Chapter 11
Positive Psychology, Existential Psychology, and the Presumption of Egoism

Edwin E. Gantt and Jeffrey L. Thayne

Positive psychology and existential psychology are commonly thought to reflect radically different perspectives on the deep questions of the nature of human nature, what constitutes legitimate psychological inquiry, and the meaning of the good life. Indeed, in the view of many commentators, these two approaches not only reflect significantly different schools of psychological thought, but each denies certain key tenets and founding assumptions of the other. Nonetheless, there have been some attempts to identify some common philosophical ground that these two traditions might share (see, e.g., Bretherton and Ørner 2003; Resnick et al. 2001; Wong 2010). For example, positive psychology's emphasis on human beings as self-determining agents (Deci and Vansteenkiste 2004; Ryan and Deci 2000) can be seen as similar in some ways to the existentialist claim that human beings are fundamentally autonomous agents who are by their very nature "condemned to be free" (Sartre 1956). Often, however, attempts to establish conceptual commonality between positive psychology and existential (and other humanistic) approaches have been greeted with suspicion by those who see such attempts as amounting to a sort of "papering-over" of important philosophical and practical differences (see, e.g., Friedman 2008; Held 2004; Peterson 2006; Slife and Richardson 2008; Taylor 2001). Although the debate over these issues continues, there can be little doubt that the perception that these two schools of thought embody rival intellectual visions with conflicting aims persists in the minds of many psychologists.

E. E. Gantt (✉) · J. L. Thayne
1086 SWKT, Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, USA
e-mail: ed_gantt@byu.edu

J. L. Thayne
e-mail: ed_gantt@byu.edu

J. L. Thayne
264 W 1395 S, Logan, UT 84621, USA

A. Batthyany and P. Russo-Netzer (eds.), *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology*, DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5_11,

In the analysis that follows, we will identify and discuss three important ways in which positive psychology and existential psychology seem to differ. In particular, we will examine positive psychology's commitment to studying the conditions of happiness, its heavy reliance on traditional methods of empirical research, and its advocacy of a scientifically grounded "calculus of well-being" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 11) whose prescriptive purpose is to actively bring about a greater measure of happiness and flourishing in people's lives. In contrast, we will examine existential psychology's notion that suffering has a central role in a life of genuine significance, its deep skepticism of the ability of traditional scientific approaches to adequately capture human subjectivity and meaning, and its rejection of any utopic vision of human flourishing that is grounded in hedonism and its ethical precepts.

We will also argue, however, that beneath these significant conceptual and practical differences, both positive and existential psychologies share a thorough-going commitment to an egoistic depiction of human nature. That is, both approaches focus their conceptual efforts *inward*, looking to the *self* as the center of human action and relationships. In short, we will argue that positive psychology and existential psychology have a crucial and often overlooked commonality at their core that is *not* merely a "papering-over" of essential differences, nor an attempt to superficially reconcile two radically different intellectual traditions. As such, both traditions are fundamentally inadequate for addressing human relationships in terms that donot reduce the relevance and value of others to an instrumental value to the self.

A Brief Look at Positive Psychology

Although positive psychology has historical roots that stretch back at least to the work of William James (Gable and Haidt 2005), the contemporary positive psychology movement is of relatively recent origin and was primarily initiated (and named) by Seligman (1999) in his role as president of the American Psychological Association. As Seligman tells it, a few months after being elected president of the APA he came to the realization that, for various reasons, and at least since the conclusion of World War II, psychology had been neglecting two of its three major disciplinary missions: curing mental illness, making the lives of all people more productive and fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). A great deal of disciplinary effort in the post-World War II years had been expended on the diagnosis, treatment, and scientific study of mental illness, and significant strides were being made toward curing (or at least effectively managing) the human psychological and emotional suffering brought on by mental illness. However, "the other two fundamental missions of psychology—making the lives of all people better and nurturing genius—were all but forgotten" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 6).

In response to such neglect, Seligman (1999) called for "the creation of a new science of positive psychology" that would serve as a sort of "'Manhattan Project' for the social sciences" (p. 562). This new project would, Seligman (1999) claimed, be directed not only at finding ways to prevent serious mental illness, but also hold "the potential to create, as a direct effect, an understanding and a scientifically informed practice of the pursuit of the best things in life and of family and civic virtue" (p. 562). In short, Seligman sought nothing less than "launching a science and a profession whose aim is the building of what makes life most worth living" (p. 562). The aim of positive psychology is, therefore, to "begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 5). From such inspirational beginnings, the modern positive psychology movement was initiated and has, with quite astonishing speed, become a serious intellectual force in contemporary psychology and psychotherapy, one that is not only achieving considerable influence throughout the social sciences but also in fields as diverse as business management, organizational leadership, education, and even health care (e.g., Gilman et al. 2009; Houston 2006; Linley et al. 2010; Lopez and Snyder 2009).

Identifying the Conditions of Happiness

If painted with a very broad brushstroke, positive psychology is simply the study of the conditions of happiness and well-being in order to better understand the nature of what Seligman (2003) has called "the pleasant life" (p. 127). It is, as Gable and Haidt (2005) put it, "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). Providing an even more specific definition, one that identifies three distinct but interlocking levels of analysis, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggest the following:

> The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p. 5)

And, in the words of Sheldon and King (2001), positive psychology is "nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues," and, thus, "positive psychology revisits 'the average person,' with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving" (p. 216).

Ultimately, a scientific enterprise of this sort is geared toward the accumulation of "knowledge of what makes life worth living" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 5). As Peterson (2006) has described it, "positive psychology is the

scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth to death and at all stops in between … It is the study of what we are doing when we are frittering life away" (p. 4). As such, positive psychologists direct much of their research effort to elucidating both the sources of and obstacles to the individual's widest possible experience of positive emotions and experiences. In so doing, the positive psychology movement reflects an overall commitment to the "study of the relations among enabling conditions, individual strengths, institutions, and outcomes" in order to develop an "empirical matrix" for describing "what enabling conditions lead to what kind of outcomes" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, pp. 11–12).

Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, especially given the sweeping nature of Seligman's call-to-arms, it often seems that anyone who is doing empirical research on a subject not directly related to negative emotions or psychopathology considers themselves part of the positive psychology movement, and quite disparate figures with widely varying theoretical backgrounds do not hesitate to present themselves as part of a unified new approach to psychological study. Thus, one often sees evolutionary and social and humanistic psychologists, all of whom typically espouse widely different conceptions of what it means to be human, nonetheless adopting the label of positive psychology for what they do, simply because they focus their research on the question of human happiness, and despite their differing conceptions of what happiness actually is and why it is important. A probable reason for this curious coalition of effort may be that, while approaching the study of human flourishing and the good life from quite divergent theoretical perspectives, these researchers are nonetheless united by a prior, and in many ways far deeper, epistemological commitment to the methods, assumptions, and practices of traditional experimental psychology.

Reliance on Empirical Methods

Although the overarching vision of positive psychology demands that contemporary psychology carefully reflects on its most basic disciplinary goals and radically adjusts its all-too-narrow and overly negative research focus, this re-visioning of the discipline "does not demand a fundamental paradigm shift in psychology" (Jørgensen and Naftstad 2004, p. 29). That is to say, "when it comes to doing specific research, positive psychology connects to mainstream psychology" and, therefore, the project of positive psychology does not require any fundamental epistemological or methodological changes to be made (Jørgensen and Naftstad 2004, p. 29). Indeed, despite their call for a systematic re-thinking of the principles and aims of contemporary psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) nonetheless clearly state:

> Such a science will not need to start afresh. It requires for the most part just a redirecting of scientific energy. … These same methods and in many cases the same laboratories and the next generation of scientists, with a slight shift of emphasis and funding, will be used to measure, understand, and build those characteristics that make life most worth living. (p. 13)

Positive psychology's call, then, is not so much to re-invent the methodological wheel of mainstream psychology, but to employ the same empirical methods to answer different questions—questions about human happiness and flourishing rather than mental illness and dysfunction.

Thus, from the outset, advocates of positive psychology have "striven to ensure that positive psychology is a discipline characterized by good empirical science" (Joseph and Linley 2006, p. 36). And, although there is occasionally a passing mention of some of the epistemological limitations of an empirical (i.e., experimental) approach to psychological investigation, most positive psychologists would no doubt "fully agree that scientific pedigree should be a hallmark of positive psychology research and practice" (Joseph and Linley 2006, p. 36; see also, Ong and van Dulmen 2007). For example, while Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) acknowledge that the call to focus on human happiness is at least partly indebted to the work of the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow—who declared that "the science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than the positive side" (Maslow 1954, p. 354) and invited psychologists to refocus themselves onto questions of human happiness—they distance positive psychology from its humanistic roots because, they explain, although the "generous humanistic vision had a strong effect on the culture at large and held enormous promise … humanistic psychology did not attract much of a cumulative empirical base" (p. 7).

Thus, although the vision of positive psychology reflects certain humanistic or existentialist influences (Taylor 2001), it has nonetheless distinguished itself through its firm commitment to a natural scientific and experimental approach to addressing questions of the nature of happiness and human flourishing. As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) emphatically responded to early skepticism about their vision for positive psychology, "We are, unblushingly, scientists first. The work we seek to support and encourage must be nothing less than replicable, cumulative, and objective" (p. 89). Similarly, Snyder et al. (2011) echo this sentiment when they write that "the greatest good can come from a positive psychology that is based on the latest and most stringent research methods" and "an enduring positive psychology must be built upon scientific principles" (p. 6).

A central assumption of the positive psychology movement is that careful empirical observation and precise measurement of behavior are necessary to ensure an objective and unbiased account of human psychological functioning and the conditions that produce human flourishing (see, e.g., Kahneman et al. 1999). Indeed, as Peterson (2006) has stated:

> The goals of positive psychology are description and explanation as opposed to prescription. The underlying premise of positive psychology is prescriptive in that it says that certain topics *should* be studied: positive experiences, positive traits, and enabling institutions. But once the study begins, it needs to be hard-headed and dispassionate. The routes to the good life are an empirical matter. (p. 15; italics in the original)

Presumably, then, positive psychology's principle contribution to the world's millennia-long intellectual discussion about what exactly it is that constitutes the good life, and how such a life might best be achieved, is the application of the

rigorous methods of science and objective measurement to the study of human action and psychological life (see, e.g., Diener et al. 2009).

The Calculus of Well-being

Interestingly, it is at this point that the goals of positive psychology begin to turn in a more prescriptive direction. Many positive psychologists are committed to employing the techniques and methods of empirical science so as to actively bring about a greater measure of happiness and flourishing in people's lives. As Sheldon (2011) notes, positive psychology is not only the scientific study of optimal human functioning, "it aims to discover and *promote* the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive" (p. 427; italics added). Likewise, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggested that someday "positive psychology might become a prescriptive discipline like clinical psychology, in which the paths out of depression, for example, are not only described, but also held to be desirable" (p. 12). Indeed, according to Peterson (2006), "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" (p. 16). Of course, Peterson recognizes that not all the facts that objective science is likely to discover will be pleasant ones, but nonetheless the process "will be of value precisely because it provides an appropriately nuanced view of the good life" (p. 16).

At first glance, it may seem that Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) stated hope that in time "positive psychology might become a prescriptive discipline" (p. 12) is in conflict with its own methodological commitment to objective description and measurement. Such conflict is, perhaps, more apparent than real. That is, positive psychologists would likely argue that once the objective facts of human flourishing have been properly documented via rigorous experimental investigation, then—and only then—will it become possible to legitimately (i.e., rationally) formulate and implement the sorts of positive interventions that Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi might envision. In the end, then, the necessary foundation for all positive psychological practice that would facilitate human flourishing can only be that which is first laid down by means of careful measurement and the rigorous application of objective methods of scientific inquiry. Indeed, as Peterson (2006) also points out, "whether what seems positive is always desirable is also an empirical question" (p. 15). Presumably, once the empirical questions have been adequately answered, positive psychology can take up its prescriptive purpose in full earnest and begin assisting psychology in more adequately fulfilling its two, as of yet, unfinished disciplinary missions: making the lives of all people more fulfilling and nurturing genius. It would seem, then, that the legitimacy of positive psychology's prescriptive prospects hinges on establishing its credentials as an objective psychological science first.

A Brief (Contrastive) Look at Existential Psychology

In contrast to positive psychology's intellectual indebtedness to modern science and experimentalism, existential psychology traces its conceptual and practical roots to the rich philosophical traditions of European existentialism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. The Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) is usually cited as the founder of existential philosophy, although Friedrich Nietzsche and Fyodor Dostoyevsky are also credited as important nineteenth century sources. Responding to what he regarded as the intellectual aloofness of Enlightenment rationalism, particularly as found in the work of Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard argued that philosophy—indeed, all of Western culture and religion—had lost sight of the concrete individual who is continuously grappling with the question of meaning and purpose. According to Kierkegaard, in its unrelenting pursuit of rational detachment and scientific objectivity, the modern world has become one in which as individual persons are relegated to being little more than cogs in the grand machine of nature, inexorably caught up in the grand sweep of history and progress, pushed along by powerful forces beyond their understanding and outside of their control. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche speak of the "leveling" of the modern world, wherein the individual is first seduced to and then subsumed by "the crowd" (Kierkegaard's term), goaded along by the "herd instinct" and living according to the pale and lifeless dictates of the "herd morality" (Nietzsche's terms). To counter the leveling tendencies of modernity, Kierkegaard felt that "it was imperative that philosophy address itself to the concrete existence of the individual person and attempt to elucidate the fundamental themes with which human beings invariably struggle" (Valle et al. 1989, p. 6).

This same concern for modernity's diminishment of the individual *as* individual is also present in the work of one of the twentieth century's most important influences on existential thought, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, as well as elsewhere, Heidegger wrote at length on the dangers of "inauthenticity" and "the they-self" or *Das Man* (1996, see, e.g., pp. 107–168). In a way that is clearly reminiscent of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Heidegger "describes how we get caught up in the "they" (*Das Man*), thereby forgetting our own individuality as we follow the dictates and 'common sense' of anonymous 'authorities'" (Halling and Dearborn Nill 1995, p. 10). Heidegger intricately describes the way in which we so easily, even naturally, fall prey to the intricate system of daily living (i.e., society), fascinated by and entertaining ourselves with a variety of transient matters (e.g., careerism, gossip, celebrity watching, unreflectively participating in social rituals, etc.) in such a way that we lose sight of our own possibilities for meaningful (authentic) living. Similarly, Sartre (1956), perhaps the most widely recognized of the existential philosophers, wrote extensively about the pitfalls of what he called "bad faith" (see, e.g., Part One, Chapter Two). For Sartre, bad faith is a kind of project of self-deception in which, in order to provide ourselves with excuses to absolve ourselves of our fundamental responsibility for the choices we make, we take a third-person stance (i.e., an external,

presumably objective and detached, or scientific perspective) toward ourselves. In this third-person stance, we choose (ironically) to regard ourselves as essentially passive objects, the helpless victims of impersonal circumstance, rather than as the active, meaning-making agents that we in fact are.

The existential perspectives of these and other philosophers first began to exert a significant influence on contemporary psychology, especially in the United States, with the appearance of the writings of such psychologists and therapists as Frankl (1963, 1965), Boss (1963), Binswanger (1962), May (1960, 1969), Laing (1959), and van Kaam (1966) in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, May et al. (1958) landmark volume, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, launched existential psychology as a prominent and important branch of the larger humanistic, or third-force movement, in psychology. Indeed, it was the publication of this book, and its unexpected popularity, that led to many further translations of works by European psychologists and philosophers that had to that point been available almost exclusively in the original German or French editions. A further sign of increasing interest in the existential perspective in psychology was the founding of a doctoral program in Existential-Phenomenological Psychology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1962.

Perhaps the most recent and influential figure in existential psychotherapy is Irvin Yalom, whose text *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980), along with numerous other best-selling works over the past few decades, articulates a form of dynamic psychotherapy that emphasizes the "conflict that flows from the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence" (p. 8). By the phrase "givens of existence," Yalom (1980) means to draw attention to the fact that each of us, simply because we are human beings, operates within and must face certain "ultimate concerns, certain intrinsic properties that are a part, and an inescapable part, of the human being's existence in the world" (p. 8). The ultimate concerns to which Yalom devotes his attention are death, freedom, responsibility, anxiety, isolation, and meaninglessness. Each of us, Yalom (1980) contends, "craves perdurance, groundedness, community, and pattern; and yet we must all face inevitable death, groundlessness, isolation, and meaninglessness" (p. 485). He argues that because of these givens of existence, "existential therapy is based on a model of psychopathology which posits that anxiety and its maladaptive consequences are responses to these four ultimate concerns" (p. 485). Thus, the existential psychotherapist's principle task is "to help the patient face and reconcile his or her longing for immortality, security, belonging, and ultimate purpose with the hard realities of the human condition" (Halling and Dearborn Nill 1995, p. 32).

Embracing Suffering

Existential psychologists are often critical of positive psychology for what they take to be its systemic failure to acknowledge the centrality of suffering in human existence and the possibility that suffering holds for the creation of a life

of genuine meaning (see, e.g., Jacobsen 2007; van Deurzen 2009; see also Frankl 1965). In turn, positive psychologists sometimes decry what they see as the existentialist's obsessive celebration of suffering, claiming that it is just one more example—like that other dismal European psychology, Freudianism—of a privileging of the dreary, the negative, and the "rotten-to-the-core view" that pervades so much of modern psychology (Seligman 2003, p. 126). Such critique, however, ignores the fact that existential psychologists readily admit that "every human being fosters ideas of happiness and entertains hopes for a happy life" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 23), and so deem the study of the experience and conditions of happiness an important one. Still, existentialists are quick to note a difference in how happiness is understood from their perspective. That is, existential psychologists believe that positive psychologists (like other humanistic psychologists) "tend to disregard the reality of suffering and its importance for their concept of happiness, whereas existential psychologists tend to incorporate suffering in their concept of happiness" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 28). For the existential psychologist, rather than just finding ways to minimize suffering by maximizing possibilities for, and quantities of, happiness, "what is important for our everyday life quality and life satisfaction is how we *relate* to the unavoidable amount of suffering that permeates our lives in numerous ways" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 30; italics in the original).

Some existentialists have proposed a distinction between two very different kinds of happiness: bliss and deep happiness. The concept of bliss, as Jacobsen (2007) defines it, refers to "a state of mind during which the individual feels that all essential needs have been fulfilled and that all essential goals have been reached. The individual feels fulfilled and in some cases even merged with the surroundings or nature itself" (p. 37). Such an experience is not unlike that which Csikszentmihalyi (1991) has described as "optimal experience" or "flow," wherein we become totally absorbed in what we are doing, enjoying fully the sense of peace and harmony that accompanies high levels of performance. Indeed, according to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002), "viewed through the experiential lens of flow, *a good life is one that is characterized by complete absorption in what one does*" (p. 89; italics in the original).

For the existential psychologist, however, this sort of understanding reflects not only an overly narrow conception of what genuine happiness really is but also a profound misunderstanding of what the good life really means. Thus, in contrast, the existentialist sees genuine or "deep happiness" as a "prolonged state of balance between the individual's wishes, goals, and needs on the one hand, and the surroundings or the world on the other" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 37). That is, deep happiness reflects the "ability to integrate the joy and the suffering of your life into a long and enduring relationship with the world marked by composed, joyous serenity" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 40). Although, at first glance, suffering may seem the very negation of happiness, from the existentialist perspective "'happiness' without suffering does not make room for living in the deepest sense of the word, real living" (Jacobsen 2007, p. 36). Thus, in the words of Frankl (1965), "*human life can be fulfilled not only in creating and enjoying, but also in suffering*" and "life can reach nobility even as it founders on the rocks" (p. 106; italics in the original).

Skepticism of Traditional Objectivist Methods

Clearly, studying the conditions and meaning of human flourishing, happiness, and suffering from an existentialist perspective requires a far greater willingness to entertain and legitimize an explicitly philosophical outlook and approach than is commonly the case in mainstream psychology. Indeed, one of the principle ways in which existential psychology and positive psychology differ is in their respective appraisals of and commitment to traditional empirical methods of psychological research and explanation. Existentialism has long been noted for its skepticism of natural science methods and assumptions in psychology (see, e.g., Valle 1998). Denunciations of naïve scientism, and its attendant uncritical application of empirical methods to the study of human beings, are a common feature of much existentially themed work in psychology (e.g., Burston and Frie 2006; Hanscomb 2006; Hoeller 1994; Schneider and May 1995; Valle 1998; Valle and Halling 1989). For example, although usually located in the phenomenological tradition, the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) (nonetheless captured nicely the perspective shared by most existential psychologists when he wrote:

> Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. (p. ix)

The point here is that whereas existentialism begins by affirming the fundamentally inescapable first-person nature of all experience—and, thus, the primacy of the subjective for any viable understanding of what it means to be human—mainstream psychology seeks to understand human action in a very different manner—i.e., from the objectivist standpoint. That is, in much of contemporary psychology, human beings are taken to be little more than the lawfully governed products of a vast causal network, explicable primarily (perhaps even exhaustively) in terms of the impersonal interactions of variables existing in some detectable quantities within the natural world (Hanscomb 2006).

From the existentialist perspective, such an approach is not only problematic because it reduces the fundamental reality of creative subjectivity to a set of objectively measureable behaviors, attitudes, or cognitive capacities, but also dangerous because it ultimately robs us of the most important feature of our subjectivity: free will. By adopting the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences as the primary tool for studying human beings, scientific psychology ironically cuts itself off from the fundamentally dynamic and meaningful core of human existence that it is necessary to understand in order to truly illuminate who and how human beings are. The irony here, especially for a positive psychology that trumpets the central importance of human self-determination (see, e.g., Deci and Vansteenkiste 2004; Linley and Joseph 2004; Ryan and Deci 2000), is that in hitching their investigative wagon to the objectivist methods of traditional science (and the implicit deterministic assumptions of such methods), positive psychologists endorse a fundamentally incoherent intellectual

position. That is, in spite of claiming to study an active and self-directing entity, once traditional scientific methods of investigation and interpretation have been adopted, this entity can only be understood in the context of a research paradigm firmly grounded in the language of passivity and efficient causality characteristic of a science of natural objects.

This commitment to a language of passivity and efficient causality can be readily seen in the way that so much of the research focus of positive psychology is aimed at identifying the essentially causal conditions that produce human flourishing, subjective well-being, and competence. Indeed, teasing apart the causal contributions of the various variables that happen to be in play is taken to be one of the primary reasons for employing experimental methods in the first place. Thus, insofar as positive psychology clings to the methods and assumptions of traditional experimental science, it must release its grip on the idea that human beings are proactive and self-determining agents capable of genuinely choosing particular ways of living and relating. In seeking to secure an objective account of human behavior, scientific psychology—of which positive psychology is but one example—both reduce the primacy of subjectivity and overlook its fundamental contributions to all human action. Further, by approaching the active human subject as a passive natural object governed by impersonal and mechanical laws and principles, scientific psychology relegates persons to an ontological category of "things that are acted upon," and which are, as such, continually at the mercy of powerful natural and social forces of which they are seldom if ever truly aware (Martin et al. 2003).

In contrast to this view, the existential psychologist affirms the primacy of human subjectivity and the inescapable nature of freedom of choice, not only for a proper psychological understanding of human nature but also for the possibility of living a properly human life. Indeed, "Man's particular nature," the noted existentialist Tillich (1990) wrote, "is his power to create himself" and "the power of deciding makes men human" (pp. 40 and 44). In the existentialist view, then, the clearest freedom we possess is the freedom to choose, to act or not act, to adopt or reject particular attitudes and desires as we navigate the ups and downs of daily living, inevitably confronting both our own mortality and the uniqueness of our situation in the world. Just as profound as our capacity to choose in the moment of the here and now particular goals, purposes, and meanings for the future, is our capacity to "separate from others, to transcend our past, and to become distinct, unique, and heroic" (Schneider and Krug 2010, p. 14).

Ultimately, what this means for the existentialist perspective is that any psychology that does not take sufficient account of the reality of human freedom in its theories, its methods, and its therapeutic practices, will be a psychology that fundamentally misunderstands the nature of its own object of study. To avoid such consequences, existential psychology would maintain that what is required is an ontologically sophisticated reconsideration of not only the basic nature of human subjectivity but also a careful re-examination of the objectivistic methods of scientific psychology itself. In the end, existential psychologists would argue that unless such basic ontological and epistemological reflection is done, and a more viable

understanding of human nature and experience is formulated to guide psychological study, we run the very real risk of not knowing what it really is that we are very busy measuring (Jacobsen 2007).

Rejecting the Calculus of Well-being

Finally, as noted earlier, positive psychology not only positions itself as the scientific study of optimal human functioning, but also "aims to discover and *promote* the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive" (Sheldon 2011, p. 427; italics added). Here too, however, the existential perspective stands in stark contrast to that of positive psychology, especially insofar as existentialism calls into question the common assumption that human rationality—particularly in the guise of objectivist science—can provide a sure guide to a life of meaning. While existential psychologists do not shy away from the prescriptive nature of the psychological and psychotherapeutic enterprise, they nonetheless firmly reject the notion that scientific reason can be the final arbiter of what might constitute the good life and the means for achieving it. Indeed, against the commonly accepted claim—at least among positive psychologists—that scientific psychology can provide us with not only the facts of existence but an objective map of what is best in life and guidance on how exactly to obtain it, existential psychology counters that no such objectivity is possible. The so-called "facts" of human life, existentialism maintains, are intrinsically value-laden expressions of meaning that we generate for ourselves to suit certain specific purposes we have chosen. For the existentialist, then, the question of the good life and the meaning of human flourishing must always remain a deeply personal one, inherently philosophical and spiritual in nature.

Further, existential psychologists would argue that adherents of the positive psychology movement have not been sufficiently reflective regarding their own founding values and philosophical assumptions. Because of this, they have adopted both an objectifying research paradigm that obscures the reality of human freedom and an interpretive framework wherein human behavior is explicable primarily (if not solely) in terms of the drive to maximize personal satisfaction and minimize pain. Indeed, because of this seldom questioned interpretive framework, most positive psychologists assume it to be an objective fact (revealed by the data of scientific research) that the good life of human flourishing is simply the life in which personal satisfaction is facilitated and maximized even as suffering and frustration are abated.

Here, however, the existentialist would point out that because of the pervasiveness of the pre-investigatory commitment to hedonistic explanation, positive psychology's presumably objective scientific findings regarding the undeniable desirability of the "pleasant life" (Seligman 2003, p. 127), the conditions of human flourishing, and nature of the good life, are not quite so objective after all. Indeed, the existentialist would likely argue that as a fundamentally philosophical

and ethical doctrine the truth of hedonism is not the sort of thing one can discover empirically, it is not the sort of thing that falls on the retinae of one's eyes, so to speak. Rather, it reflects a particular values stance rather than an objective fact of the world. Thus, existential psychology greets positive psychology's "data-driven" and presumably "objective" claims about what constitutes the good life and how it is to best be attained with deep suspicion, regarding the whole project as a sort of naïve and instrumentalist form of utopianism—and, thus, not at all the sort of science it purports to be.

Egoism: Conceptual Common Ground

Despite the often wide intellectual gulf that seems to separate positive psychology and existential psychology on many conceptual and practical issues, there is nevertheless at least one basic philosophical feature both traditions have in common: egoism. That is, both positive and existentialist psychologies manifest it as a deep and abiding commitment to a fundamentally egoistic depiction of human nature insofar as both approaches focus their adherents *inward*, looking to the *self* as the fundamental starting point for research, understanding, and meaning. Although both these schools of psychology differ in exactly how they characterize the nature of the self and how it is to be nurtured therapeutically, both traditions firmly assert the primacy of the individual self in the origins, purposes, and meanings of behavior. Thus, while we are clearly dealing with two different schools of psychological thought that have spawned two very different sets of therapeutic practices, each nonetheless derives its basic conceptions of the nature of human nature from the philosophy of egoism.

To begin with, however, it is important to be clear that we are not using "egoism" here as a synonym for either hedonism or psychological egoism. Strictly speaking, hedonism is the "view that pleasure (including the absence of pain) is the sole intrinsic good in life" (Audi 1999, p. 364). And, while most positive psychologists would likely agree with such a claim, even as most existentialists would reject it, we believe that hedonism is ultimately a secondary matter, and one that only arises in light of a deeper and prior commitment to a belief in the ontological primacy of the self. Further, egoism as we intend the term is not to be confused with the concept of psychological egoism, which is chiefly a "view about people's motives, inclinations, or dispositions" that postulates, as a matter of fact, that "people always do what they believe is in their self-interest and, human nature being what it is, they cannot do otherwise" (Audi 1999, p. 255). While, again, there is likely to be a theoretical split (along more or less clear "party lines") between positive psychologists and existentialists as to whether the claim of psychological egoism is in fact the case, we do not wish to address the question of motivation and self-interest here. Rather, we wish to draw attention to the way in which both schools of thought, in their respective accounts of human nature and purpose, privilege the individual ego or self.

In addition to making clear the distinction between egoism, on the one hand, and hedonism and psychological egoism, on the other, it is also important to head off one other possible avenue of misunderstanding. In arguing that both positive psychology and existential psychology offer accounts of human beings that privilege the self, we are *not* suggesting that all adherents to these perspectives necessarily advocate taking a self-absorbed and manipulative approach to human relationships in order to achieve the good life. While an instrumentalist ethic may well be an inescapable feature of both positive and existential psychology—and insightful analyses by both Slife and Richardson (2008) and Guignon (1993), among others, strongly suggest such to be the case—this does not mean that proponents of these schools are suggesting that either optimal experience or deep happiness comes about by selfishly treating other people as objects, mere means to our own ends. Indeed, many scholars identified with the two movements have taken pains to argue just the opposite (see, e.g., May 1969; Myers 2004; Seligman 2002; Yalom 2002).

Nonetheless, despite the confident assurances of such authors, coming to see others and our relationships with them as essentially the instrumental tools or means by which we are able to accomplish our own deepest desires for individual fulfillment, self-realization, or authenticity is difficult to avoid—if not impossible—given the hedonic tone of positive psychological theory or the individualistic bent of much existential psychology. For example, David G. Myers (2004), writing in *Positive Psychology in Practice*, remarked that "*when individualism is taken to an extreme, individual well-being can become its ironic casualty*" (p. 650; italics in the original). That is to say, living one's life selfishly and manipulatively, *as though* the only person who really matters is oneself, will almost surely result in frustration, alienation, and emptiness. A more enlightened—but no less instrumental—approach to individual fulfillment and well-being, Myers and others suggest, is to treat the people around us with kindness, respect, courtesy, and compassion. Otherwise, those people are bound to respond to us in ways that will sabotage our efforts toward fulfillment and self-realization. In other words, because our own well-being can be placed in jeopardy by not attending to the needs or concerns of others we are best served by attending to those needs. In the end, concern for others is instrumentally central to achieving our own ends.

For present purposes, however, the question is not so much whether hedonism is present or psychological egoism is assumed in either positive psychology or existential psychology. Rather, the central issue at the moment is the way in which both traditions ground their accounts of personhood and the good life—whether it is one of optimal performance, subjective well-being, or existential authenticity—in the fundamental individuality of the self.

From the perspective of positive psychology, the central unit of analysis is the *individual self*, variously understood as a self-determining organism, a nexus of causal influences in the environment and in biology, and a seeker of optimal functioning who is intrinsically capable of such functioning. From this perspective, the object of study, the target of social or therapeutic interventions, and the aim of living are all the same thing: individual, subjective well-being, and flourishing. Against this backdrop, the moral and social context of community, family,

friends, culture, and history are of secondary importance and play only subsidiary roles. That is, such things are of interest primarily insofar as they either facilitate or inhibit the well-being of the individual. The social, historical, moral, and physical world in which we find ourselves is, in the positive psychological view, to be understood almost entirely as a set of "conditions" (most often causal in nature) that either serve to constrain or promote the individual's achievement of a state of optimal functioning and well-being. Conversely, the individual self is seen as (somewhat confusingly) both the site at which certain environmental, biological, social, and cognitive forces play themselves out and produce contentment and flourishing for the individual *and* the originative source of decision-making in the setting of goals and the pursuit of happiness.

Similarly, in existential psychology, with the notable exception of the logotherapeutic perspective of Frankl (1960, 1965), the individual is usually taken to be the structural starting point for philosophical analysis, therapeutic engagement, and the conceptualization of authentic meaning and experience. The individual self as a fundamentally isolated being who, though alone and alienated in a chaotic world, and threatened at every turn with the death of meaning, is nonetheless at every moment freely choosing from myriads of self-generated possibilities, captures the ontological heart of the existentialist perspective. We have been thrust, Schneider and Krug (2010) state, into "a world of dazzling incomprehensibility" (p. 14) where our only recourse is to accept our capacity for free choice, and, thereby, authentically engage in the process that ultimately gives our life its unique meaning (Schneider and Krug 2010). Because we are fundamentally free and isolated beings, responsibility for our miseries and joys, boredoms and excitements, sufferings and salvations rests solely and inexorably on our own shoulders as the willing individuals who created them. While the external world of others and things may place some constraints on the particular characteristics or style of the expression of one's will, the fact of ultimate freedom and responsibility are the inescapable bedrock of the existential psychological worldview.

Thus, in the end, although it is clear that the theoretical (and ethical) visions, as well as practices, of positive psychology and existential psychology differ in a number of important ways, the two traditions nonetheless share a very basic and pervasive commitment to egoism. Because of this foundational philosophical commitment, each perspective regards the individual self—and its needs and desires – to be of primary investigatory, explanatory, therapeutic, and moral importance. Consequently, that which is exterior to the self—e.g., other people, the natural world, communities, religious and political traditions, families, etc. – is regarded as being of ancillary value or significance, their importance determined primarily in terms of their relevance to the aims and projects of the self. While this does not necessarily imply that the individual's relationship with others must always be an overtly manipulative or exploitative one, it does imply that the individual self comes first in the overall scheme of things—and, insofar as that is the case, whether overly manipulative or not, all relationships into which the self might enter must be characterized by their instrumental nature. Thus, while the needs and concerns of others might well be important matters for the individual

to consider at any given moment in any given relationship, the "calculus" of those considerations can only be understood in terms of the primacy of the ego and the achievement of its desires and aims.

Further, genuine intimacy, companionship, and community are rendered in principle impossible because both traditions begin their respective analyses, not with a genuinely social and relational self, but with isolated subjectivities. In positive psychology, as we have seen, the person is often taken to be *both* an individual organism that is capable of self-determination and purposive action *and* the site at which powerful determinative forces meet to produce feelings of well-being, competence, and fulfillment. While not the site at which externally located causal forces intersect to produce various sorts of behaviors, as conceived in existentialist psychology, the person is forthrightly understood to be first and foremost a private, isolated, and powerfully autonomous being, capable of freely choosing to be happy, competent, and fulfilled, or not.

The role that other persons might play in all of this—whether from the perspective of positive psychology or existential psychology—is, as we have shown above, ancillary and derivative. That is, as isolated egos, who have either been set adrift in a chaotic and inherently meaningless world (existentialism) or who are in some important ways passively shaped and conditioned by it (positive psychology), we engage in relationships with others from a position of fundamental separation, never fully capable of bridging the ontological gap that exists between us. At best, perhaps, we can hope to facilitate a sort of nestled proximity with others, a gathering of like-minded egos bent on engaging in activities of mutual benefit, but who must, at the end of the day, retreat back into the bleak isolation of individual existence. In the end, then, not only does such a perspective end up alienating us from one another by relegating us to the confines of our own individual worlds, it also reduces the meaning of our relationshipswith one another to mere events of instrumental expediency in service of the self.

It is worth briefly noting here that while much of contemporary existential psychology seems to share in positive psychology's commitment to egoism and its privileging of the individual self, and its needs, and desires, not all existential psychologists have been comfortable with such thinking. Frankl (2010), for example, was an early critic of not only the egoistic conception of the self as radically individual in nature, but also of the notion that meaning is to be found in either the pursuit of happiness by means of a reduction of tension or in "the fulfillment of the greatest number of immanent possibilities" (p. 103). "Only as man withdraws from himself," Frankl (1960) writes, "in the sense of releasing self-centered interest and attention will he gain an authentic mode of existence" (p. 99). Likewise, he states that "the potentialities of life are not indifferent possibilities, but must be seen in the light of meaning and values" (p. 100). Unfortunately, this is a vital lesson that seems to have been lost on far too many subsequent psychologists, whether they have been working in the tradition of positive psychology or that of existentialism. Only by grounding selfhood in a genuinely social and moral world of responsibilities—as well as possibilities—can the many problematic implications of an egoistic psychology be avoided.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it often seems as though the vast differences between positive psychology and existential psychology make the two traditions irreconcilable. Positive psychologists focus on human happiness and flourishing, often at the expense of acknowledging the crucial role of suffering in human existence, while existential psychologists insist that suffering is one of the givens of existence through which individuals find meaning and purpose. Positive psychologists strive to legitimize their approach through a reliance on strictly empirical methods, while existential psychologists question the ability of those methods to capture human beings as they really are, actively creating a life of meaning and significance. Positive psychologists ultimately hope to unlock the secrets of human happiness and invent a "calculus of well-being" that will help them respond to and alleviate suffering and improve human existence, while existential psychologists reject such a project as being inherently hedonistic. Attempts to bridge these radical differences often seem to dismiss them, and ignore the fundamentally different paradigms to which the two traditions adhere.

However, while many attempts to reconcile positive psychology and existential psychology are indeed superficial and dismiss important, crucial differences between the two approaches, there is a deep conceptual commonality between them that is far from superficial. Both traditions place the *self* as the primary focus of study and explanation, and as such, both traditions assume a form of *egoism*. Both approaches assume that individuals are isolated egos, and that others are important only insomuch as they are relevant to the projects, goals, and desires of the self. In the case of positive psychology, the environment of the individual is important insomuch as it constitutes causal conditions of personal happiness or unhappiness. The individual self is primary to analysis, and all else is secondary. In the case of existential psychology, the self is the locus of meaning and freedom, and the significance and relevance of others is decided solely by the self. Again, the individual self is primary to the analysis, and all else is secondary.

If psychologists wish to explore the possibility of genuine intimacy, companionship, and community (which are not merely instrumental in nature), they need to reconsider this central assumption of egoism that undergirds both positive psychology and existential psychology. Genuine intimacy and companionship require an approach that assumes the reality and relevance of others as a fundamental (rather than ancillary) given of existence, which is something that egoism—and any intellectual tradition based on egoism, including both positive psychology and existential psychology—cannot provide. For this reason, positive psychology and existential psychology are equally inadequate in accounting for human relationships in ways that do not reduce others to instruments of the self, or in addressing difficulties in those relationships in ways that do not direct attention to the primacy of the self.

References

Audi, R. (Ed.). (1999). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Binswanger, L. (1962). Existential analysis and psychotherapy. In H. M. Ruitenbeek (Ed.), *Psychoanalysis and existential philosophy* (pp. 17–23). New York, NY: Dutton and Company.

Boss, M. (1963). *Psychoanalysis and daseinanalysis*. New York: Basic Books (Original work published 1957).

Bretherton, R., & Ørner, R. (2003). Positive psychotherapy in disguise. *The Psychologist, 16*(3), 136–137.

Burston, D., & Frie, R. (2006). *Psychotherapy as a human science*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Deci, E. L., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2004). Self-determination theory and basic need satisfaction: Understanding human development in positive psychology. *Richerche di Psicologia, 27*(1), 23–40.

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2009). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and life satisfaction. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 187–194). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Frankl, V. E. (1960). Beyond self-actualization and self-expression. *Journal of Existential Psychiatry, 1*, 5–20.

Frankl, V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. New York: Pocket Books.

Frankl, V. E. (1965). *The doctor and the soul: From psychotherapy to logotherapy*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Frankl, V. E. (2010). *The feeling of meaninglessness: A challenge to psychotherapy and philosophy*. In A. Batthyány (Ed.), Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Friedman, H. (2008). Humanistic and positive psychology: The methodological and epistemological divide. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 36*(2), 113–126.

Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology, 9*(2), 103–110.

Gilman, R., Huebner, E. S., & Furlong, M. J. (2009). *Handbook of positive psychology in schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Guignon, C. (1993). Authenticity, moral values, and psychotherapy. In C. Guignon (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger* (pp. 215–239). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Halling, S., & Dearborn Nill, J. (1995). A brief history of existential-phenomenological psychiatry and psychotherapy. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 26*(1), 1–45.

Hanscomb, S. (2006). Contemporary existentialist tendencies in psychology. In P. D. Ashworth & M. C. Chung (Eds.), *Phenomenology and psychological science: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives* (pp. 169–196). New York, NY: Springer.

Heidegger, M. (1996). *Being and time* (J. Stambaugh, trans.). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (Original work published 1927).

Held, B. S. (2004). The negative side of positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 44*(1), 9–46.

Hoeller, K. (Ed.). (1994). *Readings in existential psychology and psychiatry*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Houston, S. (2006). Making use of positive psychology in residential child care. In D. Iwaniec (Ed.), *The child's journey through care: Placement stability, care-planning, and achieving permanency* (pp. 183–200). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Jacobsen, B. (2007). *Invitation to existential psychology: A psychology for the unique human being and its applications in therapy*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley.

Jørgensen, I. S., & Naftstad, H. E. (2004). Positive psychology: Historical, philosophical, and epistemological perspectives. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 15–34). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2006). *Positive therapy: A meta-theory for positive psychological practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwartz, N. (Eds.). (1999). *Well-being: The foundations of a hedonic psychology*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Laing, R. D. (1959). *The divided self*. London, UK: Tavistock.

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2004). Toward a theoretical foundation for positive psychology in practice. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 713–731). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Linley, P. A., Harrington, S., & Garcea, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Lopez, S. J., & Snyder, C. R. (2009). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Martin, J., Sugarman, J., & Thompson, J. (2003). *Psychology and the question of agency*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

May, R. (1960). *Existential psychology*. New York, NY: Random House.

May, R. (1969). *Love and will*. New York, NY: Norton.

May, R., Angel, E., & Ellenberger, H. F. (Eds.). (1958). *Existence: A new dimension in psychiatry and psychology*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, trans.). London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul (Original work published 1945).

Myers, D. G. (2004). Human connections and the good life: Balancing individuality and community in public policy. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 641–657). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002). The concept of flow. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 89–105). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ong, A. D., & van Dulmen, M. H. M. (Eds.). (2007). *Oxford handbook of methods in positive psychology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Resnick, S., Warmoth, A., & Serlin, I. A. (2001). The humanistic psychology and positive psychology connection: Implications for psychotherapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 41*(1), 73–101.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68–78.

Sartre, J.-P. (1956). *Being and nothingness* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). New York, NY: Philosophical Library.

Schneider, K. J., & Krug, O. T. (2010). *Existential-humanistic therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Schneider, K. J., & May, R. (1995). *The psychology of existence: An integrated, clinical perspective*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Seligman, M. (1999). The president's address. *American Psychologist, 54*(8), 559–562.

Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Seligman, M. (2003). Positive psychology: Fundamental assumptions. *The Psychologist, 16*(3), 126–127.

Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5–14.

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihályi, M. (2001). Positive psychology: An introduction: Reply. *American Psychologist, 56*(1), 89–90.

Sheldon, K. M. (2011). What's positive about positive psychology? Reducing value-bias and enhancing integration within the field. In K. M. Sheldon, T. B. Kashdan, & M. F. Steger

(Eds.), *Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward* (pp. 421–429). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Sheldon, K. M., & King, L. (2001). Why positive psychology is necessary. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 216–217.

Slife, B. D., & Richardson, F. C. (2008). Problematic ontological underpinnings of positive psychology: A strong relational alternative. *Theory and Psychology, 18*(5), 699–723.

Snyder, C. R., Lopez, S. J., & Pedrotti, J. T. (2011). *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Taylor, E. (2001). Positive psychology and humanistic psychology: A reply to Seligman. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 41*(1), 13–29.

Tillich, P. (1990). Existentialism and psychotherapy. In K. Hoeller (Ed.), *Readings in existential psychology and psychiatry* (pp. 39–47). Seattle, WA: REPP.

Valle, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Valle, R. S., & Halling, S. (Eds.). (1989). *Existential-Phenomenological perspectives in psychology*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Valle, R. S., King, M., & Halling, S. (1989). An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 3–16). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

van Deurzen, E. (2009). *Psychotherapy and the quest for happiness*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

van Kaam, A. (1966). *The art of existential counseling*. Wilkes-Barre, PA: Dimension Books.

Wong, P. T. P. (2010). What is existential positive psychology? *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy, 3*(1), 1–10.

Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Yalom, I. (2002). *The gift of therapy*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.