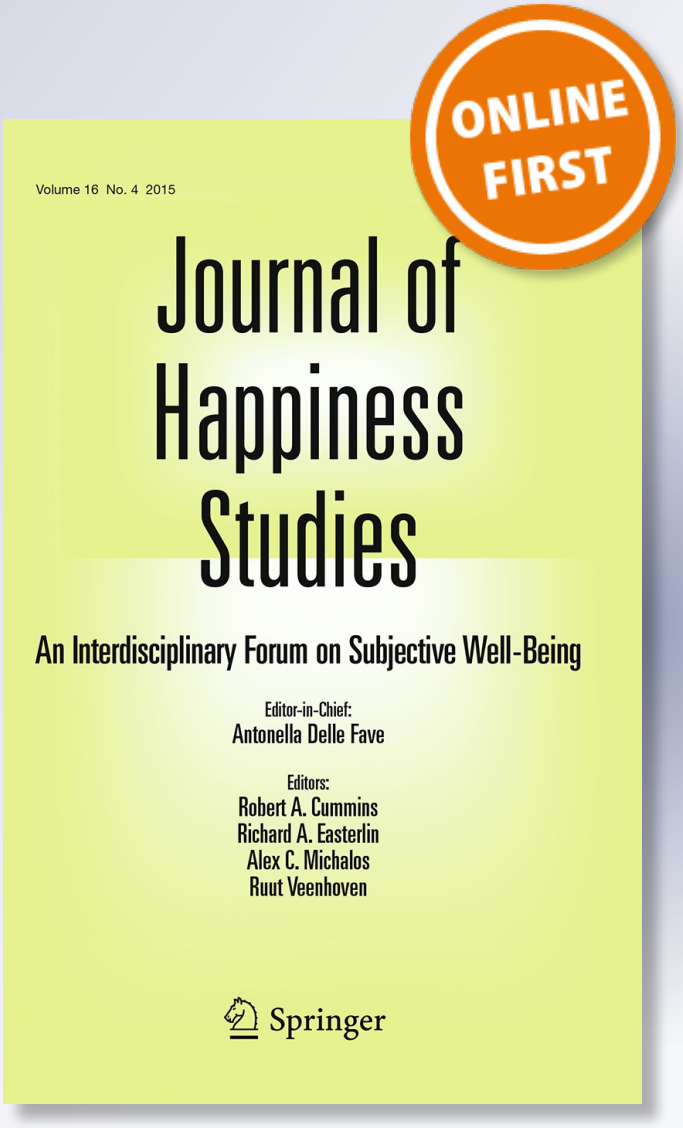

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Second Wave Positive Psychology: Exploring the Positive–Negative Dialectics of Wellbeing

Tim Lomas[1] · **Itai Ivtzan**[1]

Abstract Positive psychology has tended to be defined in terms of a concern with 'positive' psychological qualities and states. However, critics of the field have highlighted various problems inherent in classifying phenomena as either 'positive' or 'negative.' For instance, ostensibly positive qualities (e.g., optimism) can sometimes be detrimental to wellbeing, whereas apparently negative processes (like anxiety) may at times be conducive to it. As such, over recent years, a more nuanced 'second wave' of positive psychology has been germinating, which explores the philosophical and conceptual complexities of the very idea of the 'positive.' The current paper introduces this emergent second wave by examining the ways in which the field is developing a more subtle understanding of the dialectical nature of flourishing (i.e., involving a complex and dynamic interplay of positive and negative experiences). The paper does so by problematizing the notions of positive and negative through seven case studies, including five salient dichotomies (such as optimism vs. pessimism) and two complex processes (posttraumatic growth and love). These case studies serve to highlight the type of critical, dialectical thinking that characterises this second wave, thereby outlining the contours of the evolving field.

Keywords Dialectics · Flourishing · Positive · Negative · Second wave positive psychology

1 Introduction

Positive psychology (PP) is at an interesting point in its development. The initial impetus for the creation of the field was a sense of disenchantment with the way 'psychology as usual' appeared to be preoccupied with disorder and dysfunction. Given this, the promise

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of this innovative new branch of psychology was a forum where scholars could explore the 'brighter sides of human nature' (Linley and Joseph 2004, p. 4). However, in these formative years, PP often appeared to embrace a polarising rhetoric, in which ostensibly negative phenomena were conceptualised as undesirable (and thus to be avoided), whereas apparently positive qualities were seen as necessarily beneficial (and thus to be sought). We might refer to this initial embrace of the positive as the 'first wave' of PP. But, as the field grew to prominence, this kind of polarisation came under fire from critics both inside the field (e.g., Wong 2011) and outside (e.g., Held 2004). On the one hand, such critics argued that qualities that were commonly presented as positive could, under certain circumstances, be counterproductive. For example, 'unrealistic' optimism was linked to under-appreciation of risk and thus to subsequent health risk behaviours, such as smoking (Weinstein et al. 2005). (One must add that this point was not lost on PP scholars themselves; as Seligman (1990, p. 292) pointed out, one must be 'able to use pessimism's keen sense of reality when we need it.') On the other hand, ostensibly negative states could paradoxically be conducive to flourishing. For instance, theorists such as Tavris (1989) have argued that anger could motivate someone to act against and change an invidious situation that had been hindering their wellbeing. Through arguments such as these, the initial premise of PP—defined as it was by a focus on the positive—appeared to be somewhat challenged and even undermined.

However, rather than serving to destabilise the field, these types of critical arguments have helped PP to reach a new phase of maturity and development, one we might refer to as 'second wave' PP (Held 2004) or 'positive psychology 2.0' (Wong 2011). This second wave approach—hereafter referred to as SWPP—is still driven by concern with the same meta-concepts that underpinned the first wave of PP, such as flourishing and wellbeing. (Following Delle Fave et al. (2011), this paper will generally use the term 'wellbeing' as an overarching construct to encompass the range of positive qualities and outcomes of interest to PP, such as resilience and happiness.) However, SWPP is characterised by an altogether more nuanced approach to the concepts of positive and negative, and by a subtle appreciation of the ambivalent nature of the good life. More specifically, it will be argued here that SWPP is above all epitomised by a recognition of the fundamentally *dialectical* nature of wellbeing. The current paper, then, offers a review of this second wave development of the field by exploring the critical arguments—made by scholars both inside and outside the field (the latter of whom may well not identify as being 'part of' PP)—that prompted and underpinned the emergence of this second wave approach. The paper does this by considering a number of key constructs that have been central to PP, and exploring the difficulties inherent in trying to classify such phenomena as either positive or negative. Of course, the constructs featured here do not exhaust the possibilities for this type of analysis, but rather serve as case studies or exemplars for the kind of critical thinking that characterises SWPP. However, before we engage with these seven case studies, we must first introduce the idea of dialectics, as this is arguably the defining feature of SWPP.

2 The Dialectics of Wellbeing

This paper contends that SWPP is above all characterised by an appreciation of the *dialectical* nature of wellbeing. By saying this, we are also acknowledging that SWPP is not *only* based upon this; for instance, as set out below, this appreciation of dialectics has partly been fostered by a greater understanding of the contextual socio-cultural factors that

influence wellbeing, as explored by scholars such as Wong and Wong (2012) and McNulty and Fincham (2011). Nevertheless, the current paper focuses specifically on this dialectical appreciation, as this is the clearest factor we can identify at present separating first wave and second wave approaches. Essentially, dialectics refers to the dynamic 'tension of opposition between two interacting forces or elements' (Merriam-Webster 2014). This tension describes the way in which binary opposites—such as positive and negative, or light and dark—while being diametrically opposed, are yet intimately connected and dependent upon the other for their very existence. Moreover, the term dialectic does not simply refer to a static relationship between opposites, but to the way in which many phenomena change and evolve through the dynamic interplay between these opposites. One particularly formative conception of such dialectic change was formulated by the German philosopher Hegel (1812), who argued that development occurs through a process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. An example might be the development of ideas. An argument is advanced, say, that people are fundamentally good; this proposition is the thesis. People might subsequently discern flaws in this perspective, and respond with the counter-argument that people are inherently errant; this retort would be the antithesis. However, this counter-argument may then itself be found to be wanting. Crucially though, this does not necessitate reverting to the original thesis. Rather, what may emerge is a subtle *synthesis* incorporating aspects of both arguments (e.g., acknowledging that people have the potential for good and bad), creating a higher unity that transcends and yet preserves the truth of both original opposites (Mills 2000).

The notion of dialectics is central to SWPP, as wellbeing is seen as a dialectical process, both in the general sense of involving a complex interplay of conceptual opposites, and possibly also in the Hegelian sense of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The dialectical nature of wellbeing is revealed by three distinct principles. First, there is what we might call the 'principle of appraisal': it can be difficult to categorise particular phenomena (e.g., emotions) as positive or negative, as such appraisals are fundamentally contextually-dependent (McNulty and Fincham 2011). To illustrate this point, the first five sections below focus on five key dichotomies: optimism versus pessimism, self-esteem versus humility, freedom versus restriction, forgiveness versus anger, and happiness versus sadness. For each of these dichotomies, the paper seeks to problematize the very notions of positive and negative by suggesting that 'positive can be negative' (phenomena commonly regarded as positive, such as optimism, may be detrimental to wellbeing under certain circumstances), and 'negative can be positive' (there can be value in qualities and states frequently conceptualised as negative, such as pessimism). Second, there is what we might call the 'principle of co-valence': not only is it difficult to characterise particular phenomena as either positive or negative, many emotional states are 'co-valenced,' inherently involving complex, intertwined shades of light and dark (Lazarus 2003). For example, hope constitutes a fragile mix of yearning for a desired outcome, a degree of confidence that this has some chance of occurring, and an anxiety that it will not. This issue will be addressed in the final two sections, which look at two complex processes which can be regarded as co-valenced: posttraumatic growth and love. Third, and most fundamentally, there is what we could call the 'principle of complementarity': wellbeing itself can be seen as involving an 'inevitable dialectics between positive and negative aspects of living' (Ryff and Singer 2003, p. 272). This insight builds upon recent theorising by Keyes (2007), whose dual-continua model proposes that wellbeing and ill-being are not two poles of a continuum, but are two separate dimensions of functioning. This model has been corroborated by work which has shown that wellbeing is not simply an absence of ill-being, and distress is not necessarily incompatible with subjective wellbeing (Fianco et al. 2015). However, the

principle of complementarity goes further in suggesting that not only can distress and wellbeing be co-present, but they are to an extent co-dependent. Indeed, Delle Fave et al.'s (2011) Eudaimonic and Hedonic Happiness Investigation project has found that the most important self-rated psychological component of happiness is 'harmony,' which can mean 'balancing opposite elements into a whole' (p. 199). Thus, the principle of complementarity—which this paper as a whole seeks to elucidate—holds that wellbeing fundamentally involves a 'dynamic harmonization' of dichotomous states.

In acknowledging that wellbeing may involve seemingly 'negative' components, it could be argued that this undermines the very premise of PP, since its formative ethos was to redress the 'negativity' of 'psychology as usual' by focusing on more positive aspects of life. However, we would argue that, far from undermining PP, this emerging critical awareness means that PP is moving into a new phase of development, one which we are calling the field's 'second wave.' Indeed, we can use the notion of dialectics to appreciate not only the complex nature of wellbeing, but the evolution of PP itself. One might view 'psychology as usual,' with its apparent focus on the negative, as the thesis. In critiquing this and embracing the positive, first wave PP thus presented itself as the antithesis. However, as elucidated below, critics have begun to identify flaws in this antithesis, highlighting the pitfalls of apparently positive qualities and the potential merits of negative ones. Crucially though, from a Hegelian perspective, this does not mean we must abandon PP and revert back to the thesis, back to psychology as usual. Rather, in this dialectical process, the next stage is (ideally) synthesis, in which the truths of both thesis and antithesis are preserved, while the flaws in their respective positions are overcome. And, one might argue, SWPP represents just such a synthesis. In this, there is a movement away from a simplistic binary view that un-reservedly classifies phenomena as either positive and negative, valorising the former while condemning the latter, towards a more nuanced appreciation of the dialectical complexities of flourishing. Paul Wong (2012)—the foremost dialectical theoretician in PP, who spearheaded this second wave—refers to this more nuanced perspective as the 'dual-systems model'; this represents a synthesis of first wave PP (with its emphasis on positivity) and existential psychology (which focuses on engagement with the darker side of the human condition). In sum, SWPP recognises the validity of King's (2001, pp. 53–54) contention that flourishing does not mean being a 'well-defended fortress, invulnerable to the vicissitudes of life,' but appreciating and even embracing the complex and ambivalent nature of life.

Before examining the seven case studies, it is worth stating that in exploring SWPP, we may find ourselves challenging constructions of wellbeing that tend to be dominant in the West. Critical theorists argue that the kind of 'first wave' thinking introduced above—the valorisation of ostensibly positive emotions—is reflective of broader historical currents of thought that have held sway in the West over recent centuries (Becker and Marecek 2008). Consequently, one of the driving forces behind the emergence of SWPP has been critical awareness of cross-cultural variation in constructions and perceptions of wellbeing, as per the 'Cultural Lens Approach' (Hardin et al. 2014). This awareness has engendered an appreciation of dialectics in two key ways. Firstly, cross-cultural analyses have highlighted the 'principle of appraisal' by showing cultural variation in whether phenomena are valorized as positive or negative. For example, it is suggested that Western and Eastern cultures construct wellbeing in markedly different ways (Joshanloo 2014); e.g., Western cultures tend to value high arousal positive states (such as excitement), whereas Eastern cultures valorise low arousal ones (such as calmness; Tsai 2007). Likewise, in the context of critiquing the United Nations Development Program, Schimmel (2013) argues that Western markers of societal progress, like material abundance, are not equally valued

across cultures. Secondly, SWPP's appreciation of the dialectical nature of flourishing has been enhanced through studying other cultures that themselves tend to endorse just such a dialectical perspective, particularly Eastern cultures (Uchida and Ogihara 2012). This cross-cultural appreciation has helped the field challenge the Western-influenced conceptions of happiness that underpinned the first wave of PP. That said, we can also recognise that many thinkers in the West, past and present—from Hegel (1812) to Lazarus (2003)—have likewise developed dialectical perspectives, and who we can also draw on in developing SWPP. So, with that in mind, we now explore the dialectical nature of SWPP by examining five key dichotomies (beginning with optimism and pessimism), before looking at two co-valenced processes, namely posttraumatic growth and love.

3 Optimism and Pessimism

The first dichotomy considered here is optimism versus pessimism. The first wave of PP was characterised by a tendency to valorise optimism as integral to wellbeing and to conversely denigrate pessimism as antithetic to flourishing. However, there are pitfalls that can occur should optimism be excessive or unrealistic. Indeed, such risks were to some extent recognised from the outset in PP (showing that the seeds of SWPP were already present in the first years of the movement); as Seligman (1990, p. 292) put it, we must be wary of being a 'slave to the tyrannies of optimism,' but must be 'able to use pessimism's keen sense of reality when we need it.' Empirical work corroborates this insight, revealing diverse problems associated with undue optimism, most relating to an under-appreciation of risk, which can lead to risk-taking behaviour (e.g., smoking; Weinstein et al. 2005). Optimism has thus even been implicated as a mortality-risk: Friedman et al.'s (1993) longitudinal research suggested that 'cheerful' children (optimism plus humour) lived shorter lives than more conscientious peers. That said, other studies have found that optimism predicts longevity (Giltay et al. 2004). Thus, as with all qualities considered here, context is key. For instance, Peterson (2000, p. 51) argued that 'people should be optimistic when the future can be changed by positive thinking but not otherwise.' This last point captures a fundamental principle of second wave thinking: a deep appreciation of situational context (McNulty and Fincham 2011). This does not mean that one can never make value judgements about good and bad—SWPP does not necessitate a descent into the murky waters of relativism—but just cautions against an a priori categorisation of phenomena; all such judgements are (i.e., should be) contextual. On that note though, we can also acknowledge contexts where Peterson's point does not hold. For instance, Wong (2009) highlights Viktor Frankl's (1963) notion of 'tragic optimism,' which recognises the importance of sometimes keeping alive a flame of hope no matter how bleak the current outlook or future possibilities. Indeed, for existentialists like Camus (1955), such a mission arguably sums up the nature of the human condition, bounded as it is by the bleak finality of mortality.

Naturally, in considering the pitfalls of optimism (positive can be negative), we can invert this questioning and consider the value of its counterpart, pessimism (negative can be positive). For instance, Norem (2001) highlights the 'positive power of negative thinking,' e.g., the connection between pessimism and proactive coping. Here we might usefully differentiate between 'pure' pessimism (a fatalistic assumption of the worst) and strategic pessimism (anticipatory fault-finding and problem solving). One might struggle to find merit in the former; although, that said, Schopenhauer (1819) argued that one could

find a form of peace in learning to truly be without hope, in deeply accepting one's fundamental existential hopelessness. This argument is also central to traditions such as Buddhism (Hayes 2002), which perhaps explains why Eastern cultures are thought to be more comfortable with a pessimistic outlook (Uchida and Ogihara 2012). In any case, the value of strategic pessimism is more easily discerned: a pessimistic mind-set may prompt one to prepare for potential problems, thus lessening the likelihood of these actually eventuating. A veridical example of this is given by the astronaut Chris Hadfield (2013), who describes the training programme at NASA as involving endless simulations of 'bad-news scenarios' to provide practice in dealing with all conceivable mishaps. He argues that such 'pessimistic' repetitive contingency planning was highly valuable, enabling him to forge 'the strongest possible armor to defend against fear: hard-won competence' (p. 54).

4 Self-Esteem and Humility

Our second dichotomy is self-esteem and humility (close, if not perfect, antonyms). Generally, high levels of self-esteem are more conducive to wellbeing than low levels: a prospective study by Trzesniewski et al. (2006) found that adolescents with low self-esteem were liable to greater criminality, worse job prospects, and poorer mental and physical health in adulthood. However, there are parallels between the pitfalls of optimism and high self-esteem (indeed, self-esteem might almost be regarded as an optimism of the self). As with optimism, the risks of self-esteem were recognised by some PP scholars from the outset; for instance, Seligman (1995, p. 27) felt that widespread attempts by parents and teachers to boost self-esteem was 'making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression,' since children would likely suffer if and when their own positive self-appraisals were later punctured by the blunt realities of competitive life in adulthood. Moreover, inflated self-assessments can lead to people attempting tasks that exceed their capacities, leading potentially to failure; this can be particularly damaging if one's self esteem is contingent on extrinsic validation and achievement of these goals (Crocker and Park 2004). Further still, in combination with noxious qualities like narcissism, self-esteem can have a dark side, being linked to higher levels of aggression, particularly when inflated self-appraisals are threatened (Baumeister et al. 1996). There can even be health risks, since high self-esteem is linked to perceived invulnerability and consequent health-risk behaviours (Gerrard et al. 2000).

Conversely, there is value in humility. While this is not strictly an antonym of high self-esteem, it is often treated as such (Rowatt et al. 2002): etymologically, it derives from the Latin *humilis* (literally 'on the ground'), and is frequently taken to mean having a low opinion of oneself, as revealed by the contemptuous derivate 'humiliation' (being reduced to lowliness). However, Rowatt et al. argue that it involves a 'genuine modesty' that is of great value, characterised by 'respectfulness, willingness to admit imperfections, and a lack of self-focus or self-serving biases' (p. 198). For a start, many virtuous prosocial acts stem from such self-abnegation (Worthington 2007). Furthermore, the impact on the protagonist themselves may be even more profound. For instance, a central tenet of Buddhism is that an overweening sense of self (or ego), and a lack of due humility, is the root of suffering, generating noxious states like greed (seeking to reward the self) and hatred (for that which threatens the self). As such, the 'forgetting of the self' that characterises humility is a salve for these self-created poisons (Tangey 2005, p. 411). Going further, discussing the value of humility in the context of medical training, DasGupta (2008) suggests that it can enable one to become spiritually 'transfigured,' since it renders one receptive to qualities in the

world (like beauty) that a pre-occupation with self might otherwise cause one to overlook. However, from a dialectical point of view, self-esteem and humility need not be antonyms; it is possible to find a Hegelian synthesis of the two (a positive yet humble sense of self), e.g., through self-acceptance (Wong 1998).

5 Freedom and Restriction

The value of freedom—and related concepts such as self-determination—is almost axiomatic within PP, regarded as essential to wellbeing (Ryan and Deci 2000). Indeed, the torments that can occur if freedom is denied, such as in slavery, are undeniable. However, it has been suggested, notably by existentialist thinkers, that an *excess* of freedom, a life untrammelled by restrictions, can be troubling (Yalom 1980). Dostoevsky (1880) argued that freedom from religious proscriptions would erode morality ('everything is permitted'). Moreover, Kierkegaard (1834) felt that this 'dizzying' sense of unlimited possibilities could engender ontological 'dread,' since we must continually make choices that irrevocably shape our lives, and assume responsibility for the consequences; as Sartre (1952, p. 399) put it, people are 'condemned to be free.' Schwartz (2000, p. 79) offers a contemporary take on these insights, suggesting that 'excessive' freedom can be experienced 'as a kind of tyranny.' He critiques the ideology of rational-choice economic theory that forms the basis of our consumer-capitalist society, citing work which demonstrates that greater diversity of choice often leads to *lower* levels of subsequent satisfaction with the chosen item (Iyengar and Lepper 1999), perhaps in part as a result of greater scope for regret over the unselected options. While such troubles may be a luxury afforded by affluence, it does corroborate the existentialists' perceptive linking of freedom and anxiety.

Conversely, limiting one's freedom can be beneficial to wellbeing; paradoxically, it may even be liberating. Returning again to Buddhism, it is argued that restricting choice can perversely *create* freedom. For example, the rigid routines of monastic life are designed partly to alleviate the burden of the many inconsequential but incessant choices that dominate daily life (e.g., around what to eat or wear), thus freeing the mind to engage in the kind of 'non-conceptual and focused' attention that is so valued by meditators (Wright 2008, p. 14). The creation of routines—rigid patterns of behaviour that are adhered to regardless of the whims of passing moods—is valuable in other domains of life too, from education to physical health. For instance, regular exercise depends upon a person committing to a pattern of activity and keeping to this routine, even (or perhaps especially) in the face of occasional disinclination (Aarts et al. 1997). As shown so revealing by Mischel et al. (1989), wellbeing depends on being able to resist fleeting inclinations, on creating strategies to help override short-sighted desires. Only thus can one forgo more immediate satisfactions, and so pursue longer-term goals—from maintaining one's health to studying for qualifications—that are ultimately more beneficial. However, in considering freedom, it is again possible to achieve a higher Hegelian synthesis that brings together freedom and restriction. We can appreciate this by considering Frankl's (1963) distinction between 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'; the latter refers to a vital freedom of *attitude*, in which one has the courage to assert and pursue one's core values. Crucially, 'freedom to' can still exist under the most restrictive conditions, even—in Frankl's own tragic case—in wartime concentration camps. The above example of a Buddhist monastic is also illustrative in this regard (although of course, this latter example is a wholly different type of situation, being self-imposed and essentially benign).

6 Forgiveness and Anger

Turning now to prosocial qualities, an exemplar of which is forgiveness, are these not 'non-zero-sum' goods, beneficial to both giver and recipient? Forgiveness is indeed generally considered beneficial to the wellbeing of the forgiver (and the forgivee). For instance, forgiveness-based therapies have been successfully used to treat posttraumatic stress disorder following spousal abuse (Reed and Enright 2006). However, in certain contexts, forgiveness may be harmful, particularly if it means a person acquiesces to an invidious situation that they might otherwise be compelled to resist or change. This point has been made by McNulty and Fincham (2011)—who also highlight the need for a contextual approach to PP—through a summary of longitudinal studies on abusive relationships. These surveys suggest that people who make benevolent external attributions for their partner's abuse (explaining it away as a result of situational factors, like stress), and/or who are more forgiving of such transgressions, are at greater risk of on-going abuse. Needless to say, such studies are not engaging in victim-blaming, but are trying to help injured parties hold their aggressors to account; the real issue is of course is the injurious actions of their abuser. Nevertheless, such studies do highlight the fact that the value of prosocial qualities can often depend on context.

Conversely, while anger is often presented as a destructive emotion (Beck 1999), there are times when this might not only be a more appropriate response to wrongdoing than forgiveness, but one which may ultimately serve to better promote wellbeing in the long run. Leading this re-evaluation of anger is Tavris (1989), who argues that it is fundamentally a *moral* emotion, a response to an ethical/moral breach. Of course, this does not imply that all acts of anger are justified or proportionate. As Aristotle memorably phrased it (in his Nicomachean Ethics, circa 350 B.C.), it takes great skill to 'be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way.' Nor does it mean that anger is always virtuous; it can be selfish and/or antisocial (Haidt 2003). Nevertheless, as Haidt acknowledges, 'the motivation to redress injustices can also be felt strongly in third-party situations, in which the self has no stake' (p. 856). Thus, one can, and arguably *should*, feel outrage at iniquities such as oppression, and so 'demand retaliatory or compensatory action' on behalf of the victims. Indeed, one could argue that the great progressive movements of recent history, from civil rights to feminism, have been propelled by a 'righteous anger' that the world should and can be better than it is (Siegel 2009). Crucially, this does not mean fighting oppression through hate; as great leaders such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama have shown, it is possible to combat oppression while being guided by compassion and love, even for one's persecutors. As expressed by Dr Martin Luther King (2007, p. 345) in 1958, 'As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to make you hate him.'

7 Happiness and Sadness

For our final dichotomy, we turn to what is arguably the ultimate concern of PP, happiness itself. The pursuit of this ephemeral goal has been central to the field since its inception, and indeed has been valorised throughout human history, from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics to the American constitution. However, without denying the value of this goal, we can identify various issues here, including problems relating to both seeking and finding

happiness. In terms of seeking it, one issue is that one may be errant in one's pursuit, and chase the 'wrong' (i.e., relatively unfulfilling) forms of it. Central to PP is the distinction between hedonic 'subjective' wellbeing (Diener et al. 1999) and eudaimonic 'psychological' wellbeing (Ryff 1989), even if this binary division has been critiqued in recent years (e.g., Kashdan et al. 2008). Often implicit within this distinction is a qualitative value judgment, where eudamonic wellbeing is seen as deeper, more fulfilling, or in some inchoate way as simply better than hedonic varieties. Such judgments can be dated back at least as far as Aristotle who valorised eudaimonic happiness as an 'activity of the soul that expresses virtue,' while condemning mere hedonic pleasure as a 'life suitable to beasts' (cited in McMahon 2006). From this perspective, seeking hedonic happiness could be disadvantageous if it hindered one from seeking qualitatively richer states of wellbeing.

However, the notion of seeking wellbeing can itself be critiqued, as it has been observed in many quarters that the act of pursing happiness tends to render it ever more distant. As theorists such as Frankl (1963) have recognised, happiness may possibly never successfully be *directly* sought; rather, it tends to arise only as an oblique, mysterious by-product of engaging in other pursuits, such as a search for meaning. To quote Mill (1873, p. 100), 'those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness.' This same insight is found in Buddhism, where the desire for happiness is seen as the root of unhappiness: the very act of resisting the present and wishing for a better situation is what creates the dissatisfaction one hopes to alleviate. This wisdom has found its contemporary expression in Carver and Scheier's (1990) cybernetic self-regulation theory, in which dysphoria results from discrepancy between expectations and reality; yearning for happiness serves to widen this discrepancy, thus increasing dissatisfaction (a theory corroborated by empirical studies; e.g., Mauss et al. 2011). Such yearning may be exacerbated by cultural pressures that turn happiness into something approaching a social norm; indeed critical theorists have accused PP of perpetuating this very process, contributing to a 'tyranny of positive thinking' (Held 2002). The charge is that if happiness becomes expected, even obligatory, this can engender a climate of implicit blame and stigmatisation towards those who fail to achieve this goal, with unhappiness seen almost as a moral failure (Ahmed 2007; Ehrenreich 2009).

Beyond seeking happiness, our second issue here concerns, perversely, the unforeseen pitfalls of *being* happy (or at least believing that one is). The risks of attaining a modest amount of satisfaction is that it may lull one into thinking that life is as good as it *could* be. There is, for instance, a danger of becoming tranquilised and acquiescent to social contexts that ultimately undermine wellbeing through iniquities such as societal inequality. In this way, one may be beguiled by modest satisfactions into entering what Marxist theorists call 'false consciousness,' i.e., a state of mind that prevents us from acting in our own interests (Jost 1995). For instance, Marx's (1844) critique of religion was not that it was without value, but rather that its comforts (e.g., belief in the afterlife) lulled people into inaction; he thus urged people to relinquish these comforts in order to rise up against the oppressive social conditions that force people to *need* such comforts, and instead to seek and find justice and happiness here on earth: 'The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness' (p. 244). Perhaps one needs to feel discomfort in order to be compelled to create a better life—one that would ultimately be more conducive to wellbeing. Indeed, with so many people suffering worldwide through myriad torments, from poverty to war, should we even *want* to be happy? Some theorists have argued that we may actually be closer to the spirit of wanting humanity to flourish if we are angry, protesting against the state of the world. As Ahmed (2010, p. 223) puts it, 'revolutionary politics'—i.e., movements to change the world for the better, among which one might arguably include PP—must 'work hard to stay proximate to unhappiness.'

However, we must not suggest that dysphoria is only acceptable if it is useful. And it is here that we turn to sadness. Admittedly, people have argued that sadness has its merits, for example as an aesthetic emotion (Thoolen et al. 2009), or a sign of one's ethical sensitivity (Christiansen et al. 2010). For instance, sadness may arise as a compassionate response to the ubiquity of suffering in the world, a sorrow which moreover may fuel a personal sense of meaning and mission (as Shenk (2006) identified in relation to Abraham Lincoln, for example). However, the more important point is that sadness may be a profoundly *true* emotion, a genuine response to a tragic situation. For instance, for bereaved parents, intense experiences of grief are an expression of love, and indeed a 'way to maintain a connection to a beloved deceased child' (Thieleman and Cacciatore 2014, p. 6). As we asked above, in such a baleful situation, would one even *want* to feel differently? Would not happiness, or any such 'positive' state of mind, be thoroughly inappropriate? Thus, as Woolfolk (2002, p. 23) recognised, while flourishing no doubt involves elevating emotions such joy, when appropriate, it ought to also encompass the sensitivity to be 'touched or moved by the world… inextricably intertwined with a capacity to experience the sadness and pathos that emanates from the transitory nature of things.' However, there is currently a danger of PP—in its first wave incarnation—contributing to a cultural discourse in which 'negative' states like sadness are viewed, not as appropriate reactions to a troubling world, but as dysfunctions to be alleviated. Of course, therapeutic help should be given to people who want assistance to deal with negative states of mind. However, we enter troubling territory once we begin to pathologise these dimensions of human existence. As Horowitz and Wakefield (2007, p. 225) put it, sadness is 'an inherent part of the human condition, not a mental disorder.'

Unfortunately though, we do see a creeping medicalization of existence, where ordinary aspects of being human are treated as diseases to be medicated away (Szasz 1960). This can be troubling on multiple levels. It can alienate sufferers themselves, making them feel estranged from their suffering, and from humanity, as if they are flawed or broken. There can be more severe consequences too, such as the involuntary deprivation of freedom in psychiatric care (Matthews 2000). As such, PP must be wary of colluding in discourses that condemn and even pathologise negative experiences like sadness. Of course, it is to be welcomed that PP provides interventions that enable people, *if they wish*, to alleviate their distress and generate wellbeing. However, it is vital that PP does not imply that dysphoric states are inherently wrong. For one thing, this judgement may well compound such distress, leading sufferers to feel bad about feeling bad; in Buddhism, this is known as the 'two arrows' (Bhikkhu 2013)—one's initial distress (the first arrow) is wounding enough, but berating oneself over feeling distressed is a second arrow that compounds the suffering. Moreover, such states may bear important messages, in which one may find value: they may show us how much we care about someone or something, be a source of inspiration, or a font of meaning and even beauty. We shall see these ideas borne out in the next section, which focuses on the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth. However, we must also acknowledge that states of suffering may sometimes *not* bear any such positive messages or herald future beneficial changes, but may simply be distressing; but it is important for *that* to be ok too, as simply another dimension of human experience that we allow ourselves to feel.

8 Posttraumatic Growth

The five dichotomous case studies above have highlighted the dialectical 'principle of appraisal,' i.e., the difficulty in determining whether particular phenomena are positive or negative, since such a determination inextricably depends on context. In these final two

sections, we consider a related problem, the 'principle of co-valence,' which refers to the idea that many aspects of functioning and flourishing involve a complex balance of positive and negative elements. To illustrate this point, in this section we consider one such complex process that has attracted much interest within PP, namely posttraumatic growth (PTG). Prior to the identification of PTG, the distress burden presented by trauma had become increasingly acknowledged in psychology and medicine; for instance, the notion of posttraumatic stress disorder was introduced into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-III) by the American Psychiatric Association (1980) in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. However, soon after, scholars began to recognise that adverse traumatic events did not impact people equally; for instance, O'Leary and Ickovics (1994) identified four possible responses to adversity: succumbing (drastically impaired functioning); survival with impairment; resilience (returning to pre-adversity baseline levels of functioning); and thriving (people recovering to experience even higher levels of functioning than pre-adversity). Reflecting this last category, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) proposed the concept of PTG, which they define as 'positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises' (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, p. 1). Since then, a wealth of studies have corroborated the concept, with studies invariably finding that 'a majority' (percentages vary) of people suffering trauma experience some degree of PTG, with the trauma in question ranging from illness (e.g., Koutrouli et al. 2012) to natural disasters (Pooley et al. 2013).

The crucial point about PTG, from our SWPP perspective here, is that it is thoroughly dialectical, in a number of ways. At the most basic level, it is dialectical because positive changes are reported as arising out of a negative experience, or as Calhoun and Tedeschi (2013, p. 6) put it, are 'set in motion by the encounter with difficult life situations.' More specifically, PTG is associated with a number of positive changes—although it is by no means inevitable that a person will experience all, or indeed any, of these—including: increased personal strength (e.g., more creative, mature), enhanced relationships (closer and more appreciative), altered life philosophy (e.g., increased existential awareness and meaning-making, including finding meaning in the trauma), changed priorities (e.g., less focus on material goals, and greater appreciation of life), and enhanced spirituality. However, PTG is further dialectical in that it is an on-going process in which positive and negative are continually intertwined. It is not just a case of good following bad; studies indicate that PTG tends to co-evolve in conjunction with on-going distress (Dekel et al. 2012).

This co-evolution substantiates the more general point that well- and ill-being can co-exist, as Bassi et al. (2014) report in relation to persons with multiple sclerosis. Indeed, this notion of the co-presence of ill-being and wellbeing applies equally to people who have suffered trauma but who may not experience PTG. For these people, even if there is no 'growth' per se, there is still the task and the possibility of finding some degree of well-being after the event, even if this just means managing to survive and living to see another day, and perhaps enjoying the occasional moments of happiness and relief from their burdens. Moreover, in a broader sense, the imperative of attempting to flourish amidst the hardships of life extends beyond the notion of PTG. While only a subset of the population may encounter severe trauma—and only a certain percentage of these undergo PTG—arguably all people experience some degree of suffering in their lives. Indeed, schools of thought such as Buddhism suggest that suffering is a ubiquitous and universal aspect of life, at least until people attain certain peaks of psychospiritual development (Hayes 2002). As such, for the vast majority of humanity, a key existential challenge is to find some sense

of wellbeing in spite of the inevitable challenges that life throws, some precious light amidst the gloom.

Moreover, in PTG, distress and growth may not simply be co-present, but in some ways co-dependent. Consider the possibility of altered life philosophies and priorities: renewed appreciation of life is often founded upon the existentially challenging recognition of the fragility and fleetingness of life. It has even been argued that many character strengths cannot be cultivated—or at least only to a limited extent—without a person experiencing suffering and hardship (Wong 1995). As such, PTG, and flourishing more generally, is not only co-valenced, but demonstrates the 'principle of complementarity,' i.e., that wellbeing depends upon a complex balance and harmonisation of positive and negative. Of course, one does not need to suffer trauma to be able to appreciate this point; it is also true of arguably the most elevated of human experiences—love.

9 Love

We finish this paper by considering the inherently dialectical nature of love. As with PTG, we can see that this is thoroughly co-valenced, and is thus a further demonstration of the principle of complementarity. Before examining its dialectics, it is worth noting that there are many ways of looking at love, a term which encompasses a multitude of emotional relationships. Drawing on distinctions elucidated by thinkers at least as far back as classical Greece, Lee (1973) differentiated between six different 'types' of love: *eros* (romantic, passionate), *ludus* (flirtatious, playful), *storge* (filial, fraternal), *pragma* (rational, sensible), *mania* (possessive, dependent), and *agape* (unconditional, selfless). While such differentiations mean one should be wary of generalising about love, arguably most, if not all, of these types—possibly excepting *agape*—can be recognised as co-valenced, involving a dialectical blend of light and dark elements. There are many ways of viewing this dialectic, but all are essentially variations on the idea, expressed so eloquently by C.S. Lewis (1971) in *The Four Loves* that, 'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.' Love can be troubled by the vicissitudes of fate in all manner of ways, from enforced partings to the erosion of feelings over time. Even in love, one can be threatened by the fear of its loss, giving rise to complications in one's expressions of love, from anxiety to jealousy to anger. Somewhat pointedly, in their book *The Dark Side of Close Relationships*, Spitzberg and Cupach (1998, p. xiii) even claim that 'love and hate are indeed impossible to disentangle.' While this provocative suggestion will not apply to all instances of love—*storge*, *pragma* and *agape* all stand out as probable exceptions—it remains that love invariably and inevitably encompasses a spectrum of negative feelings that can be troubling to varying degrees.

However—and this is where the second wave appreciation of dialectics comes to the fore—the vulnerability and potential dysphoria that are arguably inherent in love are not aberrations, but the very condition of it. Such vulnerability is inseparable from love, they are two sides of the same coin; it is the condition one must enter into in order to be in love. This is because love essentially requires one to place one's fate in the hands of an 'Other,' whose actions cannot be controlled, and whose reciprocal love cannot be willed. And, as Levinas (1987, p. 88) puts it, it is this 'insurmountable duality of beings' that creates 'the pathos of love.' Love is thus fundamentally dialectical; a transcendent blend of joy and terror, safety and fear. It is for this reason that we have included love as an example of the 'principle of co-valence' rather than the 'principle of appraisal.' It would be possible, as

per the latter principle, to suggest that whether love is experienced as positive or negative depends upon the context (e.g., reciprocated vs. unrequited versions respectively). However, we have included it here in the context of discussing co-valence since the positive and negative aspects of love are arguably co-creating. For instance, the stronger and more intense one's love for a person, the greater the peril that one opens oneself up to (e.g., the heartbreak one would suffer if the relationship ended against one's will). As Bauman (2013, p. 6) memorably phrases it, 'to love means opening up to that most sublime of all human conditions, one in which fear blends with joy into an alloy that no longer allows its ingredients to separate.' This perspective on love arguably aligns with Delle Fave et al.'s (2011) notion of harmonization—definable as 'balancing opposite elements into a whole' (p. 199)—which was rated as the most important psychological component of happiness by participants themselves. As such, it could be argued that people intuitively understand and appreciate this point that many of our most valued and important experiences involve just this kind of dialectical balance, and nowhere more so than in the case of love.

10 Conclusion

This paper has provided a summary of SWPP—which, following Wong (2011), could equally be referred to as PP 2.0—which is above all characterised by appreciation of the dialectical nature of wellbeing (in conjunction with other subsidiary elements, such as a deep understanding of context). It was suggested that this dialectical appreciation centres on three key components: the principle of appraisal (the difficulty of categorising phenomena as either positive or negative), the principle of co-valence (the notion that many experiences involve a blend of positive and negative elements), and the principle of complementarity (the idea that wellbeing and flourishing depend upon a complex balance and harmonization of light and dark aspects of life). The principle of appraisal was demonstrated through five case studies of conceptual dichotomies, which revealed that an appraisal of the respective value of each of the polarities was dependent upon context. The principle of co-valence was shown through two case studies of complex processes, post-traumatic growth and love, which, while both being indicative of flourishing, involve a balance of positive and negative experiences. Together, both issues (of appraisal and co-valence) substantiate the broader issue of complementarity, which holds that flourishing depends on the delicate dialectic interaction of light and dark aspects of life. These considerations show the way in which PP is evolving and maturing as a discipline, and point the way ahead to future scholarship on the nature of wellbeing.

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