

Mireia Las Heras  
Marc Grau Grau  
Yasin Rofcanin *Editors*

# Human Flourishing

A Multidisciplinary Perspective  
on Neuroscience, Health, Organizations  
and Arts

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Yasin Rofcanin  
Editors

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Neuroscience, Health, Organizations and Arts

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*Editors*

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# Introduction: In the Pursuit of Human Flourishing



Mireia Las Heras, Marc Grau-Grau, and Yasin Rofcanin

The study of the good life or *Eudaimonia*<sup>1</sup> has been a central concern for academics and philosophers, as well as for many people, at least since Aristotelian times. This responds to the common experience that we all seek happiness. Today, we are witnessing a new paradoxical boom. The pursuit of happiness seems to permeate everything (i.e., books, media, organizations, talks), without reducing, or in some cases even increasing, the numbers of suicides, depression, and similar pathological consequences of anxiety and stress.

There is not a consensus regarding the meaning of the word happiness. Seligman (2011), one of the fathers of the positive psychology, confirmed that his original view the meaning he referred to was close to that of Aristotle. But he recently confessed that he now detests the word happiness, since it is overused and has become almost meaningless.

In contrast, flourishing could be a (new) term to refer to the good life, or eudaimonia in his full meaning. We, the editors of this book, truly believe that human flourishing is “a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively, and the experience that life is going well” (this definition follows Huppert and So (2013)). All the characterizations of flourishing in this edited book align with such definition. Furthermore, we trust that human flourishing goes beyond states and outcomes, and certainly includes mental and physical health, happiness and life

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<sup>1</sup>*Eudaimonia*: It is a Greek word commonly translated as happiness or welfare. However, “human flourishing or prosperity” as well as “blessedness” might actually be more accurate translations.

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satisfaction, meaning and purpose—including religious values and moral principles—, character and virtue, and close social relationships, especially family and keen.

With all these things in mind, you have in your hands (maybe in your screens) the book “Human Flourishing: A Multidisciplinary perspective on Neuroscience, Health, Organizations and the Arts.” This book comes after an enriching *Expert Meeting* organized by Prof. Mireia las Heras Maestro, Research Director of the International Center for Work and Family at IESE Business School, together with Prof. Marc Grau-Grau at the Faculty of Education Sciences at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya and Prof. Yasin Rofcanin, Prof. at Bath Business School. The event was an interdisciplinary meeting of twelve scholars, funded by the Social Trends Institute (STI), in which participants offered their perspectives on human flourishing based on their fields of study and interest.

Not by design, but because of the outburst of the COVID-19 in March 2020, the meeting took place online, to accommodate the restrictions of in-person meeting and traveling. That added an interesting layer, as it allowed us to reflect on the need of personal, non-IT-mediated relationships. On the role of strong bonds. On the role of affect. On the role of traveling and getting to perceive the outside world. On the role of fashion as expression of individuality and character. On the role of the arts as an educational means to our affect and character. Some of these reflections permeate the book, and most specifically the chapters on The Arts.

It is our aim, with this book, to offer our readership specific contributions to grow on the understanding of what represents the best of the human condition. The book contributes with research-based findings and reflections on what enables optimal functioning. For instance, the chapter by Las Heras, Barraza, and Rofcanin reflects on what fosters constructive family dynamics and engaged motherhood and fatherhood and its relationship to work. The chapter by Rodriguez-Prat and Monforte-Royo talks about human flourishing at the ending stage of life, specifically when a sick person requires palliative care. They adopt a perspective of dignified care and suggest that human flourishing may occur once the sick is freed from the reductionist gaze that treats them as an object (the patient) or as a medical problem to be solved.

This book explores positive human dynamism in life and the generative dynamics that foster the development of human strength, the increase of personal resiliency that make better family members, more efficient employees, and citizens that contribute their best to society.

This collection of chapters, carefully edited for you, presents discussions on what enables people who have stable commitment to life and family and positive contributions to society. Specifically each chapter offers in the last paragraphs, specific guidelines and suggestions of what might contribute to increase the sense of flourishing. While each chapter draws from a specific field of research, they all point towards a synergistic view of flourishing that does not conflict with each other.

This research-based book contributes to a dialog on what is life giving rather than life depleting. What is experienced as constructive rather than adverse. And what is heartening rather than conflicting. All authors in this book contribute views on the

conditions that enable positive phenomena in people's lives that result in beneficial effects for themselves, organizations, and society in general.

We trust that the contributions of this book are of most importance in a time in which the work world has become much faster, global, and all-encompassing, putting more demands on individuals, creating stress, requiring undivided attention, resulting in many people sleeping less, ignoring personal care, and neglecting significant others. A time of the post-COVID era. During the pandemics many, if not all, have suffered from uncertainty, pain, and anxiety. In a time in which technology has blurred the boundaries between work and non-work. Globalization has led to 24/7 demands on many employees. In a time of rapid changes that result in acute competition, unrest in social and legal structures, and volatility in market valuation, companies and individuals are required to be agile and adaptable.

We have worked on this book with the hope that it will contribute to ameliorate potential destructive effects of external conditions, and facilitate the understanding of what promotes that people flourish in life. We trust that people who flourish are more agile, flexible, optimistic, and resilient. We seek to present potential solutions for individuals, families, and society. We started this project at the end of 2019. It was necessary then. And, as time has passed, and after COVID pandemic hit all of us worldwide, the reflection on flourishing has proved to be more crucially important.

At the core of this book is the firm belief that interrelations, positive dynamics, and interactions among family members, work, and society allow for flourishing. We contribute to this debate from an interdisciplinary perspective in which organizational scholars, medical doctors, and psychologists, together with scholars working on the Arts and Literature have worked jointly. We are offering you an important piece of work that will help understanding the phenomenon of flourishing. We hope that whether you are a researcher or a practitioner, our recommendations will prove helpful. It is our wish that policy makers, educators, medical doctors, and many other professionals will benefit from this book in their professional endeavors to facilitate the flourishing of those they interact with.

## **1 Our Special Thanks**

Our gratitude is with the Social Trends Institute, a non-profit independent research center that sponsors examination and dialog about vital issues involving contemporary society and values (see more information at <http://socialtrendsinstitute.org/>). STI not only funded the Expert Meeting but also contributed to make this book open to all the readers.

Our special thanks go to Prof. Carlos Cavallé, Dean Emeritus of IESE Business School and professor in the Department of General Management, who is the Chairman, Founder, and President of the Social Trends Institute. Our conversations with him while preparing the Meeting have resulted in ideas and actions that have enriched the meeting and the quality of the book. Thank you also to Tracey

O'Donnell, Secretary General of The Social Trends Institute for her constant support and energy in moving the project forward.

## 2 How This Book Is Organized

This book, partially, follows the structure of the Expert meeting we hold online in 2021. As already mentioned, the Expert meeting was designed to foster interdisciplinary discussion. The aim was to enable cross learning that would allow us to reach conclusions in ever field enlightened by other fields and perspectives. As a result, the book has four differentiated sections that all speak to each other:

- Neuroscience and Health
- Organization and Policies
- Care and Flourishing
- The Arts, History and Literature

We have included three chapters that we did not discuss in the Expert meeting. This responds to various reasons:

- In the *Care and Flourishing* section, we have included a chapter by Rodriguez-Prat and Monforte-Royo that refers to human flourishing at the ending stage of life. The editors decided that such topic was of major interest to reflect in the different stages of human life. Also in the light of the worldwide events, of the Pandemics and other life threatening events, we consider that it was worth including such chapter.
- Also, in the *Care and Flourishing* section, we have included a chapter by Toussaint and his colleagues on “Forgiveness in Human Flourishing.” We decided to do so after discussing in the Expert meeting the recent trend towards polarization and social outbursts all over the World, specifically in 2019<sup>2</sup>. The models in this essay offer multiple vantage points from which to consider the forgiveness-flourishing connection.
- Finally, a third new chapter has been also included in the *Care and Flourishing* section. Lee and Contreras highlighted how artificial agents can be used to bolster moral emotions like gratitude and compassion. We decided to include this relevant chapter to explore how flourishing could be possible with the help of technology.

The book ends with a Concluding Chapter by Maria J. Bosch, a great scholar and good friend of the editors, who attended the Expert Meeting and has done a

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<sup>2</sup>For a short summary, see <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-story-of-2019-protests-in-every-corner-of-the-globe> “The Story of 2019: Protests in Every Corner of the Globe” (The New Yorker, December 30th 2019).

wonderful job in summarizing and putting together the main contributions of each chapter.

### 3 How to Use This Book

We have organized this book to facilitate that you read each section separately and offer you insights into the topic of human flourishing. It can serve as a reference for leaders and executives who aspire to make their organizations flourishing institutions that foster well-being not only in their employees but also in other stakeholders. We hope it serves as a resource of policy makers, who design and implement wide programs at societal level, whether it is nationally, regionally, or locally. It is our ambition that it serves well to the general public, who seeks to understand what *Eudemonia* is, and how to live a flourishing life.

Without further ado: we let you now start your journey through the book. We hope it will result in you increasing your flourishing experience!

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**Part I**  
**Neuroscience and Health**

# In Pursuit of Eudaimonia: Past Advances and Future Directions



Carol D. Ryff

**Abstract** Eudaimonic well-being builds on the writings of Aristotle and integrates contemporary theories of positive psychological functioning. The empirically operationalization is detailed, emphasizing the importance of rigorous psychometric evaluation. Scientific advances of this model of well-being are noted, showing links to sociodemographic factors, experiences in work and family life, and health outcomes. Three future directions for research are considered. The first addresses growing problems of socioeconomic inequality and their role in undermining the opportunities of disadvantaged segments of society to experience eudaimonia. These problems have now been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted those who were already vulnerable. The second new direction examines the role of the arts and humanities as factors that nurture eudaimonic well-being. Whether the arts can activate needed compassion and caring among the privileged is also considered. The third new direction examines the intersection of entrepreneurial studies with eudaimonic well-being. Conventional conceptions of entrepreneurial success focus on business profits; a case is made that eudaimonia, of the entrepreneur as well as his/her employees and surrounding communities, constitute further measure of success that elevate issues of virtue, morality, and ethics.

**Keywords** Eudaimonia · Inequality · Arts and humanities · Entrepreneurship

## 1 Introduction

This chapter examines an approach to psychological well-being that was developed over thirty years ago (Ryff, 1989). It was built on the integration of theories of positive psychological functioning from clinical, development, existential, and humanistic perspectives, while also drawing on Aristotle's distant view of

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“eudaimonia” as the highest of all human goods (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Points of convergence in these perspectives defined key dimensions of what it means to be well and live a good life (i.e., to flourish). This model subsequently had widespread impact gaged by the volume of publications across diverse scientific fields (see Ryff, 2014, 2018). The extensive use likely reflects an interest in and commitment to reaching for essential meanings of what constitutes the best within us, as emphasized by Aristotle. Stated otherwise, this model of well-being emerged from intellectually vital ideas and ideals that have been seen to have relevance across multiple domains of life and fields of empirical inquiry.

The first section below briefly describes the components of well-being in this approach and examines their scientific operationalization (how they are measured). Amidst growing formulations of flourishing, increased attention is now being given to what constitutes quality measurement of key constructs. The importance of rigorous psychometric evaluation of validity and reliability of proposed instruments cannot be overstated. Such matters take on ever greater significance as government surveys of well-being around the world are on the rise, along with cohort studies in multiple countries that are tracking experiences of well-being longitudinally and their health sequelae.

The second section then highlights select advances that have grown up around this eudaimonic model. Many are from the MIDUS (Midlife in the USA) national longitudinal study ([www.midus.wisc.edu](http://www.midus.wisc.edu)), which involves two representative samples of Americans—the initial baseline sample and a subsequent “refresher” sample. In terms of scope, MIDUS is deeply multidisciplinary, collecting extensive information on sociodemographic factors, psychosocial and behavioral factors, along with measures of biological regulation and neuroscience assessments of emotion regulation. Pertinent to the topic of flourishing, MIDUS includes comprehensive measures of both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. All MIDUS data are publicly available and have been widely used by investigators across the globe to examine many questions, including how reports of well-being are linked with socioeconomic status, work and family life experiences, health outcomes (disease, functional capacities, length of life), and biological and brain mechanisms. Some eudaimonic research findings from other studies are included in this overview as well.

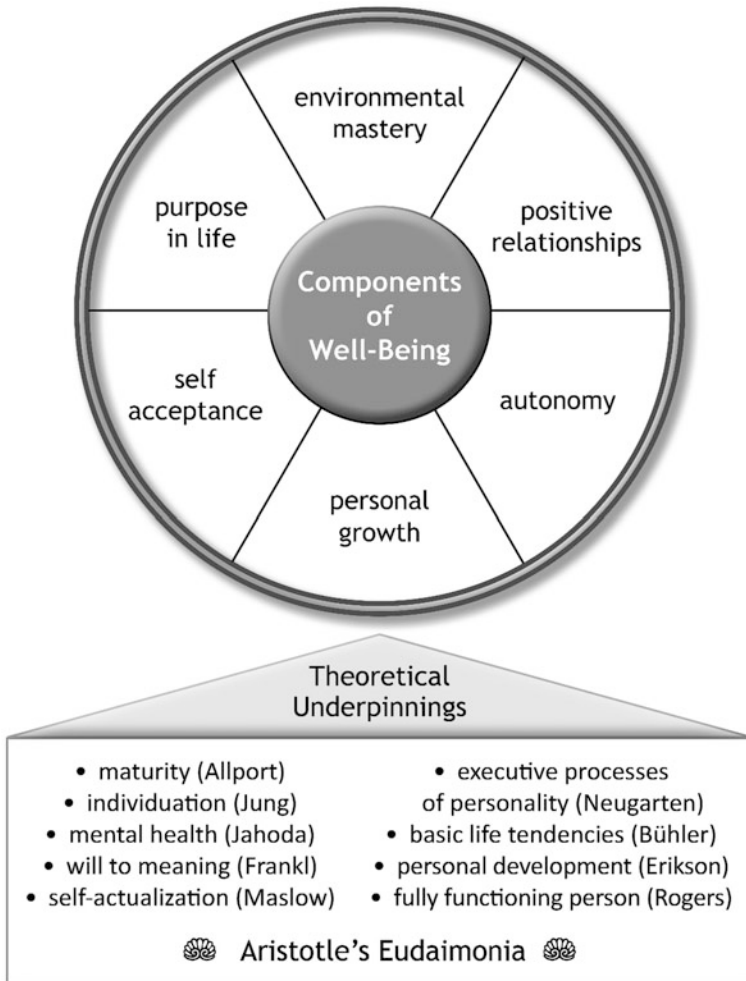
The third section then shifts to consider needed future directions, which are organized around three key topics. ***Growing problems of socioeconomic inequality*** define the first topic. Emphasis is given to how limited educational and economic opportunities are standing in the way of eudaimonic becoming for many. These problems have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic sequelae. Such “intersecting catastrophes” point to needed future science on obstacles to human flourishing and related public policy action needed to reduce gaping discrepancies between privileged and disadvantaged segments of contemporary societies. In counterpoint, the next section shifts to needed research on the ***role of the arts and humanities as factors that may nurture eudaimonic well-being***. A burgeoning literature is now investigating links between encounters with the arts, broadly defined, and numerous aspects of well-being and health. Some of this work is briefly described, and returning to the theme of inequality, attention is given to the

role of literature, music, art, film, philosophy, and history in activating the compassion and caring needed among the privileged to enact social change. A final section examines the *intersection of entrepreneurial studies with eudaimonic well-being*. Entrepreneurship has emerged as its own scientific field in recent decades. Conceptions of entrepreneurial success initially focused primarily on business profits, but are now embracing well-being as a further relevant outcome. Most of these inquiries have emphasized hedonic well-being, although growing interest is now gathering around eudaimonic well-being. A case will be made that new business activities may be critical to how individuals, communities, and countries around the world recover from the losses and trauma of the worldwide pandemic. Bringing eudaimonia to these endeavors elevates issues of virtue, morality, and ethics. Such ideas point to future work needed to understand the virtuous becoming of entrepreneurs and those impacted by their pursuits.

A concluding section recapitulates key points from prior studies of eudaimonic well-being and the central objectives of proposed scientific studies going forward. Taken together, the intent is to continue building a framework of human flourishing anchored in a commitment to the realization of the talents and capacities conceived as the highest of all human goods.

## **2 Eudaimonia Well-Being: Flourishing as the Realization of Human Potential**

Although subjective well-being has been empirically studied for more than fifty years, much of the initial work was largely atheoretical and focused on simple questions about happiness and life satisfaction. The lack of conceptual depth is puzzling, given that numerous subfields within psychology (clinical, developmental, existential, humanistic) had long ago thoughtfully articulated the upside of the human condition (Allport, 1961; Bühler, 1935; Erikson, 1959; Frankl, 1959; Jahoda, 1958; Jung, 1933; Maslow, 1968; Neugarten, 1973; Rogers, 1961). Such works thus addressed what it means to be fully functioning, developed, individuated, mature, self-actualized, and purposefully engaged in life. Most of these perspectives were not part of empirical science, however, largely because they lacked credible assessment procedures. Seeking to bring more of these ideas into contemporary science, I first sought to integrate these perspectives into a synthesis that distilled the key points of convergence among them. The result was a model of well-being that involved six key dimensions of well-being (Ryff, 1989), which are shown in Fig. 1. Distant philosophical input also came from Aristotle's eudaimonia, which he explicated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1925). This classic work opened with a profound query: what is the highest of all goods achievable by human action? Aristotle thought the answer was happiness, but he underscored notable differences in what is meant by happiness. In his view, happiness was not about pleasure or wealth or honor or satisfying appetites—things more aligned with hedonia, also of



**Fig. 1** Core dimensions of psychological well-being and their theoretical underpinnings

interest to the ancient Greeks. Instead, he defined the highest good as *activity of the soul in accord with virtue*; it was thus about achieving the best that is within us. This core meaning of eudaimonia, conceived as a kind of personal excellence, is captured by the two Greek imperatives, inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, namely, to “know thyself” and “become who you are” (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Translation of the six different dimensions of well-being to quality assessment tools was imperative. So doing required a comprehensive psychometric approach that has been detailed in prior publications (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2014). Of critical importance at the outset was the need for clear and coherent definitions of each proposed dimension. Table 1 provides these definitions,

including a description of both high and low scorers. These definitions, which came from the underlying theories, served as the basis for generating self-descriptive items intended to operationalize each dimension. A central point is that the items emerged from the guiding conceptual definitions of each aspect of well-being. Detailed psychometric analyses were then conducted to refine the item pools; such work included assessments of face and content validity as well as item-to-scale correlations (to insure that each item correlated more highly with its own rather than another scale). Internal consistency (alpha) coefficients were also examined. Confirmatory factor analyses were then conducted to assess whether the data supported the proposed six-factor model as well as to examine how it related to other constructs, thus addressing issues of convergent and discriminant validity (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes et al., 2002). In the main, these analyses, including those conducted with samples from other countries, have supported the proposed model (see Ryff, 2014). Of importance in evaluating the factorial structure has been the need to employ scales of sufficient length (Gallagher et al., 2009)—i.e., analyses based on limited items have shown problematic structures.

As the science of human flourishing proliferates, issues of measures are receiving heightened attention (e.g., Lee et al., 2021a) and debates are unfolding. Included in the preceding edited collection was a set of recommendations (VanderWeele et al., 2021a) for single-item assessments, 4–6 item scales, and longer, multi-item scales. A dissenting perspective (Ryff et al., 2021a) argued against ultra-short form (1 item) assessments on grounds that extensive prior science has documented the complex, multi-faceted nature of well-being. The specific multi-item assessment put forth also lacked a clear conceptual foundation, had limited evidence of validity and used highly redundant items, presumably to obtain high internal consistency coefficients. A rebuttal followed, noting areas of agreement and providing further defense for measures recommended (VanderWeele et al., 2021b). A final rebuttal (Ryff et al., 2021b) challenged the view that “one is better than none” perpetuates a simplistic view of well-being that is out of touch with how the field has progressed, while also questioning the idea of blanket advocacy for measures on grounds that best choices likely depend on the substantive scientific questions of interest. A final point emphasized quality control standards as essential in deliberating over measurement options. Included in quality control is extent of prior usage—presence in the published scientific literature.

The eudaimonic model of well-being described herein meets quality control criteria: it emerged from an integration of multiple theoretical perspectives and involved an empirical operationalization process that was comprehensive and rigorous. In addition, the model has taken hold in the scientific community: the scales have been translated to 40 different languages and more than 1,200 publications have been generated. This is not to argue that the eudaimonic model is the best or only credible choice for studying human flourishing. Rather, the point is to underscore that whatever approach is chosen, it needs a solid theoretical and empirical foundation. Otherwise, the science of flourishing will flounder.

**Table 1** Definitions of theory-guided dimensions of eudaimonic well-being**Autonomy**

*High scorer:* Is self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards.

*Sample item:* “I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.”

*Low scorer:* Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.

*Sample item:* “I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.”

**Environmental Mastery**

*High scorer:* Has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.

*Sample item:* “I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.”

*Low scorer:* Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.

*Sample item:* “The demands of everyday life often get me down.”

**Personal Growth**

*High scorer:* Has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness.

*Sample item:* “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.”

*Low scorer:* Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.

*Sample item:* “When I think about it, I haven’t really improved much over the years.”

**Positive Relations with Others**

*High scorer:* Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of other others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships.

*Sample item:* “I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family and friends.”

*Low scorer:* Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.

*Sample item:* “I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.”

**Purpose in Life**

*High scorer:* Has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.

*Sample item:* “I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.”

*Low scorer:* Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims; lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.

*Sample item:* “I don’t have a good sense of what it is I’m trying to accomplish in life.”

**Self-Acceptance**

*High scorer:* Possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.

*Sample item:* “When I look at the story of my life, I’m pleased with how things have turned out.”

*Low Scorer:* Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred in past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.

*Sample item:* “My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.”

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Response options for all above items: 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*)

### 3 Past Advances: What Have We Learned About Eudaimonic Well-Being?

The brief overview of scientific findings draws on previous summaries of prior research (Ryff, 2014, 2018) as well as more recent reviews, one covering sociodemographic and health correlates of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being (Ryff et al., 2021c) and another examining growing interest in purposeful life engagement (Ryff & Kim, 2020). Findings in some earlier cross-sectional research conducted with convenience samples, and later work from MIDUS and other cohort studies, such as the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). The first topic below briefly covers how sociodemographic factors have been linked to eudaimonic well-being. A second section reviews evidence linking experiences in family and work life to well-being and health. Given that several contributors to this volume are interested in human flourishing as it relates to the work-family interface, several more recent publications from MIDUS are covered in this section. A final section summarizes how eudaimonia has been associated with health outcomes, broadly defined, as well as with biological regulation/dysregulation and brain mechanisms.

#### 3.1 Sociodemographic Factors and Eudaimonia

With regard to age, considerable evidence, initially based on cross-sectional findings and then extended to longitudinal investigations, has shown that certain aspects of eudaimonic well-being, especially purpose in life and personal growth, show decline as individual transition from midlife to older age (Hill & Weston, 2019; Springer et al., 2011; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Such decline may reflect “structural lag”—namely, that contemporary social institutions have not kept up with the added years of life that many older adults now experience (Riley et al., 1994). There is notable variability within age groups, however, such that some older adults maintain high levels of purposeful engagement, which in turn has been found to matter. With regard to personal growth, recent longitudinal findings (Toyama et al., 2020) have shown that many are able to maintain high levels across adult life. Multiple factors, especially positive relationships and generativity (having a concern for guiding the next generation), are shown to promote personal growth across time.

Gender differences have not been prominent in findings of eudaimonic well-being, although some work has shown that women report higher levels of positive relations with others and personal growth than men (Marks, 1996; Ryff & Heidrich, 1997). These findings are notable given that women are known to heightened risk for experiencing depression relative to men. In terms of socioeconomic standing, early work from multiple studies (National Survey of Families and Households, MIDUS, Wisconsin Longitudinal Study) showed that those with higher levels of educational attainment reported higher levels of eudaimonic well-being compared to those with



lower educational standing (Marmot et al., 1998; Marmot et al., 1997). Greater educational opportunities implicate not only access to knowledge but also better jobs, higher incomes, and greater wealth. With regard to race, an early, unexpected finding from MIDUS was that African American adults had higher levels of eudaimonic well-being compared to their white counterparts (Ryff et al., 2003). Subsequent evidence from MIDUS showed that the minority advantage in well-being would be even greater were it not for experiences of discrimination (Keyes, 2009). Going forward, intersectionality—namely, how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and race interact to account for differing levels of eudaimonic well-being—will likely receive greater attention (see Ryff et al., 2021c).

### ***3.2 Family and Work Life Experiences***

Family and work life have been of sustained interest in MIDUS. Multiple findings are noted here, including those that are not explicitly linked to eudaimonic well-being, but potentially could be. Greater involvement in multiple life roles (worker, spouse, parent) has been found to promote higher well-being (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006), although the actual activities in these roles matter—i.e., helping others seems to enhance purpose and self-acceptance (Greenfield, 2009). Those who are married have been shown to have a well-being advantage compared to the divorced, widowed, or never married, although single women score higher on autonomy and personal growth compared to married women (Marks & Lambert, 1998). Parenting seems to enhance adult well-being, particularly when children are doing well (An & Cooney, 2006; Schmutte & Ryff, 1994), whereas the loss of a child predicts impaired well-being, even decades later (Rogers et al., 2008). Similarly, loss of a parent in childhood predicts lower levels of multiple dimensions of adult well-being (Maier & Lachman, 2000). Experiencing psychological or physical violence from a parent in childhood compromises adult well-being (Greenfield & Marks, 2010), as does caring for an aging parent, although less so for daughters with high environmental mastery (Li et al., 1999).

With regard to work, new MIDUS research (Weston et al., 2021) has shown cross-sectional and longitudinal links between work characteristics and employees' sense of purpose. Greater skill variety and coworker support (but not job autonomy or supervisor support) were associated with higher levels of purpose in life. Increases in purpose over time were also associated with higher levels of skill variety. Several other recent MIDUS publications (Choi, 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Kivimäki et al., 2015; Seeman et al., 2020) have linked various aspects of work (e.g., job insecurity, long working hours, job strain and physical demands, lack of autonomy and creativity in work) to various health outcomes (e.g., sleep quality, type 2 diabetes, opioid use, allostatic load, cognitive performance). These findings offer new opportunities to investigate psychological factors (resources and vulnerabilities) as potential moderators of the observed links between work characteristics and health.

Of particular prominence in MIDUS has been the *interplay between work and family life*, with early findings showing both negative and positive spillover between these domains (Marks, 1998; Grzywacz, 2000). Cohort differences were also observed in how young men and women manage work/family roles, with related differences for well-being (Carr, 2002). Negative work-to-family spillover (NWFS) has been found to matter for subjective well-being, with effects moderated by dispositional optimism (Lee et al., 2021b). Although increases in NWFS over time were found to predict increased chronic conditions (Lee et al., 2015), leisure-time physical activities were found to buffer against such adverse health effects. Additional work has linked NWFS over two decades to elevated chronic conditions and greater functional limitations (Tsukermann et al., 2020), while negative work spillover also mediated the relationship between job insecurity and subjective sleep quality (Kim et al., 2021). Among caregivers, those reporting higher levels of work-to-family spillover reported lower self-acceptance and higher negative affect than caregivers not dealing with such spillover (Hodgdon & Wong, 2021). Guided by the idea of stress proliferation, work–family conflict was found to be higher among employed US adults who reported that their spouses had mental or physical health problems (Fettró & Nomaguchi, 2018). In sum, a multitude of new findings from MIDUS have documented growing interest in the work-family interface and its relevance for well-being and health.

### 3.3 *Eudaimonic Well-Being and Health*

Considerable research, generated from multiple studies, has grown up around purpose in life, a specific dimension of eudaimonia, and health. A key finding emerging from a community sample of older adults showed that those with higher purpose in life had reduced rates of mortality 7 years later (Boyle et al., 2009). Findings from MIDUS then replicated and extended the mortality findings (Hill & Turiano, 2014), showing greater survival over 14 years among those with higher purpose in life at baseline, after adjusting for numerous covariates. Findings from HRS (Health and Retirement Study) also showed lowest risk of all-cause mortality among those with highest levels of purpose in life as well as reduced risk of mortality from heart, circulatory, and blood conditions (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2013a, b). A meta-analysis of ten prospective studies reported significant associations between purpose in life and reduced all-cause mortality and reduced cardiovascular events (Cohen et al., 2016). Relevant for understanding these profiles of morbidity and mortality is evidence showing that those with higher eudaimonic well-being are more likely to use preventive healthcare services and practice better health behaviors (diet, exercise) (Chen et al., 2019; Hill & Weston, 2019; Hooker & Masters, 2016; Kim et al., 2014, 2017; Steptoe & Fancourt, 2019). It is important to note that indicators of poor health or the presence of disease have also been associated with compromised eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Costanzo et al., 2009;

Schleicher et al., 2005), underscoring the need to investigate bi-directional relationships.

Implicated above findings are biological and neurological mechanisms, which are also being studied. Early findings showed that higher well-being (particularly, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life) was linked with better neuroendocrine regulation, better inflammatory profiles, lower cardiovascular risk factors, and better sleep profiles (Friedman et al., 2005; Lindfors & Lundberg, 2002; Ryff et al., 2004). More recent findings from national samples have shown that aspects of eudaimonia are associated with better glycemic regulation (Boylan et al., 2017; Hafez et al., 2018), better inflammatory profiles (Elliot & Chapman, 2016; Friedman & Ryff, 2012; Morozink et al., 2010), better lipid profiles (Radler et al., 2017), lower risk of metabolic syndrome (Boylan & Ryff, 2015), and lower allostatic load (Zilioli et al., 2015). With regard to neuroscience, van Reekum et al. (2007) used functional MRI techniques to show that those with higher eudaimonic well-being had less amygdala activation in response to negative stimuli as well as more activation of regions (ventral anterior cingulate cortex) that help regulate emotions. Heller et al. (2013) used fMRI techniques to show sustained activation of reward circuitry (striatal activity) in response to positive stimuli among those with higher eudaimonic well-being; this pattern was further linked with lower cortisol output over the course of the day. Schaefer et al. (2013) showed that higher purpose in life predicted less reactivity (eye-blink startle response) to negative stimuli. Finally, eudaimonic well-being has been linked with greater insular cortex volume, which is involved in an array of higher-order functions (Lewis et al., 2014).

In sum, growing evidence documents the benefits of eudaimonic well-being for health, assessed in terms of reduced chronic conditions, disease, and functional impairment as well as longer lives. Other emerging science shows the contribution of eudaimonic well-being to better regulation of different physiological systems as well as to neural circuitry implicated in emotion regulation.

## **4 Future Eudaimonic Science: Needed Directions**

The advocacy for future research that follows encompasses notably negative topics related to contemporary societal problems that are undermining the eudaimonic potential of many individuals. In counterpoint, a promising positive future direction calls for bringing the arts and humanities more prominently into studies of well-being. A final topic embraces the intriguing possibility of linking contemporary studies of entrepreneurship to research on eudaimonic well-being. New business ventures will likely be critical in how countries around the world recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. An important feature of eudaimonia in such pursuits is the emphasis it brings to virtue and ethics.

#### **4.1 *Impediments to Eudaimonia: Widening Inequality***

Interest in human flourishing tends to focus on upbeat, happy topics, as exemplified by the positive psychology movement that was built on the assertion that too much of psychology was focused on the negative. There is a danger behind such thinking in that it can create blinders to human suffering, particularly forms tied to structural forces that can make life unlivable for some. Growing inequality is such a problem in the current era, although it has long been recognized that such socioeconomic hardship matters for health (Lynch et al., 1997; Marmot, 2015; Ross & Wu, 1995). Recent research conducted by demographers, economists, and epidemiologists documents the deepening of inequality (Graham, 2017; Pfeffer & Schoeni, 2016; Piketty et al., 2018; Piketty & Saez, 2014; Reeves, 2017). These problems were exacerbated by the Great Recession of 2008, which fueled dramatic increases in poverty rates (Bishaw, 2013) and accompanying health costs due to job loss, unemployment, and financial strain (Burgard & Kalousova, 2015; Kirsch & Ryff, 2016). The take-home message is that privileged segments of society, particularly in the USA, are, indeed, flourishing, defined by objective indicators (better jobs, greater wealth, marital stability, safer neighborhoods, healthier lifestyles) as well as subjective indicators (optimism, life satisfaction, happiness). However, for others, including those who formerly were middle class, life has become dire (Kristof & WuDunn, 2020). This heightened trauma among the disadvantaged is what sits behind increased “deaths of despair”—suicides, deaths to addictions, such as opioids and alcohol, now evident among midlife adults (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2020).

Prior to these recent changes, MIDUS findings were already showing the adverse consequences of inequality. Gruenewald et al. (2012) linked socioeconomic adversity in childhood (parental education, welfare status) and adulthood (education, income, difficulty paying bills) to heightened multisystem biological risk (allostatic load) in adulthood. Focused on the lives of African Americans, other studies (Slopen et al., 2012; Slopen et al., 2013) linked cumulative stress across multiple life domains (neighborhood, financial, relationship, work, perceived inequality, discrimination, childhood adversity) to increased risk of smoking. Other studies of inequality in MIDUS brought attention to the role of psychological and behavioral factors as moderators and mediators of adverse health effects, including dysregulation of different physiological systems (Kirsch et al., 2019).

A unique feature of the MIDUS design made it possible to examine social and historical change in health inequalities. Specifically, MIDUS includes two national samples of US adults situated on either side of the Great Recession. The baseline sample (ages 25–74) was recruited in 1995; it was followed by recruitment of a new “refresher” national sample (same ages) in 2012. Over this period educational attainment in the USA improved: college-educated adults increased from 24.8% to 33.2% and those with less than a high school education decreased from 15.3% to 11.3%. Despite such gains, the post-Recession sample reported less household income (after adjusting for inflation) and lower financial stability than the pre-Recession sample (Kirsch et al., 2019). In addition, the post-Recession sample

had worse health (measured in terms of chronic conditions, body mass index, functional limitations, and physical symptoms) as well as lower levels of many aspects of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being.

Additional MIDUS research (Goldman et al., 2018) compared these two national samples on an array of mental health measures (negative and positive) and showed that mental health had become more compromised among the later refresher (post-Recession) sample compared to the baseline MIDUS sample *among those with lower socioeconomic positions* (measured with a composite of education, occupation, income, and wealth). This worsening of mental health among disadvantaged Americans was framed in the context of the opioid epidemic, growing alcoholism, and increased suicide rates among middle-aged whites of low SES standing (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2020; Grant et al., 2017; Kolodny et al., 2015; Schuchat et al., 2017).

Returning to the eudaimonic focus of this chapter, these combined findings underscore historic changes unfolding in the USA that need to be considered in thinking about people's opportunities to make the most of their own talents and potential. These life objectives are now beyond the reach of many. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these problems. What we know is that economic fallout from the pandemic hit lower-income Americans the hardest, measured in terms of paying bills, receiving help from a food bank, job loss, and risk of eviction (Pew Research Center, 2020). More recent evidence (Serkez, 2021) extends this troublesome tale: the wealthiest segments of society were more likely to stay at home during the lockdown and rely on delivery services compared to those at the low end of the income hierarchy; the disadvantaged also experienced more employment changes and had greater problems with online schooling (availability of a computer, evidence of progress in math coursework). Finally, life expectancy fell for Americans, but only by about a year for white Americans compared to nearly three years for Black Americans, whose life expectancy is now at its lowest level in 20 years (Serkez, 2021).

In sum, the pandemic has aggravated existing disparities in unemployment, education, housing, health, and survival. These ominous changes demand scientific attention among those who care about human flourishing. A critical concern going forward is whether positive human functioning will increasingly be restricted to privileged segments of society. History is replete with the grim consequences that follow when the prosperous are indifferent to the suffering of those who lack opportunities to lead good and dignified lives. These societal problems are not new: the ancient Greeks were concerned about problems of greed and injustice (Balot, 2001) and argued that they violated virtues of fairness, which contributes to civic strife. Centuries later Dante (1308/2006) placed the sins of greed and gluttony in his nine circles of hell. Returning to the present, a central question in the face of rampant inequality, now carried to greater heights by the pandemic, is what will it take to see this nightmare for what it is: stark evidence of societal dysfunction at structural levels that demands social change toward more equitable opportunities to realize human potential.

## 4.2 *Nurturing Eudaimonia Through the Arts*

While inequality is worsening, other more hopeful work points to recent advances on beneficent contributions of the arts and humanities to well-being and health (Crawford et al., 2015; Lomas, 2016; Royal Society and Public Health Working Group, 2013; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). A new synthesis report from the World Health Organization (Fancourt & Finn, 2019) summarized evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being in many countries. Although future research is needed, it thus appears that the creating and consuming of literature, poetry, the visual arts, film, music, and dance may nourish good lives and human becoming. Among those who study well-being and flourishing, the arts and humanities have received limited attention; hence, the advocacy herein.

In thinking about such issues, it is worth considering what cultivates sensibilities to partake of the arts. I have suggested that the opportunity to have a broad liberal education may matter (Ryff, 2016, 2019a). Such ideas have been articulated by those who teach great literature and poetry in higher education as a way of nourishing inner vitality and strengthening the self (Edmondson, 2004, 2015). Science aligns with this view, showing that the best predictor of attendance at arts events (broadly defined) is years of schooling (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Others have emphasized the importance of history and philosophy, key components of the humanities, as critical for creating capable and competent citizens that democratic societies need (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010). At the same time, problems of elitism in higher education are under scrutiny. This form of inequality was recognized centuries ago by Benjamin Franklin as something the “cementing of privilege” that occurred in private institutions (see Roth, 2014). From our era, other have written about elite institutions, which serve as the primary mechanisms through which class hierarchies are maintained (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1990). Going further, Deresiewicz (2014) has described the miseducation of the American elite as a process that nurtures a false sense of self-worth, compromises capacities to relate to non-elites, and promotes a narrow view of intelligence needed for achievement in business, law, medicine, and science.

Recent research illuminates the contributions of educational elitism to growing problems of inequality (Mendelberg et al., 2016). Using a large sample of US students, the study showed that norms for financial gain are more prominent at affluent colleges compared to public universities. In addition, psychologists have shown that those from higher compared to lower class backgrounds have a greater sense of entitlement and higher levels of narcissism (Piff, 2014; Piff et al., 2012). Regarding the well-being consequences of such life outlooks, Kasser and Ryan (1993) showed that those motivated by primarily extrinsic factors (financial success) had lower well-being and adjustment compared to those motivated by less materialistic values.

How the pursuit of wealth and privilege translates to malevolent consequences for others is well-represented in much of the world’s great literature: thanks to Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, and John Steinbeck, among others, we have

been taken inside the suffering of the disadvantaged. Such themes are evident in contemporary fiction as well, such as *Call Me Zebra* (Van der Vliet Oloomi, 2019) and *Exit West* (Hamid, 2017), which depict the difficulties and inner experience of refugees. Contemporary film (e.g., *The Florida Project*, *American Honey*, *Paterson*, *Parasite*) also reveals the lived experiences of inequality, including homelessness and having addicted parents, but also finding poetry in working class lives, and the cleverness of those at the bottom vis-à-vis insensitive elites. Recently, *Nomadland* portrays experiences of many older Americans whose lives were undone by the Great Recession. Many who lost their homes and savings now survive by moving from temporary job to temporary job, living in their vans and trailers. This film emerged from a book by the same name (Bruder, 2017) written by an academic journalist. It opens with the impossible choices now facing those who used to be middle class: do you pay your mortgage or your electric bill? Do you buy food or get or dental work? Do you make a car payment or buy medicine? Do you purchase warm clothes or buy gas for your commute? To be sure, the book also documents the resilience and comradery of many of these individuals, while also detailing the grueling demands of long shifts in Amazon warehouses. A central point nonetheless is the growing prevalence of those who have lost their homes and savings and are struggling to make a living wage.

To summarize, widespread suffering is part of our era, and the arts may play critical roles in depicting these contemporary problems. That is, encounters books, poetry, film, and art *about the traumas many now experience* may serve as conscious-raising endeavors that foster greater caring and compassion. These are researchable topics, anchored in deeper questions about what it takes to penetrate complacency and indifference among some who are privileged. Whether the arts can serve as vehicles for social justice—i.e., venues to inform, educate, and activate societal change—is thus important future direction for science.

### **4.3 Entrepreneurship and Eudaimonia**

The field of entrepreneurial studies has become increasingly interested in the well-being of entrepreneurs (Stephan, 2018), although most studies to date have focused on hedonic indicators, especially life satisfaction. How self-initiated business venturing might matter for eudaimonic well-being is an important question that points to multiple new directions in research (see Ryff, 2019b). As noted in the preceding research advances, prior studies have linked work experiences to various dimensions of eudaimonia, although few studies have focused on entrepreneurial, self-initiated business pursuits that may matter for particular aspects of well-being, such as autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life. In thinking about these questions, distinctions between opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurs may be important because they likely implicate pre-existing sociodemographic factors (educational status, income), which are known contributors to variation in reported levels of eudaimonic well-being. Being forced into self-employment because one lacks other

alternatives may well compromise experiences of well-being. Another important consideration for future inquiries is the need to investigate how entrepreneurs impact the well-being of others (employees, families, communities). Such assessments embody an enlightened approach to evaluation of entrepreneurial impacts.

A recent endeavor (Shir & Ryff, 2021) proposed a dynamic approach to studying links between entrepreneurial experience and eudaimonic well-being, guided by the view that venture creation involves separate phases of deliberation, planning, implementation, and reflection, each of which may involve different aspects of well-being. Planning and initiation, for example, may be particularly consequential for purpose and mastery, whereas the reflection and evaluation phase may contribute to one's sense of personal growth and self-acceptance. A dynamic view is thus needed to illuminate the richness of the entrepreneurial process unfolding in time. Guided by multiple philosophical perspectives, including Aristotle and Kant, it is important to see entrepreneurs as distinct from others, not only for reasons of their self-employment, but also because they are engaged in self-organized activities and pursuits that, ideally, are guided by a personally meaningful vision. Self-responsibility, attention to many factors, and commitment are likely critical for bringing the vision to fruition. Those who are guided by a sense of calling, aligned with core meanings of eudaimonia, may thus be more likely to prevail and persist through the challenges that unfold. It is also important for future research to better understand when the entrepreneurial journey fails to proceed as hoped, planned, and anticipated.

A final point in Shir and Ryff (2021) called for rethinking the meaning of entrepreneurial success. From standard economic and utilitarian perspectives, profit is the obvious and key indicator of success. Indeed, profit is necessary for the endeavor to survive. Nonetheless, emphasis needs to be given to entrepreneurship as ideally rooted in personal dreams formulated about one's place in, and desired contributions to, the surrounding world. Entrepreneurial success in this formulation thus encompasses more far-reaching aims that include pursuing a moral life and having communitarian concerns. Issues of virtue, foundational to Aristotle's formulation, are thus center-stage in eudaimonic business venturing. This blending of traditional economic objectives with a commitment to initiating business ventures that reflect concerns for the greater good will likely be key in rebuilding, post-pandemic, an enlightened marketplace that promotes many valued ends, including the eudaimonic well-being of many (the entrepreneur, her/his employees, the surrounding community) and thereby, communitarian objectives that are fundamental in responsible and just societies.

## 5 Conclusion

Extensive territory has been covered in this chapter, beginning with a distillation of the eudaimonic model of well-being, which frames the content of what follows, beginning with a look at research advances that have grown up around this model.



These are wide-ranging, but were highlighted in terms of how eudaimonia varies depending on sociodemographic factors, how it is linked with experiences in family and work life, including the interface between the two, and how it matters for health, defined in terms of chronic conditions and disease outcomes, functional capacities, biological risk factors, and underlying brain mechanisms. Shifting to future directions in the science of eudaimonia, emphasis was given to widening problems of economic inequality. Although prior studies of health inequalities have documented known socioeconomic gradients in well-being and health, recent decades have witnessed ever-deepening discrepancies between disadvantaged and privileged segments of societies. These disturbing changes have been linked to impacts of the Great Recession, and now more recently, to the COVID-19 pandemic. A concern of dire urgency is whether eudaimonic becoming is increasing beyond the reach of many in contemporary societies who lack requisite resources and opportunities. These questions were framed vis-à-vis growing evidence of suicide, alcohol and drug addictions among the disadvantaged. A more hopeful future direction was then considered, drawing on emerging evidence that the arts, broadly defined, are linked with multiple indicators of better health, although more research is needed to document the nature and scope of these links. Emphasis was given to the humanities, especially philosophy and history, in thinking about issues of social justice. An observation was made that the arts (great literature, poetry, film) may be critical in addressing the indifference of some among the privileged regarding the suffering of others. These questions thus point to the role of the arts and humanities not only in nurturing well-being and health, but also in effecting needed social change. The final future direction pertained to building bridges between the growing field of entrepreneurial studies and eudaimonic well-being. It was suggested that self-initiated business venturing may constitute an archetypal example striving to become one's best self via pursuit of core dreams and visions (passions). In addition, the eudaimonic approach offers an expanded meaning of entrepreneurial success beyond the usual utilitarian emphasis on business profits. A wider conception of success encompasses the promotion of eudaimonic well-being of all involved, including the entrepreneur, her/his employees, and the surrounding community context. Returning to Aristotle's overarching concern with ethics and virtue, this approach coheres with and extends the core motif throughout this chapter—namely, the nurturing well-lived lives that are personally meaningful and fulfilling, while also socially responsible, just, and morally good.

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# An Affective Neuroscience Perspective on Psychological Flourishing: How the Brain Believes that Things Are Going Well



Christian E. Waugh

**Abstract** To establish a “neuroscience of flourishing” one must first boil down its definition to only feature psychological concepts and then build a definition based on what the brain does. The “trait” perspective treats flourishing as a trait of the person that is reflected by forms of brain structure and/or patterns of neural functioning. The “behavioral” perspective emphasizes the brain as doing the behaviors that flourishing people do. I spend more time fleshing out the “belief” perspective, which is the brain’s representations of ‘having flourishing. In particular, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) forms these flourishing beliefs by generating positive evaluations of life circumstances (e.g., life satisfaction), the self (e.g., self-esteem), relationships (e.g., relationship satisfaction), and goal progress (e.g., purpose). This “belief” neuroscientific perspective on flourishing is parsimonious, helps explain the overlapping yet distinct features of hedonic and eudaimonic flourishing, and forms the basis for neurologically constrained psychological models of flourishing.

**Keywords** Flourishing · Well-being · Ventromedial prefrontal cortex · Positivity · Brain

To the degree that flourishing and its related concepts like well-being and thriving are psychological constructs, they are produced somehow by the brain. This is not to say that flourishing is not also an important construct in the domain of philosophy, economics and other related fields, but rather that if one cares about the “neuroscience of flourishing” one must first boil down its definition to only feature psychological concepts and then build a definition based on what the brain does.

Flourishing is the presence of “positive feelings and positive functioning in life” (Keyes, 2002, p. 208). In this paper, I briefly review a common perspective on the neuroscience of flourishing as a trait of the person and reflected by particular forms of brain structure and/or patterns of neural functioning. I also briefly review another

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perspective on flourishing that emphasizes the brain as doing the things flourishing people do. I spend more time, however, fully fleshing out a third perspective, which is to think of the brain as representing the degree to which the human it belongs to believes they are flourishing. Further, I will describe how the brain represents the facets of psychological flourishing common and unique to hedonic well-being, the positive emotional aspects of flourishing including subjective well-being and happiness, and eudaimonic well-being, living well and actualizing one's potential (Huppert & So, 2013; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011).

## **1 Perspective 1: The Brain as Reflecting “Trait Flourishing”**

Many psychologists suggest that, even though flourishing can be thought of as the state of an individual at a particular point in time, it has trait-like qualities. Diener and Lucas (1999), for example, suggest that subjective well-being, the affective and cognitive components of flourishing as defined by the individual, is fairly stable across the life span. They and others also provide evidence that subjective well-being is correlated with personality traits. For example, extraversion and neuroticism are consistently positive and negative predictors, respectively, of subjective well-being (Diener & Lucas, 1999).

When examining how the brain represents the trait of flourishing, researchers typically correlate some form of well-being derived from questionnaires with some form of brain structure or functioning. One measure of brain structure is voxel-based morphometry, which measures the density of gray matter in a particular region. Gray matter density often, but not always, positively correlates with increased performance of whatever function is associated with that region (Kanai & Rees, 2011). Researchers have found that subjective well-being is related to gray matter density in regions associated with self-oriented imagery and memory such as the precuneus (Sato et al., 2016), and in regions associated with emotion and emotion regulation such as the orbitofrontal cortex (Kong et al., 2019) and rostral anterior cingulate cortex (Matsunaga et al., 2016). In addition, those investigating eudaimonic well-being have found it be correlated with gray matter density in the insula (Lewis et al., 2014), a region associated with producing conscious feeling states associated with the body.

Another trait-like neural metric that researchers have used to investigate well-being is resting state functional connectivity, which reflects the degree to which brain regions' activity correlate with other brain regions' activity when people are not doing a particular task. Researchers have found that there is increased resting state functional connectivity between the rostral prefrontal cortex and superior parietal lobule for those exhibiting high vs. low post-traumatic growth (Fujisawa et al., 2015), which the authors interpreted as reflecting differences in executive functioning. Researchers also found that the left middle temporal gyrus and fusiform

gyrus were hubs of a functional network that was stronger in people who were high vs. low in flourishing (Goldbeck et al., 2019), which they interpreted as possibly reflecting greater memory-based social day dreaming.

There are some benefits of assessing the relationship between trait-like neural metrics and flourishing. If flourishing has components of it that are stable, and possibly genetically heritable (Baselmans et al., 2019), then these components are most likely captured by these trait-like neural metrics (Pennington et al., 2000). This approach is similar to that taken when investigators characterize the trait-like neural metrics of various forms of psychopathology such as depression (Gotlib & Hamilton, 2008) and anxiety (Etkin et al., 2009). Thus, this approach allows researchers to draw parallels and contrasts in the stable neural make-up of both flourishing and non-flourishing traits.

There are, however, challenges with this approach to examining the neural basis of flourishing. First, due, in part, to inconsistencies across studies in both psychological and neural measurement, the relationships between the two are inconsistent as well. Indeed, whereas one study found that lower subjective well-being was related to more connectivity in the default-mode network (a brain network characterized by its prominence during resting states and reduction in activation during tasks; Luo et al., 2016), another study found that greater eudaimonic well-being was associated with more default-mode network connectivity (Luo et al., 2017). Although these forms of well-being can be differentiated, they are probably not so distinguishable as to be supported by opposite patterns of neural functional organization. Even when the well-being metrics are similar, there are still discrepancies in their relation with these trait-level neural metrics. For example, Sato et al. (2016) found subjective happiness to positively correlate with gray matter density in the precuneus, whereas Kong et al. (2015) found it to negatively correlate with gray matter density in the precuneus.

Second, even when researchers conduct systematic reviews of the findings in order to highlight any consistent relationships (M. L. King, 2019), it is difficult to interpret these findings without postulating how these brain regions and networks function to contribute to flourishing and well-being. For example, that the middle temporal gyrus and fusiform gyrus were hubs of a functional network for high flourishing individuals (Goldbeck et al., 2019) required the authors to interpret this pattern as “increased memory-based social daydreaming.” This interpretation is possible, but almost certainly not a function that the researchers thought, a priori, strongly characterizes flourishing individuals. So these trait brain metrics may be helpful as a starting point for psychologists, but are not yet sufficient for understanding how flourishing is produced by the brain.

## 2 Perspective 2: The Brain as Doing “Flourishing Behaviors”

Modern theories of personality suggest that personality traits are best described as a collection, or density distribution, of trait-relevant behaviors (Fleeson, 2001), interpretations and motivational processes (Jayawickreme et al., 2018). For example, although extraverts do not always act extraverted, they do extravert-relevant behaviors most of the time, and are motivated to do extravert-relevant behaviors and interpret the world in an extraverted way. Neuroscience perspectives on personality (DeYoung, 2015) suggest that the brain is the source of this interpretation, motivation, and (production of) behavior and personality consists of reliable patterns of these processes. For example, extraversion is correlated with cortical volume in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC; DeYoung et al., 2010) perhaps because the vmPFC makes positive interpretations of the environment (Roy et al., 2012) and motivates people to obtain things they feel positively about (Nakao et al., 2012) (Table 1).

This approach can work if researchers focus on one particular aspect of flourishing and identify the interpretational, motivational, and behavioral functions produced by the brain to support that aspect. For example, self-determination theory (SDT) posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs and must be satisfied for someone to flourish (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, one might propose that people flourish when they exhibit greater activation/density/functional connectivity in regions of the brain that support intrinsic motivation for autonomy, competence, and/or relatedness (Reeve & Lee, 2018). In another example, participants high in self-reported meaning in life exhibited enhanced functional connectivity in the medial temporal lobe, which the researchers interpreted as supporting mental simulation of the past and future (Waytz et al., 2015). The researchers then showed through a series of experiments that mentally simulating the past and future caused increases in self-reported meaning.

The primary challenge with this perspective when applied to flourishing is that, unlike personality, flourishing is often treated as an outcome or reflection of various

**Table 1** Implications of this affective neuroscience perspective (ANP) on flourishing

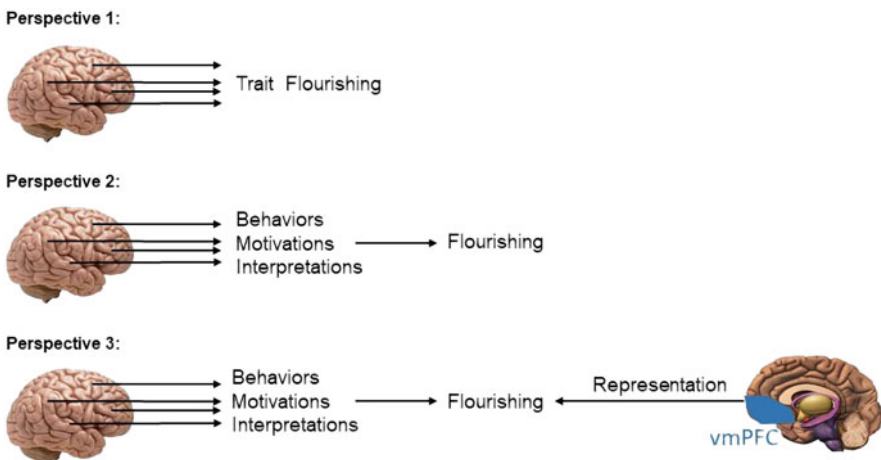
Topic	Implication
Flourishing definition	ANP requires that flourishing be defined by its individual psychological components that can be mapped on to neural processes
Flourishing domains	ANP suggests that the commonality between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being might be positive evaluations, which are generated by the vmPFC
Flourishing measurement	ANP provides the foundation for simplified measures of flourishing that focus on positive evaluations
Flourishing interventions	ANP suggests that positive evaluations, and their associated neural activity in the vmPFC, could be a powerful target of interventions designed to improve flourishing.

*vmPFC* ventromedial prefrontal cortex

behaviors, interpretations, and motivations instead of the causal agent of those processes (Huppert & So, 2013; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011). This leaves open the possibility of multiple causes of each of the behaviors, interpretations, and motivations that then lead to or constitute flourishing. For example, having good relationships is an aspect of flourishing, but there are multiple behaviors that lead to having good relationships and the sources of these behaviors may reside in very different regions of the brain. This multiple-cause of a single effect might also explain the inconsistencies when attempting to find neural correlates of trait flourishing (**Perspective 1**).

### 3 Perspective 3: How the Brain Represents Flourishing

To address the issues above, I propose that a neuroscience of psychological flourishing begins with understanding how the brain represents flourishing (Fig. 1). This perspective, therefore, addresses the subjective aspect of flourishing—those conceptions of flourishing that are primarily based on people’s report of their flourishing or well-being directly, or report of their evaluation of those parts of their life (e.g., meaning, relationships) that are thought to constitute flourishing. This subjective approach avoids the multiple-cause single effect problem by suggesting that there may be one set of brain regions that form a common system for “believing one is flourishing” even if there are multiple ways of obtaining flourishing. However, this perspective is inconsistent with more objectivist views of flourishing that stem from Aristotle’s original writings (Aristotle, 1986), which suggest that one cannot be flourishing if, objectively, one’s life is not going well



**Fig. 1** Three possible perspectives on investigating the neuroscience of flourishing. *vmPFC* ventromedial prefrontal cortex

or living up to its full potential (Brülde, 2007). Contributing to this subjective vs. objective debate is a little out of the scope of this chapter except to say that the brain is inherently subjective so a neuroscience of flourishing must approach it as such; however, my perspective allows for (and probably agrees with) objectivists thinking that a neuroscience approach to flourishing does not capture its entirety.

### ***3.1 Believing One is Flourishing is about Making Positive Evaluations***

My neuroscientific perspective on psychological flourishing is that the brain believes it's flourishing when it makes positive evaluations of life events, the self, goals, and relationships. This approach is drawn from research showing that many of the evaluations that people make about their life that reflect good well-being share a strong latent positive dimension (Caprara et al., 2010). In the following section, I describe how the components of flourishing can be reframed as positive evaluations of various aspects of peoples' lives.

**Life Circumstances** Positive evaluations of circumstances that are currently drawing one's attention are called "positive appraisals" (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003) and are theorized to cause, in part, positive feelings, which are a critical element in almost all theories of well-being and flourishing (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Seligman, 2011). Life circumstances can also be more global and stable and less about individual events. Positive evaluations of current global life circumstances form the basis for "life satisfaction," the cognitive component of subjective well-being and flourishing (Diener et al., 1985). Positive evaluations of future global life circumstances form the basis for optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), a trait often included in definitions of flourishing (Huppert & So, 2013).

**Self** Positive evaluations of the global self are the basis for high self-esteem (Brown et al., 2001). Within self-esteem there are also different domains that map onto various facets of flourishing. Positive evaluations of one's ability to accomplish goals are reflected in one's sense of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Positive evaluations of one's self in a social context include one's likability and perceived social inclusion (Leary et al., 1995).

**Relationships** Quite simply, having good relationships is a fundamental aspect of flourishing (Huppert & So, 2013; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011) and knowing one has good relationships requires making positive evaluations of close others as well as the relationships with those close others (Leary et al., 1995; Martz et al., 1998).

**Goals** The trickier aspects of flourishing to explain with this positive evaluation approach are forms of eudaimonic well-being, such as meaning, purpose, and

autonomy, which are sometimes, but not always correlated with positive emotional hedonic well-being (Kashdan et al., 2008). However, there is evidence to suggest that eudaimonic well-being is also about having positive evaluations of aspects of one's life—specifically, positive evaluations of one's goals and goal pursuit. Some of the more popular “meaning in life” measures, for example, include items that feature positive evaluations of goals such as “I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose, or mission in life as very great” (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). Indeed, some studies have found that meaning in life is predicted by positive evaluations of one's goals as well as positive mood (L. A. King et al., 2006), which can reflect positive evaluations of one's progress in pursuit of life goals (Carver, 2015). Relatedly, one's positive evaluation of one's freedom to pursue goals is reflected in feelings of autonomy and contributes to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), both key aspects of flourishing.

### ***3.2 Positive Evaluations Are Made by the Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex (vmPFC)***

In my neuroscience of flourishing perspective, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) is the brain region mainly responsible for making positive evaluations of life circumstances, the self, relationships, and goals, and therefore primarily responsible for people's beliefs about their flourishing. The vmPFC is a member of the mesolimbic dopamine system along with the nucleus accumbens and other cortical and subcortical regions. Among the functions of the mesolimbic dopamine system is to attach motivational importance to rewarding stimuli that positively reinforce behavior (Berridge & Robinson, 2003). Therefore, this system is implicated in making positive evaluations of external stimuli (Kühn & Gallinat, 2012; Sescousse et al., 2013). Although the vmPFC and nucleus accumbens are often co-activated in studies examining reward processing (Sescousse et al., 2013), the vmPFC is more related to processing higher-order secondary rewards (Sescousse et al., 2013) and making contextual positive evaluations (Roy et al., 2012). Also, the vmPFC makes positive evaluations that are domain-independent, meaning that it creates a “common currency” of positive evaluations in order to compare the value of stimuli/events in different domains (Rangel & Hare, 2010). Therefore, I propose that the vmPFC makes positive evaluations across the different life domains that are relevant for flourishing.

**Life Circumstances** Perhaps the most evidence for the role of vmPFC in positive evaluations comes from studies in which people rate the subjective pleasantness or liking of various stimuli (e.g., faces, odors, Kühn & Gallinat, 2012), which then can lead to positive feeling states. For example, the vmPFC is activated more to funny rather than unfunny cartoons (Admon & Pizzagalli, 2015) and is associated with people's amusement to funny cartoons (Goel & Dolan, 2001). Beyond evaluating simple external stimuli in the moment, the vmPFC is also associated with people's

felt enjoyment for engaging life activities (Mitchell et al., 2010). When evaluating future life circumstances, there is evidence that the vmPFC is associated with simulating future positive events (Benoit et al., 2014) and generating optimistic beliefs of possible future adverse events (Kuzmanovic et al., 2016). Lastly, the vmPFC is also associated with generating positive re-evaluations of negative events and stimuli (Doré et al., 2017) and evaluating stressors as positive (Tobia et al., 2017), both important aspects of stress resilience (Kalisch et al., 2014).

**Self** The vmPFC is consistently implicated when people make positive evaluations of various facets of their selves, such as thinking about their positive self-relevant traits (Chavez et al., 2017) and associating positive traits with themselves (Frewen et al., 2013). The vmPFC, therefore, is a key region in representing self-esteem (D'Argembeau, 2013) and is associated with updating self-esteem in response to unexpectedly positive social feedback (Will et al., 2017) and maintaining positive self-esteem when threatened (Hughes & Beer, 2013). In addition to generating positive evaluations of the trait self, the vmPFC also generates positive evaluations of episodic representations of the self, such as memories (Speer & Delgado, 2017).

**Relationships** The vmPFC also generates positive evaluations of others and of one's relationships with others. Meta-analyses have shown that the vmPFC is activated when people are processing information about close others (Van Overwalle, 2009) and that this vmPFC activation is more related to the perceived closeness of the others than to perceived similarity in one's traits with others (Krienen et al., 2010). The vmPFC has also been shown to track with people's sense of relatedness as reflected by their belongingness to an in-group (Morrison et al., 2012) and affiliation with close family members (Rüsch et al., 2014).

**Goals** Studies have shown that the vmPFC is associated with generating positive evaluations of simple goals like determining what to eat (Hare et al., 2008) as well as more meaningful, global goals like maintaining a sense of fairness and equality (Aoki et al., 2014). Although regions of the brain associated with executive functioning are more responsible for performing the operations related to goal pursuit (Berkman & Lieberman, 2009), the vmPFC represents the perceived autonomy with which one can pursue those goals. A meta-analysis showed that the vmPFC is reliably activated when people make intrinsically motivated decisions (Nakao et al., 2012), such as when people get to freely choose the objects that they employ in tasks (Murayama et al., 2010).

### 3.3 *Refining this Neuroscience Approach to Flourishing*

I have so far made the claim that the vmPFC is responsible for people's beliefs that they are flourishing. In this next section, I discuss some refinements of this approach that address some of the nuances in the research on vmPFC functioning and flourishing.



**Not All Positive Evaluations Are about Flourishing** The vmPFC generates positive evaluations, but the targets of those positive evaluations are not always relevant to flourishing. For example, the vmPFC also makes positive evaluations of erotic stimuli, money, and sugary food (Sescousse et al., 2013). Therefore, one might expect the vmPFC to be consistently featured in studies examining positive evaluations of flourishing elements, but if a study demonstrates vmPFC activation, it does not necessarily mean that the study in question featured elements of flourishing.

**vmPFC as “Representing” Flourishing but not Necessarily “Doing” Flourishing** Importantly, the claims I make in **perspective 3** about the vmPFC representing beliefs about one’s flourishing do not necessarily suppose that the vmPFC is also involved in doing the behaviors that lead to flourishing (as reflected by **perspective 2**). For example, although the vmPFC is involved in reflecting on engaging activities (Mitchell et al., 2010), vmPFC activation actually decreases when people are in the midst of those engaging activities (Ulrich et al., 2016). Also, although the vmPFC represents the positive evaluation of goals and of one’s autonomy, it is not always involved with goal pursuit. That being said, the vmPFC is sometimes involved in the motivations/behaviors that one might presume would lead to flourishing, such as making altruistic charitable donations (Moll et al., 2006). Therefore, when investigating the neuroscience of flourishing, it is important to distinguish “beliefs about flourishing,” which I propose reliably involves the vmPFC, from “behaviors/motivations that contribute to flourishing,” which requires identifying the brain regions responsible for producing those specific behaviors/motivations and may or may not involve the vmPFC.

## 4 Implications

**Integrating and Distinguishing Between Metrics of Flourishing** There is much debate over the independence of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being with the least provocative stance being that it appears as if the two forms are correlated to a substantive extent (Kashdan et al., 2008), but that each may provide distinctive value in understanding the entirety of psychological well-being and flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Although a full treatment of this debate is beyond the focus of this chapter, this positive evaluation perspective might offer some explanatory power for the relation between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being.

If, as I propose, positive evaluations are common to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, then these evaluations could form the basis of any shared variance between the two types of well-being (Caprara et al., 2010). Positive evaluations, however, do not always lead to positive feelings (Garrett & Maddock, 2006). Although positive evaluations are necessary for generating positive feelings, positive feelings arise when those positive evaluations are particularly important, urgent, intense, enduring and lead to higher rather than lower arousal (Frijda et al., 1992; Grandjean et al., 2008). Therefore, it may be that both versions of well-being are

based on positive evaluations, but that hedonic well-being also features these other factors that are necessary for producing positive feelings, whereas eudaimonic well-being may not (although it could).

**Forming the Basis for Simplified Versions of Psychological Flourishing that Can then Be Related Directly to Brain Function/Structure** If one's goal is to understand flourishing from a neuroscience perspective, then psychological measures of flourishing should represent as closely as possible the mental operations that the brain performs. This positive evaluation approach aims to provide the background to create just that type of measure (e.g., Caprara et al., 2012). One in which researchers can relate more specifically people's positive evaluations of their life circumstances with the underlying brain structure and function supporting those positive evaluations, and then link these relationships to feelings of flourishing.

**Building Flourishing by Building Positive Evaluations** One implication of this perspective is that building beliefs in flourishing would require people to increase positive evaluations of their life. Importantly, as some comprehensive positive psychology interventions have discovered (e.g., LEAF: J. T. Moskowitz et al., 2019), this can be accomplished by actually increasing the good things in people's lives that naturally induce more positive evaluations (e.g., personal strengths, attainable goal setting, acts of kindness), and/or training people to adopt more positive evaluations of their current circumstances (e.g., noticing positive events, gratitude, positive reappraisal). Even when trying to build eudaimonic well-being by increasing meaningful circumstances in people's lives (e.g., by building close relationships), ultimately, the brains of those people believe they are flourishing when they improve their positive evaluations of those meaningful circumstances (e.g., as occurs in gratitude interventions).

## 5 Summary

Flourishing is not only in the domain of psychology, but rightfully also belongs to other fields like philosophy, economics, sociology, etc. This neuroscientific perspective on psychological flourishing is not intended to replace these other theories of flourishing, but rather to provide a powerful way of understanding how the brain represents flourishing. Beyond just understanding how the brain works for its own sake, this positive evaluation perspective may also help explain the relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia as well as provide a basis for more targeted measures of flourishing. One of the keys of understanding how to have the good life is to understand how people believe (in their brain) that their life is good.

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# Health and Flourishing: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis



Matthew T. Lee and Isha Mayor

**Abstract** Human flourishing is a complete state of well-being, comprised of essential elements that are universally valued across cultures as ends in themselves rather than as means to ends. Understanding the ontological interconnectedness of individual and communal flourishing has important implications for health. A narrow view of health has been framed in biomedical—and frequently physical—terms as the absence of disease or impairment. But broader and more holistic understandings derived from long-standing wisdom in the humanities are increasingly being used in tandem with the allopathic approach, thereby offering a relational understanding of health that transcends a focus on physical infirmity and locates the individual in social, ecological, and spiritual contexts. This wisdom has profound implications for the organization of healthcare, including a restoration of compassion as the heart of healthcare practice, as recent iterations of lifestyle medicine and integrative medicine have demonstrated. A synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge affirms the goal of building a wellbeing ecosystem that transcends self-centeredness and reimagines health *as* flourishing.

**Keywords** Flourishing · Health · Ontological interconnectedness · Compassion · Religion · Spirituality

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# 1 Connecting the Flourishing of Individuals, Communities, and Ecosystems

This chapter offers a relational understanding of health that transcends a focus on physical infirmity and locates the person in social, ecological, and spiritual contexts. A synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge affirms the goal of building a wellbeing ecosystem that reimagines health as flourishing (VanderWeele et al., 2019). Human flourishing is a state of *complete wellbeing*, comprised of essential elements that are universally valued across cultures as ends in themselves rather than primarily as means to ends (Lee et al., 2021b). At the individual level, this would entail at least five domains: happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017). But individual flourishing is always constituted and sustained by communal flourishing, requiring an understanding of such group-level factors as mutuality, belongingness, mission, justice, relational growth, effective leadership, and trust (VanderWeele, 2019). For most people, flourishing is also inseparable from spiritual well-being (Lee et al., 2021a).

Interrelationships among the domains of material and spiritual well-being of individuals, communities, and ecosystems might be termed *intersystemic flourishing*. This perspective foregrounds the integral relationship between the “contextual-social sphere” and the “psychological sphere,” representing an “ontological interconnectedness” (Delle Fave et al., 2016, p. 1; Slife & Richardson, 2008) that is constitutive of both health and flourishing:

[A]ll religious and philosophical traditions identify the highest stage of human development with the transcendence from the individual self, by acknowledging its interconnection with a broader and more complex reality... [A]cross individualistic and collectivistic countries varying in their value orientation, harmony represents the core feature of happiness in its individual and social manifestations, as it presupposes connections or bonds at the intra and interpersonal levels (Delle Fave et al., 2016, p. 19).

A holistic, harmonious, interconnected viewpoint brings into clear focus relationships among individual and communal flourishing and their overlapping pathways.

For some purposes it makes good sense to treat empirical reality *analytically*, drawing distinctions between, for example, a flower and the soil. From this way of seeing, the flower is separate and has specific properties that distinguish it from soil. This perspective has obvious value because it helps us understand and categorize meaningful empirical distinctions. Understanding discrete parts helps us better see the functioning of larger systems. But used exclusively, an analytical way of viewing the world may deemphasize the importance of interconnections, in a manner that is both cognitively thin and fundamentally *unloving* (De Jaegher, 2019). From a more *holistic* or *living system* (Reed, 2007) perspective, the flower and the soil participate in *interbeing*.

In other words, the creation and sustenance of the flower requires the soil, just as the creation and sustenance of the soil requires living things such as flowers. They exist in a state of “interdependent origination” (Manga, 2008, p. 121), a perspective

that reflects awareness of the essential “complementarity” (Bateson, 1971, p. 16) found in systems theories such as cybernetics. The micro (flower) and macro (soil) are ontologically interconnected: the very being of each is irreducibly dependent on the other. Human flourishing requires the honoring of interbeing because the quality of the soil in which people have been planted reflects a larger social, political, and environmental *wellbeing ecosystem* that fundamentally determines their ability to grow, realize their potential, and live long, healthy lives, often approaching 100 years (Buettner, 2012; Jones, 2000).

Analytical and holistic perspectives are both valid ways of seeing the world, useful for different purposes. However, a de-emphasis on the holistic in our healthcare, economic, political, and other social systems has contributed to fundamental disconnects that simultaneously impede both human flourishing and a thriving ecosystem. This has led to proposals for more interconnected ways of seeing and redesigning the larger system to reflect principles of interbeing, using holistic frameworks such as Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2017), Systems Integrity Building Economy or Interbeing Economy (Manga, 2008), Eco-System awareness (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), Compassionomics (Trzeciak & Mazzarelli, 2019), Regenerative Design (Reed, 2007), Whole Health (Gaudet & Kligler, 2019), and Ecosynomics (Ritchie-Dunham, 2014).

Such holistic conceptual platforms contrast sharply with narrow analytical paradigms such as conventional economics, rooted in scarcity and zero-sum structures (Ritchie-Dunham, 2014), organized for extraction and disconnection rather than wholeness (Laloux, 2014), and reflective of an ego system awareness characterized by the selfish mindset of “maximum me” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). Our chapter highlights the holistic in order to advance the argument that we would be better off if we imagined health, not solely in terms of the functioning of the individual, physical body, but in a much more encompassing way: as flourishing (VanderWeele et al., 2019).

Philosophers have noted that the term “health” has had many different meanings (Woods & Edwards, 1989). We argue that the integration of individual and communal/contextual flourishing has important implications for understandings of health. A narrow view of health has been framed in biomedical—and frequently physical—terms as the “absence of any disease or impairment” (Sartorius, 2006). But broader and more holistic understandings derived from long-standing wisdom in the humanities are increasingly being used in tandem with the allopathic approach, thereby offering a relational understanding of health that transcends a focus on physical infirmity and locates the individual in a social context. In fact, the World Health Organization has defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and *social wellbeing*” (emphasis added) for over 70 years (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662; VanderWeele et al., 2019). Yet the implications of this comprehensive definition of health, along with its relation to flourishing, have only recently been considered (VanderWeele et al., 2019; Delle Fave et al., 2016).

## 2 Health as a Dynamic Equilibrium Constituted by Ontological Interconnectedness

Once we move beyond the overly individualistic and biological focus on the physical health of the individual's body, we are prepared to understand health more dynamically and holistically as "an equilibrium that an individual has established within [oneself] and between [oneself] and [one's] social and physical environment" (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662; see also Dodge et al., 2012) which includes "the resilience or capacity to cope and maintain and restore one's integrity, equilibrium, and sense of wellbeing" (Huber et al., quoted in Bircher & Kuruvilla, 2014, p. 365). This view aligns with ancient wisdom, such as the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*, a roughly two-thousand-year-old text on Chinese medicine that emphasizes inner balance as well as harmony with the wider environment. It is perhaps inevitable that health framed in this way becomes the presence of "a state of wellbeing" rather than the absence of disease and that such a state is "emergent from conducive interactions between individuals' potentials, life's demands, and social and environmental determinants" (Bircher & Kuruvilla, 2014, p. 368). An individual person's flourishing is always a function of the quality of relationships and myriad other aspects of growth-enhancing systems (Delle Fave et al., 2016). The old saying that "person becomes a person through other persons" speaks to this interconnectedness.

Instead of piecemeal approaches, a synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge affirms the goal of building a *wellbeing ecosystem* grounded in "interconnectivity" (Buettner, 2012, pp. 256–7; see also Gaudet & Kligler, 2019). These interconnections include holistic ways of relating with one's self, other people and living things, one's environment, and with the various domains of individual and communal flourishing. Much of our current biomedical epistemology has been grounded in propositional logics and technical rationality, driven by an analytical carving up of totalities into discrete components. A more holistic, dialogical way of knowing attends to the porous boundaries between individual and ecosystem (De Jaegher, 2019; Delle Fave et al., 2016; McNiff, 2000; Nisbett et al., 2001; Steger et al., 2008). This nonreductionist orientation reveals the inseparability of health and flourishing.

Consider the interconnections among an individual person's diet and health—a quite personal and micro-level issue—in the context of systems of food production and their impacts on a sustainable biosphere. A holistic view reveals that the health of individuals, communities, and the entire planet are inseparable. Building individual diets primarily on a foundation of high-quality plant-based foods would save an estimated 11 million lives per year globally due to a reduction in noncommunicable disease (a roughly 20% reduction in mortality), while also promoting sustainable food production processes that work within ecological limits (Willett et al., 2019). What is healthy for the individual is also healthy for the ecosystem and vice versa. A planetary health diet is designed at the intersection of individual and ecological health and is properly understood as a wellbeing ecosystem. An individual that contributes to the environmental destruction that results from unsustainable collective dietary choices incurs personal health risks (e.g., heart disease, diabetes) from

the diet itself and from the degraded global environment (e.g., heat waves traced to global warming causing increased mortality, Berardelli, 2019).

Appreciation of such connectedness has profound implications for the organization of healthcare, as recent iterations of lifestyle medicine, integrative medicine, and the *whole health* transformation of systems have demonstrated (Frates et al., 2019; Gaudet & Kligler, 2019). In such holistic systems, the doctor is not primarily an expert who “treats” a patient. Rather, the doctor is a coach, one node in a network, working within interdisciplinary relationships involving the family and community that help the patient find their own wholeness, balance, and ultimately flourishing (Frates et al., 2019). This approach tends to restore compassion (Trzeciak & Mazzarelli, 2019) as the heart of healthcare practice and privileges a relational “ethics of care” (Gilligan, 1993) over fidelity to abstract principles divorced from the context of specific relations. The compassion of healthcare workers by itself has been found to prolong the life of patients. But in addition, the false choice of compassion or quality clinical care has given way to strong empirical evidence that a clinician who chooses to express compassion is more likely to also be more clinically competent. One reason is that compassionate healthcare workers are more likely to listen to patients, and attentive listening might itself be experienced by patients as healing, but such listening also provides the worker with more clinically useful information about the patient which enables higher quality care (Trzeciak & Mazzarelli, 2019). Rather than treating patients primarily as biological *bodies* or *specimens* to be medicated, skillful practitioners combine emotional and cognitive care in the context of relationships with *persons* that are both warm and friendly, enabling them to be known more fully, which contributes to treatment effectiveness (DiBlasi et al., 2001; De Jaegher, 2019).

This kind of warm, caring culture—rooted in abundance rather than scarcity (Ritchie-Dunham, 2014)—can be assisted by a structural redesign of large systems currently rooted in transactional and extractive relations: those that diminish the flourishing of the many in order to materially enrich the few. For example, a nurse in the Netherlands founded Buurtzorg after years of dissatisfying experiences in a bureaucratized nursing context which harmed the health and wellbeing of both patients and nurses (Laloux, 2014). The goal of the new organization is to promote high-quality nursing practice grounded in warmth and intimacy. The nurse is partly a coach and plays an important role in expanding the patient’s network of support, including family members and even neighbors. Holistic and compassionate health is situated in a web of supportive—even regenerative—social relationships that also impact the other domains of flourishing. The nurse attends to the same patients for many years, often for life, building strong and meaningful bonds. Although this is less efficient in a narrow economic sense than bureaucratized healthcare, Buurtzorg’s nonhierarchical structure reduces costs by eliminating bosses and other forms of bloated administration. Everyone at Buurtzorg is a leader, enhancing a sense of purpose and life satisfaction.

### 3 Social Determinants of Health and Social Connectivity

To continue our exploration of interconnections between individual and communal health and flourishing, we turn to the subject of the social determinants of health: non-medical social conditions that adversely affect physical health and the harmful effects of poor healthcare. These conditions are inequitably distributed. In fact, there is evidence that “iatrogenic damage not associated with recognizable error. . . constitutes the third leading cause of death in the United States, after deaths from heart disease and cancer” (Starfield, 2000, pp. 483–484). Abundant research has demonstrated both the adverse effects of material deprivation (food, water, poverty) and the positive benefits of assets such as social capital that emerge from larger social and political systems on an individual’s health, including important correlations with demographics such as race and ethnicity, gender, education, and occupation (Braverman et al., 2011; Braverman et al., 2010; Kim & Kawachi, 2006; Link & Phelan, 1995; Lucyk & McLaren, 2017; Marmot, 2018). Individual health and wellbeing are a function of social policy and the extent to which the healthcare system is able to effectively serve all groups of people (Stout, 2017). Policies that produce poor, rocky soil inhibit the flourishing of individuals planted in this soil (Jones, 2000); these individuals are then less empowered later in life to contribute to the health of the soil that will nurture the next generation.

Health and happiness tend to covary and both are affected by the same social determinants. One study of 24,188 adults in 36 US communities revealed that individuals in households with the lowest incomes were roughly four times more likely to report being both unhappy and having poor health. Education was strongly related to these two outcomes as well. But the positive association between health and happiness among individuals was not fully explained by the social determinants. These two aspects of flourishing appear to be co-constitutive. Furthermore, the covariation between health and happiness was even stronger at the community level, suggesting further need to understand the relationship between individual and collective covariation (Subramanian et al., 2005). In sum, happy people tend to be healthy, partly due to the quality of the soil in which they have been planted, and happy places are even more likely to be healthy places. Consider also that average scores during the COVID-19 pandemic declined at roughly the same magnitude for happiness, emotional health, and physical health compared to the time period before the pandemic. Interestingly, the average score for the character and virtue domain of flourishing was largely unchanged across these same time points (VanderWeele et al., 2020). Social determinants therefore do not affect all domains of flourishing in the same manner: physical and emotional health (including happiness) are particularly sensitive to changing conditions of the soil. Domains such as character may be more resilient to short-term fluctuations in social circumstances, but perhaps only because they have much deeper roots in less variable soil.

### 3.1 *Interrelationships Among Domains of Flourishing*

But before we consider these deeper roots, which include spirituality, it is necessary to reflect on why the deprivations associated with the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affect health and happiness. One possible explanation is that these domains are strongly affected by other aspects of flourishing such as a sense of purpose, social connectedness, and the material stability necessary to sustain these domains over time, all of which have declined during the pandemic (VanderWeele et al., 2020; see also Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). If an individual has lost a job because of the pandemic, not only does their material stability suffer, along with increased worry about paying bills, but they also miss out on the sense of purpose formerly associated with a job. Life-affirming connections with valued co-workers might be lost as well.

The literature on these interconnections is voluminous. For example, it is well-known that those who are socially isolated, compared with people who have strong social ties, experience greater threats to physical health, including both morbidity and mortality. Disempowering relationships are “at the heart of poor health—physical, mental, and emotional” (Hari, 2018, p. 69). On the other hand, a meta-analysis based on more than 300,000 participants revealed that supportive relationships increased the likelihood of survival by 46%, a finding comparable to results for risk factors that are considered more “biomedical,” such as smoking, exercise, and diet (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Similarly, in another study senior citizens who scored lowest on a psychological life purpose inventory were found to be 2.66 times more likely to die from heart and circulatory-related conditions compared to those with the highest purpose scores (Alimujiang et al., 2019; see also Kim et al., 2020a; VanderWeele et al., 2019). Stress is also widely recognized as a major cause of death, but encouragingly the mortality inducing effects of stress can be eliminated if individuals engage in “unpaid helping activities directed toward friends, neighbors, or relatives” (Poulin et al., 2013, p. 1650). This is consistent with the *undoing hypothesis*: the experience of positive emotions is able to correct or undo the harmful effects of negative emotions, including cardiovascular functioning (Fredrickson et al., 2000). Given such regenerative findings, it is little wonder that doctors prescribe volunteering or benevolent service as medicine (Post, 2017). All of this suggests that stressful, purposeless, disconnection *is* poor health. Physical symptoms and even death are manifestations of this empirical fact. Warm, caring service to others—whether to family, friends, strangers—is medicine that positively affects physical health and other aspects of whole-person flourishing (Chen et al., 2019a; Chen et al., 2019b; Ironson et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020b; Poulin et al., 2013).

The opportunity to meaningfully engage in benevolent service to others is not simply an individual choice. Broader group dynamics are also important, such as living in a community where doctors routinely practice social prescribing and help connect their patients to viable opportunities to volunteer. More generally, all of the flourishing domains, including physical health, are the result of the *interaction* of the

individual (flower) and the collective (soil): “people are embedded in social networks and... the health and wellbeing of one person affects the health and wellbeing of others” (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, p. 8). We will explore this thesis by considering the evidence that happiness is not merely the “province of isolated individuals” or “a function of individual experience or individual choice” (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, p. 8)—it is a resource that thrives and grows with community engagement.

One study about the spread of happiness in social networks followed over ten thousand people for three decades, including the initial study participants, the next two generations of children, and their close contacts. Reinforcing our theme of ontological interconnectedness, findings indicated that an individual’s happiness was connected with the happiness of people in a social network up to three degrees of separation, including “one’s friends’ friends’ friends” (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, p. 8). This research shows that, geographically, happy people tend to be found within large groups of other happy people and the happiest are at the center of these social networks. Happiness is partly a “property of groups of people” (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, p. 7) and the future happiness of an individual can be predicted by network characteristics. Just as individuals are influenced by the network, changes in the happiness of individuals have ripple effects that “generate large scale structure in the network, giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals” (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, p. 7).

Happiness, like any emotional state, can be directly transferred from one individual to another through mimicry in physiological processes from our brain to our bodily actions, especially facial expressions. Experiencing happiness and associated facial expressions improves social relations by spreading pleasurable emotions in others, acknowledging and rewarding the efforts of others, and by prompting, facilitating, and encouraging continuing social contact. Positive emotions have a broadening effect as well: they expand cognitive and behavioral flexibility, which builds lasting resources in the form of social abilities, traits, and bonds (Fredrickson, 2016). The second author learned from one of Fredrickson’s undergraduate courses about how experiencing awe for the natural world could influence views on spirituality, which is a resource that enhances meaning and connection. In this way, positive emotions not only spread to others in a given moment, but also years later, as they build resources and relationships that reinforce and recreate them. In other words, positive emotions are one set of durable nutrients that contribute to rich, fertile community soil.

Positive emotions therefore create an environment for people to experience and spread these emotions to others. For example, love-the-emotion is a type of positive emotion that is inherently shared between two or more individuals during positive social interaction that creates positivity resonance (Fredrickson, 2016). This is different from, but it contributes to, love as a larger, dynamic system. An accumulation over time of the momentary experience of love-the-emotion in a social network will strengthen the love system, with profound implications for physical health and other domains of flourishing. In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the accumulation of such moments might be saving lives. Social interactions comprising

love-the-emotion are associated with behaviors like mask-wearing that can prevent viral spread, as well as with charitable acts to respond to community needs. In this way, moments of love-the-emotion experienced between two or more individuals not only lead to more of these moments with others with whom these individuals interact, but they also motivate prosocial tendencies that directly lead to better community health (West et al., 2020). In other words, love-the-emotion fosters physical health and broader wellbeing, including inspiring actions that protect community health. These moments between and among family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers create and strengthen bonds, meaning, and purpose on individual levels, and community well-being on a collective level.

### ***3.2 Neurological and Physiological Pathways***

The neurological and physiological pathways through which close social relationships, as well as emotions like love or compassion, influence physical health are becoming better understood (Uchino & Way, 2017). For example, when researchers induce feelings of anger, physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, headache, muscle pains, and dry mouth persist from 3 to 6 h. Conversely, inducing feelings of compassion even for 5 minutes increased the level of salivary immunoglobulin A (S-IgA), an important measure of immune function and parasympathetic nervous system activity, while also providing recipients with “a general state of wellbeing, feelings of relaxation, and increased energy which often lasted throughout the day” (Rein et al., 1995, p. 102). With such findings in mind, it is easy to imagine how being immersed over time in a social network comprised primarily of compassionate people (or, conversely, angry people), would nurture (or harm) one’s physical body through positive (or negative) experiences with others and through positive (or negative) habits related to our own ability to relax (or feel stress). We therefore are profoundly affected by the extent to which our networks model a virtuous “cycle of renewal” (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 212) which trains us to skillfully “turn off” our sympathetic nervous system (i.e., the “fight, flight, or freeze” stress-response) and engage the parasympathetic (“tend and befriend” or “calm and connect”). Such practices “give you the ability to gradually rewire your own brain—from the inside out—for greater well-being, fulfillment in your relationships, and inner peace” (Hanson, 2009, p. 6).

This whole-person view integrates a physiological and psychological understanding of the person. Attention to the connection between “mind” and “heart” is not just a metaphor, as research on a physiological measure of cardiac vagal tone demonstrates the inseparable interconnectedness between biophysical health and social connections particularly well. Cardiac vagal tone refers to the functioning of the vagus nerve, which connects the brain and the heart, and is a proximate measure of physical health due to its relationship to physiological functioning, including inflammatory processes and blood glucose levels. The vagus nerve is implicated in the body’s “calm and connect” response, which is especially important in responding



skillfully to stressful, changing circumstances. Cardiac vagal tone is also associated with the regulation of attention and emotion, and consequently, social skills (Fredrickson, 2018).

Research has demonstrated the ways that social connectivity and cardiac vagal tone strengthen each other. One study showed that people's positive perceptions of their social connections helped account for the positive relationship between positive emotions and physical health. When people's experiences of self-generating positive emotions as a result of a lab intervention culminated in feeling close or in tune with others, they experienced improvements in cardiac vagal tone (Fredrickson, 2016). Another study in the same lab observed that higher levels of cardiac vagal tone were associated with more frequently being in the presence of others and with greater intensities of positive emotions experienced during social activities. This suggests that cardiac vagal tone "amplifies the positive emotions experienced during moments of social connection" (Fredrickson, 2018, p. 165) and is therefore a biological vantage resource—a resource built by experiences of positive emotions over time that increases people's sensitivity to subsequent positive emotions. Positive feelings of social connectivity and cardiac vagal tone are mutually reinforcing aspects of a single biopsychosocial process. The health of one's social relations and one's physical health are therefore not fully distinct aspects of our lives. Benevolent service that increases positivity resonance and strengthens social bonds is medicine (Post, 2017)

### ***3.3 Individuals as Embodied Context***

All of this suggests that, in an ontological sense, there is no escape from participation in interbeing (Manga, 2008). Every individual person can be at least partly understood as the literal embodiment of culture and group dynamics, although some level of agency is always possible within the constraints imposed by social context. Thus, the health of the individual depends on the health of the collective. Our cardiac vagal tone and ability to self-regulate our sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are shaped by the social networks in which we are immersed and their level of positivity resonance (Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Fredrickson, 2018), the "collective intentionality" (Barrett, 2017, p. 135) that comprises the knowledge base we use to socially construct both our understandings of reality and our emotional experiences, and the ways we use language to make meaning. This ongoing process of social construction "literally gets under your skin" (Barrett, 2017, p. 139): our language-based shared understandings feed an emotion that affects our physiology and neurochemistry. This has obvious effects on our physical health, but these effects are also bound up with our emotional health. For example, the emotional experience of anger causes additional cortisol to be released, which affects our nervous system, blood pressure, and ability to use our muscles.

But our individual experience also affects others in our network, whose minds and bodies respond to our furrowed brow, shallow breathing, and tense posture. In

this way, social realities “wire the brain,” or put differently, “your brain wired itself to its physical and social surroundings” (Barrett, 2017, pp. 279–280). This perspective spotlights the individual from the vantage point of the collective. From the other direction, we might also say that “our mind extends beyond our physical selves” (Goldhill, 2016); it is not confined only to the brain in our head, it also exists in our interactions with others. Such understandings support “a reframing of emotional development as a process of *embodying* context from which the feeling self emerges” (Erickson & Cottingham, 2022, emphasis added).

#### 4 The Social Meaning of Health: Spirituality and the Whole Person

Spirituality provides another example of how conceptual frameworks and collective intentionality shape experiences of health—and, crucially, link individual experience to the experiences of others. The essential difference between a spiritual and a biomedical understanding of health is that, for the former, health is wholeness, not physical cure. This perspective is found in:

...the Vedas and Buddhist traditions, where ‘all human suffering is a result of the hallucination of the separate self. . . . The moment you identify yourself as separate from other beings, or other people, or separate from life in general then you will suffer. And it all begins with initial anxiety because when you’re disconnected from people and life, you feel fear, and that creates the beginning of suffering’ (Chopra, quoted in Karlis, 2017).

If disconnection is the most basic cause of suffering, then a unifying principle such as love might be understood as “the fundamental power needed to mitigate suffering” (Wärnå-Furu et al., 2008, p. 18). The work of overcoming disconnection follows from a holistic conception of health not as an end-state to be contrasted dualistically with its opposite, but rather as a dynamic “process of creation in the dimensions of doing, being, becoming” that involves the virtuous restraint of self-centered passions (Wärnå-Furu et al., 2008, p. 22). A unifying virtue such as love emphasizes the process of becoming more deeply connected to a rightly ordered self, to others, and to life as the path to an experience of greater wholeness.

Further illustration of this ontological interconnectedness can be provided by drawing on theology from the Christian tradition, which views “illness” as “the sickness of both body and soul” (Breck, quoted in Larchet, 2002, p. 7) in the context of a primary relationship with God, against which all other relations are deemed secondary. Understood from the perspective that life is fundamentally about appreciating and strengthening a relationship with God, illness can be seen as a good, perhaps even a blessing, to the extent that it helps to wake up a person to their disordered emphasis on material well-being (e.g., narrow, biomedical health and financial wellbeing; see Lee et al., 2021b) and their complacency about spiritual matters, including knowing and doing God’s will. An analogous case is found in the spiritual awakening that arises from an addiction and that prompts the development

of virtue and spiritual growth (Lee et al., 2017; see also Brooks, 2020). More generally:

[S]ickness and its attendant sufferings, with other tribulations, appear to be a condition for acquiring the virtues and the virtuous life in general. St. Isaac the Syrian writes in this regard: ‘If we love virtue, then it is impossible that the body not suffer from illness’ (Larchet, 2002, p. 66).

Illness, addiction, and related forms of suffering can become part a “divine pedagogy” that purifies “spiritual intelligence” and frees a person from an “egotistical love of self” (Larchet, 2002, pp. 60–61, 73), a proposition that makes sense only if the individual is understood to be intimately connected to a higher power as a matter of ontology (*Galatians* 2:20: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”). Again, health is less about physical cure and more about wholeness and connection.

This whole-person integration of the physical and spiritual points to a lively debate within the literature on flourishing (Lee et al., 2021a): whether there is a hierarchy, or right ordering, within the domains of flourishing, and if so, whether some ends of human concern might be considered *penultimate* (happy emotions, physical health of the body?) or *ultimate* (salvation of the soul, virtue rooted in the Supreme Good?). Research on adolescents and young adults (15–39 years old) with cancer provides some possible answers. Despite the experience of intense suffering and loss, these young people “find meaning in their cancer experience, perceive the world positively, and use adversity as an opportunity to improve relationships with others and to aid others” who are suffering (Cho & Docherty, 2020). Illness provides a spiritual awakening similar to “hitting rock bottom” with a drug addiction; such experiences unleash the twin “spiritual virtues” of love and service (Lee et al., 2017). Other traumas, including serious victimization and experiences of warfare or natural disasters, also have had this effect when they are held in a social container that allows for understanding the deeper significance of life, developing a richer sense of purpose, and forging more meaningful relationships (Baugher, 2019a, b; Harris, 2017; Solnit, 2009). The Japanese word for such relationships, *kizuna*, signifies such relationships that are “formed when people go through difficult times and overcome hardships together” (Inoue, 2015, p. 112).

Personal transformation can result from a serious illness if positive preconditions shape the progression as “an ongoing evolutionary process” involving “awareness, readiness, and learning” in a way that fosters “a sense of authenticity, spirituality, peace, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment” (Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004, pp. 232, 234; see also Middleton, 2016). In a study of adults, Mulkins and Verhoef (2004, p. 234) state:

As [cancer patients] came to be more self-aware and to know themselves on a deeper level, they... started to engage in life in different ways. They were able to define their core values and now had a different sense of who they were... [B]ecause of this, they were able to make more conscious decisions, understanding themselves and their reactions to the world around them.

Such a broadening of awareness encourages the development of “seeing the world through new eyes” (Mulkins & Verhoef, 2004, p. 234). During such experiences, people learn that their initial aims are too small, their conception of self too narrow, their connections to community too few and tenuous. Conventionally “bad” outcomes may be reappraised according to a higher (spiritual) standard, often in the context of a “calling,” benevolent service to others, and enhanced spiritual—if not material—well-being (Lee et al., 2013).

For some, the threat of violence also provides clarification about the right ordering of flourishing ends. For example, working with both religious and non-religious peacebuilders in a war zone, one observer noted that the impulse to respond in kind to violence, which in some cases could involve protecting the physical security of the physical body, was resisted in order to follow a spiritual path, or “still small voice”:

...they realized a profound truth: the worst evil is not death; the worst evil is betraying the soul by ignoring the inner voice. As a consequence, they discovered they had lost their fear of death and experienced a significant sense of connection ‘with the source of spiritual power.’ We soar as human beings, they concluded, by ‘acting well in spite of threat’ (Batcharova, quoted in Yoder, 2005, p. 50).

To provide further insight into such dynamics, we turn to the reflections of the poet David Whyte (2015) on friendship and heartbreak:

But no matter the medicinal virtues of being a true friend or sustaining a long close relationship with another, the ultimate touchstone of friendship is not improvement, neither of the other nor of the self, the ultimate touchstone is witness. . . . [H]eartbreak may be the very essence of being human, of being on the journey from here to there, and of coming to care deeply for what we find along the way. . . . Realizing its inescapable nature, we can see heartbreak not as the end of the road or the cessation of hope but as the close embrace of the essence of what we have wanted or are about to lose.

Whereas the biomedical approach treats physical illness as a problem to be solved, the collective intentionality, right ordering of flourishing domains, and ontological interconnectedness associated with many spiritual perspectives offer a broader understanding in the context of the ultimate aims of a flourishing life, exemplified by Whyte’s insights on heartbreak as embrace and friendship as witnessing rather than improvement—the paradigm case in the Christian tradition is Jesus asking his disciples to “keep watch with me” during his agony in Gethsemane. This does not imply passivity in the face of illness, but rather it offers a perspective that is open to the possibility that physical cure is not always possible, or even desirable if it requires unacceptable trade-offs in terms of meaning, purpose, character, or close social relationships. People do prioritize different aspects of well-being and quite often sacrifice one domain to enhance another (Adler et al., 2017).

## 5 Conclusion: Health as Flourishing

We have considered a number of interconnections that support the argument that health ought to be reimagined as flourishing (VanderWeele et al., 2019). Physical health and other domains of flourishing are deeply linked. Individual health involves the embodiment of context (a wellbeing ecosystem), including social determinants such as the wellbeing of a person's friends' friends' friends. The meaning of "health" itself is a product of collective relationships, which for many people include spiritual relations. More than "disease-oriented," this holistic vision of *whole health* is focused on "health creation" for the whole person, recognizing the deep interconnections with "family, community, and social determinants of health" (Gaudet & Kligler, 2019, p. S7). Reflecting on the World Health Organization's well-established multidimensional definition of health that clearly extends beyond the biomedical domain, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter (see also Sartorius, 2006), it is plausible that many, and perhaps a majority of people, would be willing to trade some level preservation of the physical body in order to achieve a higher level of other flourishing ends. Such decisions can only be made "in the full context of what matters in a person's life" (VanderWeele et al., 2019, p. 1667; Gaudet & Kligler, 2019, p. S9). This points to flourishing as "wholeness... of living with integrity even in challenging circumstances" (Su, 2020, p. 10).

Such determinations include, at the very least, an implicit consideration of ontological interconnectedness as constitutive of harmony "in its individual and social manifestations" (Delle Fave et al., 2016, p. 19; Kjell et al., 2016). In other words, the self is involved, but so is a self-transcendence that minimally includes the broader community, and, for the religious, God or the divine. The decision about whether to accept a medical treatment that would "maximize life expectancy" but "severely hamper quality of life and happiness" (VanderWeele et al., 2019, p. 1667) might involve a calculation of "flourishing years" (FLRYs, see VanderWeele, 2020) using scores on a measure of the five domains of flourishing. This is similar to, but much more holistic than, the concept of "quality-adjusted life years" (QALYs). Meaningless longevity is not health. The pursuit of harmonious passions in life are preferable to the pursuit of obsessive passions (Vallerand, 2008).

Some medical groups have already adopted this broader understanding of health, even beyond traditions associated with lifestyle and integrative medicine (Frates et al., 2019). In 2014, the National League for Nursing proposed human flourishing as an outcome of nursing practice and argued that it "encompasses the uniqueness, dignity, diversity, freedom, happiness, and holistic well-being of the individual within the larger family, community, and population. Achieving human flourishing is a life-long existential journey of hopes, achievements, regrets, losses, illness, suffering, and coping" (cited in Cho & Docherty, 2020). It is significant that flourishing is framed holistically as a *journey* that encompasses losses and other forms of suffering, not the absence of suffering, as well as communal connections. This resonates with the spiritual viewpoint we have discussed; it also opens space for a restoration of compassion as the heart of healthcare (Trzeciak & Mazzarelli, 2019).

The contemporary ideal of a wellbeing ecosystem resonates with the long-standing notion of “ontological interconnectedness” (Delle Fave et al., 2016), as well as the “healthy” city described millennia ago by Socrates. Such a city contrasts with what Socrates called a city “in the grip of a fever,” where simplicity has given way to endless craving and striving that produces injustice and inter-group conflict (i.e., “ill-health” at both the personal and social level, see Plato, 2012/375BCE; or obsessive passions, Vallerand, 2008). In a parallel but certainly not identical line of reasoning, Augustine (1950/413–426) explains that such a fevered city is not “rightly ordered” in such a way that leads to tranquility. In such disordered contexts, happiness—conventionally understood as a domain of flourishing—can manifest as the “sickness” that Kierkegaard (1980/1849) labeled “despair”: for despair, “the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness.” Medical metaphors like fever and sickness abound in such classic discussions precisely because they point to a broader understanding of the meaning of health, a view that was at one time more prominent and when health referred to the whole person rather than just the physical body. We have suggested moving beyond the fixation on the physical body and the “narrow wellbeing of the individual self,” in order to “encompass the thriving of the whole,” which represents a paradigm shift from “self-centeredness to interconnectedness” (Lee, 2019, p. 236). This entails systems-level thinking, which in organizational contexts has created a deeper awareness of interconnection “according to a primacy of the whole” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p. 122), giving rise to the notion of a “healing organization” with its “unwavering commitment to the value and well-being of people” (Sisodia & Gelb, 2019, p. 65). Such shifts in thinking help us reimagine health *as* intersystemic flourishing.

**Key Implications**

Topic Area	Key Implications
Conceptualization of and Research on Flourishing	Many studies of flourishing offer only a partial understanding of the interrelationships across domains and levels of analysis. Some conceptual frameworks are primarily subjective and focused on the individual, thereby neglecting objective markers of flourishing, as well as more communal elements. Spirituality is often overlooked, although it is often at the heart of flourishing for many people throughout the world who focus on <i>ultimate</i> rather than <i>penultimate</i> concerns. The construct of <i>intersystemic flourishing</i> explores interrelationships among the domains of material and spiritual well-being of individuals, communities, and ecosystems.
Expanded View of “Health”	A narrow view of health framed in biomedical—and largely physical—terms (e.g., absence of disease) constrains awareness of the broader and more holistic understandings derived from long-standing wisdom in the humanities. This relational understanding of health transcends a focus on physical infirmity and locates the individual in a social context. A broader view of health is less about physical cure and more about wholeness and connection. This shift in thinking helps us reimagine health <i>as</i> intersystemic flourishing.

(continued)

Topic Area	Key Implications
Understanding of Suffering and Sickness	<i>Health as intersystemic flourishing</i> is not an end-state to be contrasted dualistically with its opposite (ill-health, sickness, suffering). Instead, suffering is present within the flourishing life and serves a pedagogical function on the path towards personal character growth and healthy connections with others. The health of one's social relations and one's physical health are therefore not fully distinct aspects of our lives. Experiences of ontological interconnectedness signal a dynamic equilibrium that allows human beings to thrive despite adversity.
Social Organization of Healthcare	Adopting the promotion of intersystemic flourishing as a goal has implications for the organization of healthcare, including a restoration of compassion as the heart of healthcare practice and the necessity of building a wellbeing ecosystem that transcends the treatment of individuals. This requires a <i>whole health</i> transformation of systems.

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**Part II**  
**Organization and Policies**

# Revising Policy to Reflect Our Better Nature



Lara B. Aknin

**Abstract** Governments should help citizens thrive, not merely survive. Doing so means alleviating stress and addressing mental illness, as well as amplifying positive experiences and emotions that allow humans to blossom and grow. But what factors support human flourishing? In this chapter, I challenge early pessimistic views of human nature as purely selfish by summarizing evidence demonstrating that humans are social and prosocial beings. Critically, I discuss how social and prosocial behavior have been repeatedly shown to promote well-being, a finding that aligns with numerous theories espousing that meaningful social connections are the essential feature to human flourishing (Ryff and Singer, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4(1):30–44, 2000). Using these insights, I suggest that institutions should revise their policies to mirror and inspire human proclivities to connect and care.

**Keywords** Prosociality · Kindness · Prosocial spending · Happiness · Well-being

The ultimate purpose of government is to help citizens thrive, not merely survive. Governments and organizations can enable human flourishing—defined as positive attributes of the human condition (Ryff & Singer, 2003)—by not only alleviating sources of stress and supporting the treatment of mental illness, but by amplifying positive experiences and emotions that allow humans to blossom and grow. But what factors comprise and promote human flourishing? Challenging early and pessimistic views of human nature as solely solitary and self-interested, in this chapter I provide a brief summary of the emerging literature on the ways in which humans demonstrate their ultra-social and prosocial character. Critically, I discuss how social and prosocial behavior lead to greater well-being, a finding that aligns with numerous theories espousing that meaningful social connections are the essential feature to human flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 2000). Then, in light of this evidence, I suggest

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that governments and organizations should revisit policies to reflect and encourage the human tendencies to connect and care.

## 1 Early Sources and Support for Pessimism

Scholars have debated the nature of human behavior for millennia. Many early voices believed that humans are cruel, callous, and self-interested beings. While this case was perhaps most famously championed by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651), classical economic theories similarly assume that humans are primarily motivated to maximize personal gains, even at the expense of others (e.g., Noreen, 1988). Various lines of evidence offer converging support for this position. For instance, classic research shows that some people follow the direction of authority figures to harm others (Milgram, 1964), may hesitate to help others in need (Latane & Darley, 1968), and often take credit for moral behavior that is driven by selfish motives (Frimer et al., 2014).

Perhaps in protection, people are hyper-sensitive to negative information and malicious intent. Consistent with the notion that bad information is more memorable and consequential for survival (Baumeister et al., 2001), new research suggests that ambiguous actions are quickly labeled as immoral (Hester et al., 2020) and prosocial actors are penalized for enacting good deeds with even the slightest potential of self-benefit (Barasch et al., 2016; Lin-Healy & Small, 2012; Newman & Cain, 2014). The widespread belief that human beings are motivated by self-interest is so pervasive (at least in North America) that it alters peoples' thoughts and behaviors. For instance, evidence supporting the Norm of Self-Interest suggests that actors sometimes avoid providing help they are willing and wanting to offer if there is no clear evidence for personal gain (Dunning, 1999; Ratner & Miller, 2001).

Beyond layperson beliefs, numerous organizational and governmental policies appear to embody these sentiments and reflect the view that humanity is solitary and selfish. For instance, businesses typically incentivize workers with personal cash-based bonuses or equivalent rewards, assuming that individualistic gains that separate and distinguish one from their peers are the primary inspiration for workplace productivity (e.g., Ariely et al., 2009; Gneezy et al., 2011; Oyer, 1998; Stajkovic & Luthans, 2001). More broadly, national laws ban harmful treatment of citizens and enforce mandatory contribution to public goods, signaling an expectation that people will harm others and forgo the opportunity to assist if given the chance. While explicit encouragement can help encourage civility and cooperation, these records imply that humans are out for themselves, and themselves alone.

## 2 Reasons for Optimism

### 2.1 *Ubiquity and Value of Social Connection*

Counter to the cynical accounts of humanity, new evidence reveals that humans are deeply connected to and concerned about other people. Supporting the notion that social relationships are vital to human functioning, people spend a large portion of their time interacting with others and these experiences are often rated as some of the most enjoyable moments of the day (Kahneman et al., 2004; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Indeed, social relationships seem to be a necessary condition for experiencing the highest levels of happiness. A thorough investigation of over 200 college students revealed that every individual in the top decile reported having strong and satisfactory relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Further evidence comes from responses of over one million people surveyed by the Gallup World Poll; having just one individual to count on in times of need is the single best predictor of life satisfaction around the globe (Helliwell et al., 2019a). These findings—along with meta-analyses underscoring the importance of social relationships for health and mortality (e.g., Holt-Lunstad, 2018; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010)—have led researchers to argue that humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In addition to the importance of meaningful relationships with close others, humans also derive feelings of connection and pleasure from interactions with acquaintances and strangers. At the most basic level, being overlooked by a stranger can lead people to feel a sense of disconnection from others (Wesselmann et al., 2012) and brief interactions with acquaintances can bring a sense of belonging and joy (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a, 2014b). People experience higher levels of happiness on days when they connect with a greater number of weak social ties (i.e., people they know but not particularly well), and this relationship holds even controlling for the number of interactions with strong social ties that same day (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). Critically, having a brief and pleasant conversation with an acquaintance, such as the barista at Starbucks, has a causal impact on well-being and leads to greater happiness than having an efficient and impersonal exchange (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014b).

Despite the enjoyment of talking to unfamiliar others, people overlook the benefits of these short but powerful opportunities for connection—and erroneously express a preference to be left alone. In one study, commuters on trains and busses predicted that they would experience lower feelings of well-being and productivity when chatting with a stranger on their commute than when remaining alone, yet controlled experiments show that people were happier and no less productive when they engaged in conversations with other commuters (Epley & Schroeder, 2014). Indeed, emerging work on “the liking gap” demonstrates that interacting with strangers tends to breed more liking and enjoyment than most people expect (Boothby et al., 2018).

Why do people err and prefer to be alone? The mistaken inclination, which mirrors early assumptions of humans as solitary creatures, results from a failure to appreciate that others are interested and willing to converse and connect. Indeed, when a group of commuters were asked to report how willing they and a fellow commuter would be to talk with each other on a commute, responses revealed that people were more interested in conversing than they expected their peers to be (Epley & Schroeder, 2014). Taken together, these findings demonstrate the potential value of human connection, even if these benefits are not always recognized in advance.

## ***2.2 Early Emergence, Prevalence, and Rewards of Prosocial Behavior***

Given that social relationships are a critical source of human well-being, how do people build and strengthen these bonds? One means is through kind and caring actions, broadly labeled as prosocial behavior. The human capacity for and sensitivity to prosocial behavior begins early in life. Infants as young as 3–6 months of age attune to the kind or cruel actions of others—and display a preference for prosocial actors (Hamlin et al., 2007, 2010). Not long after, children begin providing help to others through various helping, sharing, and comforting actions in infancy (Dunfield & Kuhlmeier, 2010; Dunfield et al., 2011; Warneken & Tomasello, 2007). As they grow, toddlers provide assistance to others (even strangers), which is sometimes spontaneous, anonymous, and proactive (Aime et al., 2017; Hepach et al., 2017; Warneken, 2013; Warneken et al., 2007; Warneken & Tomasello, 2008). In fact, seeing a target in need of help leads children to experience a sense of physiological arousal, detected in pupil dilation. This distress is alleviated when targets receive assistance, regardless of whether this help comes from the child or a third party (Hepach et al., 2012, 2013, 2017).

Beyond infancy and childhood, people engage in a range of prosocial behaviors. In 2018 alone, Americans volunteered upward of 7 billion hours (equivalent to more than 800,00 years) and donated more than \$420 billion to non-profit organizations (National Service Research, 2018). In addition to these formal and familiar channels of giving, people assist one another in various direct and personal ways. For instance, people share food with the hungry, commit random acts of kindness, and donate blood to those in need (e.g., Aknin & Whillans, 2020; Brethel-Haurwitz & Marsh, 2014; Koo & Fishbach, 2016; Marsh, 2019; Mogilner & Aaker, 2009; Meier & Stutzer, 2008). These acts can be observed in lab-based experiments and the real world. For instance, in cooperation experiments, people contribute resources to help non-related others and punish transgressors (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Fehr & Gächter, 2000; Gintis, 2003; Van Vugt & Van Lange, 2006), and outside the lab, some people engage in exceptional altruism by donating life-saving organs to complete strangers (Brethel-Haurwitz & Marsh, 2014).



Prosociality is not limited to wealthy nations, but can be observed across rich and poor countries around the globe (Aknin et al., 2019; Helliwell et al., 2019a, 2019b; Henrich et al., 2005). In fact, some evidence suggests that prosociality may be an automatic or intuitive response (Rand, 2017; Rand et al., 2012; Zaki & Mitchell, 2013). If so, this could help to explain some seemingly puzzling findings, such as why people are willing to pay more to reduce harm for a stranger than for themselves (Crockett et al., 2014), why assistance rises in the wake of natural disasters (Rodriguez et al., 2006), and why people stay in unsatisfactory romantic relationships if they feel that relationship dissolution will have a strong negative impact on their partner (Joel et al., 2018).

Humans not only engage in prosocial action with relative frequency, but they derive pleasure from it too. Indeed, humans may have evolved to find costly help provision rewarding because prosocial behavior facilitates cooperative social relationships that are essential for survival (Aknin et al., 2013a). Supporting this possibility, a growing body of research indicates that engaging in various forms of kind or generous action, such as donating one's time or money, leads to emotional rewards for the helper (Aknin et al., 2019; Curry et al., 2018). For instance, a consistent trend emerging from the volunteering research is that people who engage in more volunteering tend to report higher level happiness. Supporting this notion, data from over 28,000 Americans in 29 states indicates that volunteers express higher happiness than non-volunteers, even when accounting for alternative factors, such as demographic and socio-economic variables (Borgonovi, 2008). Beyond the United States, data from more than 30,000 people from 12 countries who participated in the 2007 Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, analyses demonstrated that volunteers reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than non-volunteers (see also Musick & Wilson, 2003). The most far-reaching evidence for this association comes from the Gallup World Poll where responses from more than one million people between 2009 and 2017 link formal volunteering with higher life satisfaction in most countries around the globe (Aknin et al., 2019; Helliwell et al., 2019a; see also Kushlev et al., 2020). Despite this robust association, little causal evidence shows that formal volunteering leads to greater happiness (Schreier et al., 2013; Whillans et al., 2016). This may result from the nature of formal volunteering, which can be required and offer little information about the impact of one's actions. Other work, however, indicates that more direct and volitional interpersonal assistance can lead to happiness gains (e.g., Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2016).

In addition to giving time, people can also use their money to benefit others. This form of generous behavior—sometimes called *prosocial spending*—is both associated with and leads to emotional rewards (e.g., Aknin & Whillans, 2020; Dunn et al., 2014). People who spend more money in a typical month on others—by way of gift giving or charitable donations—report higher levels of happiness than those who spend less (Dunn et al., 2008). Importantly, this relationship is causal. In one early experiment, participants randomly assigned to spend a small monetary windfall of \$5 or \$20 on someone else were significantly happier at the end of the day than

participants randomly assigned to spend the same amount on themselves (Dunn et al., 2008; see Aknin et al., 2020 for large-scale replication).

Data from various sources suggest that the emotional rewards of prosociality may be a human universal, detectable in most humans around the globe. For instance, survey responses to the Gallup World Poll indicate that people who donated charity to in the last month reported higher levels of life satisfaction in most countries around the globe (Aknin et al., 2013a, 2013b; Helliwell et al., 2019a, 2019b). Moreover, a number of experiments conducted in rich and poor nations, such as Canada, India, South Africa, and Vanuatu, suggest that the emotional benefits stemming from generous spending may be shared by most humans around the globe (Aknin et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Even young children under the age of two smile more when giving treats away to others than when receiving treats themselves (Aknin et al., 2012). Finally, new evidence suggests that gang-involved youth and felony level ex-offenders also experience greater joy from giving than buying for themselves (Hanniball et al., 2019).

Although the hedonic benefits of generous behavior may be far-reaching, generous acts are more likely to yield happiness in certain conditions. Specifically, people are more likely to experience happiness from enacting kind behavior when their actions (1) are freely chosen, facilitating a sense of autonomy, (2) have a clear positive impact, demonstrating a sense of competence, and (3) build or promote social relationships. I briefly consider the evidence for each of these factors below.

**Autonomy** People are most likely to experience emotional rewards from helping when their generous actions emerge from or reflect their personal volition. For instance, in one lab experiment, student participants donated part of a financial endowment to another person before reporting their well-being. Half of the students were allowed to decide how much, if any, they wanted to give away (high autonomy). Meanwhile, the other half of students were told that, due to the study design features, their donation amount was pre-determined (low autonomy). Results showed that people who gave larger donations experienced great well-being, but only when they had freedom to choose how much to give. Indeed, larger donations predicted *lower* levels of well-being in the low autonomy condition (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

More recent work has replicated this finding using a well-powered, pre-registered experimental design (Lok & Dunn, 2020). One hundred people recruited online were asked to describe two previous spending events: one in which they decided to help (high autonomy) and one in which they had little choice to help (low autonomy). After describing each event, participants reported their emotions at the time of spending. Consistent with the idea that the emotional rewards of helping others are greater when generous behavior is autonomous, people reported greater happiness after describing a time in which they chose to spend money on others than when they had little choice to do so. Other studies reveal that simply leading donors to feel that they have freedom about how much and how they would like to give can be beneficial (Nelson et al., 2015).

**Competence** People are more likely to experience emotional rewards from helping when appreciate how their generous actions have had a positive impact on others. As noted elsewhere (e.g., Aknin & Whillans, 2020), not all acts of generosity provide clear evidence that one’s efforts have made a difference. For instance, payroll deductions and online donations can contribute to important causes but offer fewer cues of direct helping than in-person visits to the food bank or directly delivering a birthday gift to your niece.

Several studies demonstrate the importance of competence for experiencing the mood benefits of prosociality. In one study, for example, more than one hundred students were provided with a \$10 endowment that they could donate to charity (in part or in full) if they liked (Aknin et al., 2013b). Critically, half of the students were randomly assigned to a condition in which they were told that their donation would go to UNICEF, an umbrella organization that helps children in many ways around the globe. Because this condition provided little specificity about if and how the aid would be provided, it was considered the “low impact” condition. Meanwhile, the other half of students were assigned to a condition in which they were told that their donation would go to Spread the Net, a charity that buys bed nets to stop the spread of malaria through Africa. This condition provided participants with clear information about exactly how their actions would benefit others, and was thus considered the “high impact” condition. All students were allowed to make a donation decision and then report their current well-being. While the average donation did not differ across conditions, the emotional impact of generosity did. Specifically, larger donations predicted higher levels of post-giving happiness, but only when people gave to Spread the Net, suggesting that providing donors with clear information about how their contributions will help others is important for experiencing the hedonic benefits of giving. Meanwhile, giving more money to UNICEF did not predict greater happiness.

The importance of believing that one has made a positive impact on others was demonstrated in a recent well-powered and pre-registered experiment (Lok & Dunn, 2020). One hundred participants recruited online were asked to describe two instances in which they spent money on others—one instance included a time they were able to see how their actions made a difference for others (high impact), and the other instance included a time they were unsure of how their actions made a difference for others (low impact). After describing each instance, participants were asked to report their current positive emotions. As predicted, people reported feeling significantly happier when they were aware of how their generous spending had helped someone else (vs. after recalling a time they were unsure of how their generous spending impacted another person).

**Relatedness** Finally, people are more likely to experience emotional rewards from helping when it provides opportunities for connection. For example, in one small study, students were given \$10 and told that they could give as little or as much of this sum to a randomly selected classmate who did not receive a payment. Half of the students were told that whatever amount they chose to give they would have to deliver to the recipient in person themselves (high social connection). Meanwhile,

the other half of students were told that whatever amount they chose to give would be delivered by an intermediary (low social connection), thereby blocking an opportunity for connection. After the donation, all students reported their happiness. Consistent with the idea that social connection is key for experiencing the happiness benefits of generosity, larger donations led to greater happiness when donations were transferred directly from the donor to recipient. However, when the donation was transferred by an intermediary, larger donations led to slightly *lower* levels of happiness (Aknin et al., 2013a, 2013b).

The importance of social connection for reaping the enjoyment of generosity was also detected in a well-powered, pre-registered experiment (Lok & Dunn, 2020). One hundred people were asked to describe a time they spent money on someone else or a cause that led them to feel personally connected to the person or cause they helped (high connection) and did not lead them to feel connected to the person or cause they helped in random order. After describing each experience, participants reported their positive emotions at the time of spending. Consistent with predictions and the findings reported above, participants reported greater happiness after describing a time they spent money in a way that made them feel connected to others or a meaningful cause than a time they spent money that lacked those connections. Taken together, these results support that notion that social connection unlocks the emotional rewards of giving.

### ***2.3 Revising Policies to Reflect and Reward Social and Prosocial Tendencies***

The evidence presented above challenges the view that humans are solitary and self-interested creatures. Instead, humans have a proclivity to connect and care (Helliwell & Aknin, 2018). Given that businesses and governments have the ability to shape many of the conditions that allow people to enact these behaviors and derive pleasure from doing so, decision makers should revisit policies in light of these insights. Doing so could further develop *positive institutions*—a critical but often overlooked means for supporting human flourishing (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman, 2002).

For instance, organizations currently incentivize helpful workplace behavior (also called organizational citizenship in the management literature) with monetary rewards, positive assessments, and leadership opportunities. While enticement is an effective strategy for encouraging people to participate in a behavior they initially resist (Tang & Hall, 1995), most people are willing to help others. As such, offering employees external materialistic rewards to help coworkers may *undermine* helping behavior, consistent with classic research on the over-justification effect (Lepper et al., 1973). Instead, companies may be better off providing employees with the opportunity to help fellow employees or customers in a more direct fashion, such as through regular team support networks or face-to-face exchanges (e.g., Grant, 2007,

**Table 1** Suggestions for revising policy and practice

<i>Rather than...</i>	<i>Try...</i>	<i>Why?</i>
Emphasizing that certain behaviors are forbidden by law or policy	Allowing and enticing desirable behavior through opportunities for social connection (between fellow citizens, employees, with customers, etc.), direct impact, and social norms	Discouraging and forbidding negative behaviors assumes that these actions may be normative
Incentivizing behavior with money or status rewards	Offering prosocial rewards, such as the funds or time to help a personally meaningful cause	Capitalizes on the human motivation to connect and care

2012). Doing so not only creates and fosters social bonds, but it also provides direct evidence of how the helper’s effort positively impacted the recipient—both critical factors that make prosociality rewarding (see Aknin & Whillans, 2020).

Recognizing that humans have “a need to belong” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) could help governments to facilitate creative ways for fostering new connections among citizens. Using both physical and online spaces, such as communal parks, libraries, and virtual communities or training sessions, people can meet their neighbors or like-minded others, share experiences, and support one another. For instance, investing in public spaces where people can interact and give to their communities (e.g., clean park spaces or tend to community gardens) could build relationships and commitment to their neighborhood. While the specific practice, space, or policy would need to fit within the existing community, the literature reviewed above suggests that most humans are seeking—and derive pleasure—from connecting with others.

Revising policy and practice in light of these findings not only presents a more complete picture of humanity, but it should also encourage greater prosociality. Classic research on the self-fulfilling prophecy demonstrates the power of prior expectations. When people are expected to act aggressively or fail in the face of challenge, they tend to fulfill those expectations (e.g., Farrell & Swigert, 1978; Spencer et al., 1999). Conversely, when we expect people to blossom and thrive, they do so as well (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1966). Armed with this insight, organizations and governments may want to revisit policies to reflect and reinforce our better nature (Table 1).

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# Human Flourishing Through Behaviour Change



Colin Strong

**Abstract** We tend to think of flourishing as a place we get to, where we have arrived, but often do not see that act of change itself is a core facet of what it means to flourish. Indeed, we argue that flourishing is in fact our ability to change and adapt rather than a state that we are striving for. This points to human flourishing requiring an ‘adaptive’ approach to manage change: supporting careful navigation, negotiation and trade-offs. On this basis we need to identify the barriers that get in the way of enacting these possibilities and as such organisations and institutions that seeks to facilitate behaviour change will lean on barrier identification as well identifying ways to overcome them thought educating, assisting and facilitating. Using a behaviour change framework to identify the mechanisms shaping behaviour can help to identify ways to overcome barriers and facilitate positive outcomes.

**Keywords** Change · Adaptive · Imagination · Meaning · Prosppection

What do we need to flourish in life? This is a topic that has gripped philosophers, policymakers, business strategists, parents, lovers and friends since time and eternity.

This chapter is a call-to-arms for what can seem to be a forgotten part of flourishing: that of enacting change. Whilst we tend to think of flourishing as a state of being, a place at which we have arrived, we can often fail to see the way in which the act of *change itself* can be seen as a core facet of what it means to flourish.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests that we are continually reviewing, anticipating, changing not only as we learn and understand but as the external environment

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around us changes. He writes that ‘where there is human life there is never anything but happening. Life *is* not; it *goes on*’. He suggests that we are not in fact human beings, fixed in time, rather that we are all always life-in-the-making and as such we could call ourselves ‘human becomings’. The ability to ‘become’ is therefore how we might define human flourishing, it is our ability to change and adapt rather than a state that we are striving for (Ingold, 2021).

The poet John Keats used the term Negative Capability to describe the skills and strength needed to manage this transformation, describing the state as being ‘...when a man is ‘...capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’ (Keats, 1899).

We set out a number of complexities involved in thinking about behaviour change: how the desired behaviours are not always obvious, but also how the environment we are in can challenge our ability to enact those behaviours. Also, how our choices of behaviour are acts that occur in a human social, cultural context, and it often is this which grants it meaning and imaginative possibilities.

Given change is at the heart of flourishing, we then consider ways in which organisations and institutions can help facilitate change. This requires us to adopt an approach that mediates the complex interactions between people, the environments they operate in and the way in which desired outcomes can be enacted. This very process is one which we can consider to be human flourishing.

## 1 Flourishing and Behaviour Change

There is a case for the act of change itself being at the heart of flourishing, but what is the change directed towards? To understand this we need to explore the way we have a strong drive for meaningful lives, driven by our imaginations.

### 1.1 *The Drive for Meaning*

Since Aristotle, there have been many ways in which we might think about what flourishing means. Philosopher Susan Wolf offers a ‘Fitting-Fulfilment’ view of flourishing, suggesting that indulging one’s passions offer a particularly rewarding type of subjective experience, but this is not in itself what is valuable (Wolf, 2012). The thing we love doing must also be ‘objectively good’. And this is in partly to do with a need that we can see one’s life as valuable in a way that can be seen from another person’s perspective.

Our drive for this is due in part to our need to see ourselves from an objective, external perspective. As Thomas Nagel would say, we are unique as a species in that we are able to have a ‘view from nowhere’ upon ourselves (Nagle, 1998). In addition to this, we have a need for self-esteem. We want to be able to see ourselves as good and valuable.

We might add to this, considers Wolf, in this way:

The thought that one’s life is like a bubble that, upon bursting, will vanish without trace can lead some people to despair. The thought that one lives in an indifferent universe makes some people shudder.

If we can think of ourselves as being engaged in a behaviour of independent worth, then we may be able to put aside these feelings of despair. The feeling of being involved in a behaviour that has value, independent of our own narrow self-interests, means we become part of a community, sharing values and a common purpose. As Wolf puts it:

By engaging in projects of independent value, by protecting, preserving, creating and realizing value the source of which lies outside of ourselves, we can satisfy these interests. Indeed, it is hard to see how we could satisfy them in any other way.

Our desire for a meaningful life is not about *feeling* a particular way but an interest that life *be* a certain way, one that can be admired by others and is connected in some way with independent value. Philosopher Lucas Scripser reminds us not to interpret this in a manne that is overly ‘elitist’; as he points out, not everyone is cut out to be a Steve Jobs or a Jane Austen. Rather, meaning is as much reflected in ‘ordinary meaningful lives’ involving personal relationships and aesthetic experiences (Scripser, 2018).

Nevertheless, the point we can take from Susan Wolf is the drive for meaningfulness which has an active component: behaviours need to take place. To flourish, it is not enough to dream, there needs to be action, as Goethe famously pointed out:

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do

This is consistent with philosopher Agnes Callard’s perspective when she points out in her book about change, ‘Aspiration’, that:

Valuing involves more than caring: when we value something, we also evaluate it as in some way good or worth caring about. (Callard, 2018)

We can perhaps take this to mean that our values shape what we choose to engage with, they also motivate us to shape our behaviours in relation to it.

## 1.2 *Imagined Futures*

The question that is surely raised is how we construct a sense of ways to achieve meaningful lives. This feels close to the issue of sense making that psychologists Nick Chater and George Lowenstein consider is analogous to better known drives

such as hunger, thirst and sex (Chater & Loewenstein, 2015). Sense making seems an ever more important challenge to get right, given that the world we now live in is vast, interconnected and complicated. As such ways in which we can consider ways of living as different to that we experience today means we need to use imagination to look at future possibilities.

One of the early people that worked on the psychology of imagination is Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who considered imagination was at the heart of much of human life. He considered it a creative, higher order mental activity and “the essential feature. . .that of imagination is that consciousness departs from reality. Imagination is a comparatively autonomous activity of consciousness in which there is a departure from any immediate cognition of reality” (Vygotsky, 1987). In other words, this gives us a degree of freedom from the restrictions of our immediate situations.

But linked to this is the way in which imagination is also deeply linked to our social reality. Vygotsky set out how the human mind is shaped by historic and cultural forces. As Tania Zittoun and Alex Gillespie put it more recently (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015):

It is an obvious, but revealing, fact that for the vast majority of human history it was impossible for people to imagine space travel, intelligent robots, or even telephones. The earliest attempts at such imaginings seem limited, and saturated with the culture of their time.

Imagination is therefore not a solitary activity; we have the ability to build imaginative possibilities with others but also our acts of imagination can shape the society and culture they draw from. As such:

It is the fundamental process by which we can explore and share our past—individual and collective, define and visit alternative and possible worlds, and imagine the future—our own, and that of the world—and perhaps, set us in motion toward it.

We can see that part of flourishing is the ability to use imagination to consider future possibilities, working on ways to prospect, or ‘construct’ our lives. As Wolf points out, supporting people to place their behaviours into a wider network of meaning and sense is **hugely motivating for people**. This meaning is all about prospecting the future, seeing how we can be part of something bigger than ourselves, shaping a future that we would wish for ourselves and others.

This points to humans requiring an ‘adaptive’ approach to manage change: careful navigation, negotiation and trade-offs. This adaptive approach suggests that we need to identify the barriers that get in the way of enacting these possibilities and as such organisations and institutions that seek to facilitate behaviour change will lean on barriers identification as well identifying ways to overcome them through educating, assisting and facilitating.

## 2 Dimensions of Navigating Change

At the heart of flourishing is an intense relationship between intention and behaviour: we may know what we need to flourish but we do not properly flourish until we start to enact change. There are complexities and barriers to changing behaviour which are characterised here in three broad ways: internal barriers of understanding the difficulties of making change when the outcomes are not always apparent; the barriers related to the situation we are in which is increasingly fluid, meaning we can struggle to work out how to enact and maintain desired behaviours and then finally the social and cultural barriers, managing the negotiation of meaning in our socially embedded lives.

### 2.1 *The Internal Barriers Challenge*

The psychologist [Kurt Lewin](#) talked about the way in which change requires us to first ‘unfreeze’ our mental landscapes. If we remain fixed in the ways we approach the world, then we leave no opportunity for change. But once unfrozen, do we always know what we want and how we want to flourish? What we are aiming for can often be unclear as Rebecca Solnit points out in her book, ‘A field guide to getting lost’ (Solnit, 2017):

The things we want are transformative, and we don’t know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration—how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else.

Again, Agnes Callard also talks to this theme of uncertainty of transformation when she suggests:

The aspirant’s idea of the goodness of her end is characterized by a distinctive kind of vagueness, one she experiences as defective and in need of remedy.

This type of change is harder than a related theme, ‘ambition’, which Callard describes as follows:

An ambitious agent’s behaviour is directed at a form of success whose value she is fully capable of grasping in advance of achieving it. Hence ambition is often directed at those goods—wealth, power, fame—that can be well appreciated even by those who do not have them.

Surely for a human to unfreeze and flourish then we surely need to think of this in terms of ‘aspiring’ rather than ‘ambition’. There is a period of intense uncertainty where we try and work out the direction we take. Indeed, when we embark on a venture of transformation that enables us to flourish, Callard would likely argue that

people are usually aware that they will change in ways that are impossible to know and hard to understand. There is no one single point, rather a period of continuous change:

When one makes a radical life change, one does not submit oneself to be changed by some transformative event or object; one's agency runs all the way through to the endpoint. The nature of that agency... is one of learning: coming to acquire the value means learning to see the world in a new way.

This suggests that if we 'aspire' to flourishing, then we are continually reviewing and anticipating, changing not only as we learn and understand but as the external environment around us changes. There are a whole range of ways in which different aspects of ourselves may therefore be barriers to change. These might include identity: the sort of person we see ourselves as; outcome expectations: the way we see risks associated with certain behaviours; emotion: whether we feel anxious and fearful or bold and excited. Alongside these motivational considerations is our 'capability'—ensuring that we can benefit from education to understand the possibilities, barriers and how we can overcome them. These and other dimensions are part of the ways in which our individual orientation can shape our response to change.

## ***2.2 The External Barriers Change***

As we well know, our environment can sometimes change dramatically. COVID is an example of a dramatic change that was imposed on us. Suddenly we have had strict curtailing of a wide range of activity that we once considered normal. Many of the routines we had acquired to manage our world were, very quickly, no longer relevant as they had offered us mastery of a world that no longer exists. We were collectively and rapidly 'unfrozen', to navigate a very fluid situation.

We can place this in a wider context of a changing environment by referencing Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who suggested we live in 'liquid times' where thinking, planning and acting deteriorate over the long term (Bauman, 2007). He suggested that our environment is increasingly subject to a state of change and operating without fixed, solid patterns. This means that we must learn to 'walk on quicksand,' being flexible and adapting constantly to rapid change.

This era of uncertainty is not a temporary stage, he suggests, but inevitable and permanent which means that people will have even more to worry about in the future. That is why it is important for them to have the tools to cope with uncertainty. German sociologist Hartmut Rosa refers to 'social acceleration', or 'the shrinking of the present', making reliable expectations of the future increasingly problematic and fluid (Rosa, 2015).

All the while, this is against a backdrop of more liberalisation and privatisation that have increased the variety of products and services on offer in finance, health care, insurance, pensions, education, and energy supply. We are all expected to make informed choices out of a wide range of complex products and services.



The implication of this is that people must be increasingly self-reliant, working out how best to navigate increasingly complex environments and, within this, working out how to steer towards our own ends that may often be vague and unclear.

So it appears that the environment we are in sets up a range of challenges for us—some of which may be out of our control. We seek to find ways in which to mitigate these challenges and where possible re-structure the way in which we engage with these environmental barriers.

Another element is the social and cultural context. As Wolf has pointed out, meaningful behaviours do not sit in a vacuum—they are only given meaning and purpose through understanding the interchange between the human inner life and the social context. As such, theories which seek to find explanations of human behaviour by leaning on notions of automaticity, may struggle to account for a full understanding of when, where, how and why humans seek meaning and a desire to flourish in their lives.

Philosopher Mary Midgley referred to this when she wrote:

Social institutions such as money, government and football. . . are forms of practice shaped and engaged in by conscious, active subjects through acts performed in pursuit of their aims and intentions. They can therefore only be understood in terms framed to express those subjects' point of view. (Midgely, 2006)

One of the important aspects of considering behaviour change is that the wider, socially embedded aspects of our lives cannot be ignored. As Wolf points out, an understanding of the context in which the behaviour is embedded is critical—behaviour never takes place in a vacuum. We can see how that is not only a function of our own internal characteristics (our motivations, capabilities) but also the physical, social and cultural environment we inhabit.

### ***2.3 Internal Meets the External***

Humans occupy a space which necessarily integrates the external and the internal—the way in which we process information and then enact behaviour is at the heart of much debate within psychology. As such it is worth setting out some of the parameters of the discussion.

The discipline of psychology has, arguably, tended to focus on past experiences as a determinant of current and future behaviour. On this basis we can see the way in which the external environment that we inhabit can then be seen as having primacy in determining our behaviour.

Indeed, much of the history of psychology has been accounted for behaviour arising as a result of historic causality. Early behaviourists assumed that human activity could be understood with animal experiments, and that our behaviour is largely the result of stimulus and responses that we have been exposed to in our pasts. The evidence for this came from animal studies where experimenters observed that rewards or punishments could be used to shape certain behaviours, such as rats choosing which direction to travel in a maze. Human behaviour was thought to be no different, even though the mechanisms underpinning behaviour may be more complex.

This approach started to be contested as it became clear that the tested animals' behaviour could not always be fully explained using simple 'stimulus-response' theory. There were novel behaviours (such as rats taking shortcuts or swimming in the right direction after their maze was flooded) which suggested that animal behaviour was, in fact, more prospective and adaptive than initial stimulus-response theorists, who expected the animals to flounder in unencountered circumstances, would have believed. The animals had demonstrated some capacity to mentally engage with the task and at some level consider future possibilities differently to the manner their associations would logically have led them (Seligman et al., 2013).

A 'teleological' alternative to the 'past oriented' tradition started to emerge, meaning the explanation of our behaviour can be understood through the outcomes that we are *seeking* rather than purely being determined by our *past experience*. [Martin Seligman](#) is one of the leading proponents of a 'prospective' orientation to understanding human behaviour (Seligman et al., 2013). He considers that we construct an evaluative landscape of possible acts and outcomes which is used to guide our behaviour.

Of course there is not a binary distinction between these meta-accounts of human behaviour, one which references external factors in the shape of past associations, and the other of which cites internal characteristics in the shape of future prospecting. Inevitably, both have their place in helping to account for different types of behaviour. Indeed, we do not necessarily see them as entirely separate accounts, as the evaluation of the future clearly leverages our learning and memory of past experience. We have also seen the way in which our internal lives are shaped by external cultural narratives of what is possible. We need to understand the nature of the subtle inter-relationships between these two broad ways of considering human behaviour, if we are to support people to change.

### 3 The Principles and Practices of Behaviour Change

We can see the way in which change has both individual, contextual and social components to it which are often characterised by uncertainty. Understanding this and how we rise to the challenge of navigating this and helping others to do so is key to making change happen. Psychology offers us a way to understand many of the mechanisms that sit underneath this.

If we are to help people change, to strive for their imagined futures, then we need to properly understand what the mechanisms are that underpin the enactment of our behaviour. If we can identify these, we can then help make use of them to help facilitate people changing, overcoming the range of barriers.

How can organisations and institutions help to facilitate change and as such, human flourishing? There are a huge number of possible psychology theories that we

can draw on to help identify the dimensions that shape behaviour—these all have different means by which they identify barriers (in our terms) to changing behaviour and as such are important starting point for behaviour change.

The challenge is knowing which theory to choose, as illustrated by a recent book which identified over 80 possible theories of behaviour change (Michie et al., 2014). Selecting the one most suited to a particular challenge requires wide knowledge and expertise that is not always readily accessible. In addition, and problematically for the practitioner, theories that help us understand behaviours typically do not offer guidance about which interventions to prescribe in order to actually change behaviour. Whilst understanding behaviour is important, we clearly need to be able to then help people to enact behaviour change.

To overcome these challenges, we must move away from theories of behaviour change towards ‘systems’. These are when a range of different theories have been integrated into a single ‘meta framework’ to avoid the issues we have just mentioned. This firstly means we can then use a single approach to understand the barriers to behaviour change, confident that it will offer a comprehensive view across a wide range of issues.

Secondly, systems of behaviour change point to ways in which the desired outcomes can be achieved. This is significant as many approaches are available for diagnosing behaviour, but far fewer offer guidance on how to link this through to designing interventions to change behaviour.

We use a behaviour change framework or ‘system’—MAPPS—to help facilitate this change (See Table 1 for a very simple example of changing recycling behaviours) (See: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/science-behaviour-change>). This involves a number of straightforward steps. The first task is Define, what is the outcome that is

**Table 1** Ipsos MAPPS behaviour change framework: recycling

What it looks like	Category	MAPPS dimension
I don't think that recycling makes any difference	Outcome expectations	Motivation
Recycling is tedious and boring	Emotion	
I only do it because I ought to, not because I want to	Internalisation	
I am not the kind of person to do this kind of thing	Identity	
I do not feel confident about how to recycle properly	Self-efficacy	
I do not know where to place my recycling for collection	Capability	Ability
Recycling is not part of my normal routine	Routines	Processing
I automatically dispose rather than recycle	Decision forces	
I have no space to store my recycling before collection	Environmental	Physical
No-one else I know pays attention to recycling	Social norms	Social
Whether I recycle is purely a matter of personal choice	Cultural values	

being sought? As we saw earlier, this is not always as simple as may first appear. We may not always know precisely what we want but rather the ‘direction of travel’.

We can nevertheless act by understanding that change is a process, drawing on stage theories such as the transtheoretical model which suggests a series of stages of readiness for change, namely: precontemplation (no intention to make changes or rejecting the need for change), contemplation (serious consideration of making changes), preparation (undertaking small changes), action (actively engaging the desired behaviour), and maintenance (continuing the desired activity). Each of these will have different considerations for how we define behaviour (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005).

The next step is ‘Diagnosis’, a clear-headed understanding of what people find hard about change, identifying what is preventing people from being able to move to the next ‘stage’. We can think about this in the context of sustainability behaviour for example. Why don’t people recycle even when they say they want to do so and intend to do so? An ‘adaptive minds’ view of humans would suggest we first need to understand what the barriers are to enacting that behaviour; we use our framework (MAPPS) for just this purpose.

We can see from this example in Table 1, there are all sorts of reasons, both internal and external to the individual, that may inhibit the enactment of recycling behaviour.

Of course, an understanding of this is only half the challenge—we then need to move to the Design stage of behaviour change. By understanding these barriers, we can then link them to Design Principles to generate ‘interventions’ to help people overcome these barriers. Different classes of interventions that we use include:

- Understanding: Build knowledge, help people see relevance and importance.
- Feedback: Provide positive or negative guidance, direction, or outcome expectancies.
- Planning: Develop and maintain intentions or skills needed to perform a behaviour.
- Restructure: Change the environment to enhance or remove influences.
- Connect: Allow connections to be formed or make them available as informational sources.

With this sort of approach, we can start to develop interventions that are more likely to succeed as they are directly related to an effective diagnosis of the issues, and as such we are helping to facilitate change.

These interventions can take many forms ranging from simple ‘nudges’ through to education and wider engagement types of activities. The point is that we start with the individual and an understanding of their context-based lives to unlock barriers to change and in this very process enable them to participate in the process of human flourishing.

## 4 Closing Thoughts

A case has been made for the way in which the *act* of changing behaviour is itself flourishing: it is tempting to assume that human flourishing is a position we arrive at and whilst this is surely part of the explanation, the act of being human means rising to the challenge of continuous change. It is the act of overcoming individual, environmental and social and cultural barriers that is also very much part of human flourishing.

People are less able to turn to the usual guides for behaviour whether it be the bank, doctors, media, teachers. These professions are all in a process of change themselves so the extent to which behaviour is now guided by these gate keepers is, at best, debateable.

In addition, psychologist and philosopher Matthew Crawford suggests there were historically greater social affordances in the form of close family, colleagues and friends that lightly directed us into actions that we may find rewarding and meaningful. But these societal structures are arguably giving way to more individualistic points of reference (Crawford, 2016).

Making change happen is therefore at once both more challenging than ever and yet is at the heart of human flourishing (see Table 2). Helping people to imagine futures and navigate change is therefore going to be more critical than ever.

**Table 2** Summary

Destinations are often unclear	Support people to imagine and identify future possibilities, change is not a one-step process but a number of stages—people may well start often not knowing or conceptualising all that clearly the point at which they consider arriving
Meaning or sense making is a key part of being human	Education helps people to unpack the complex and inter-related nature of the world, allowing them to understand the challenges of navigating it
The act of change is as much part of flourishing as is the desired outcome	This focuses us on how to facilitate change rather than being too rigid what the outcomes are that we need to be arriving at helping people overcome barriers to change is at the heart of the way we are articulating flourishing
There are a range of internal and external barriers to enacting behaviour	There are subtle relationships and interplay between internal and external dimensions to behaviour—both are relevant for both understanding current behaviours and barriers to change
There are tools available to help make change happen	There is an increasing awareness and use of behaviour change frameworks that have a very practical application to support people to make change happen—these deserve consideration as a pragmatic contribution to the literature of human flourishing

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# Work, Family, and Human Flourishing



Maria Barraza, Mireia Las Heras, and Yasin Rofcanin

**Abstract** Work and family are two domains of human life that are closely interconnected. For that reason, job resources can potentially contribute to have a better non-work life domain. The purpose of this research is to study how contextual resources, such as spouse behavior at home, can foster human flourishing through spill crossover, resulting in enriched outcomes in the work and home domain. We explore how support for work received from the spouse can lead to the generation of resources such as creativity, self-efficacy and strategic renewal. This chapter contributes to the work and family literature by introducing the concept of work supportive spouse behavior (WSSB), defined as behaviors exhibited by spouses that are supportive of their partner’s role in the workplace—this concept mirrors the family supportive supervisor behavior (FSSB) that denotes behaviors by supervisors that favor their employees’ role as family members.

**Keywords** Work · Family · Flourishing · Family supportive supervisor behavior · Work supportive spouse behavior

## 1 Work, Family and Human Flourishing

Recent social and demographic changes have transformed business and family structures. As the number of dual earner couples, single parents, and women in the workforce continues to increase, more individuals now assume multiple roles that require obligations and responsibilities regarding both the work and family domain.

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Therefore, there is a growing concern about working adults who aspire to engage successfully in both the work and family sphere. This has called into question the changes we need in order for them to achieve this effectively.

Organizations, families, and society can benefit from understanding the linking relationships between work and family (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Research has suggested that individuals can benefit from engaging in multiple roles (Hanson et al., 2006). Our study aims to explore human flourishing in the context of stable dual earning heterosexual couples. Organizations where individuals can better flourish are beneficial for individuals and for society (Huppert & So, 2013). As organizations seek to create more humane environments, we see this as an opportunity for enrichment in couples, and a means towards human flourishing. For the same token, it is our aim to show that individuals who are part of couples that generate enriching dynamics will be better able to contribute to organizations as well. Our research intends to explore under which family and organizational circumstances, individuals who are part of committed and stable couples live fulfilled lives and experience well-being. We study such conditions for couples in which both members work full time jobs.

Human flourishing has been defined as a state in which different aspects of life, including happiness, health, satisfaction, meaning, purpose, and relationships, are good (Vanderweele, 2017). It is a state that is achieved when feeling good, functioning effectively and experiencing that life is going well (Huppert & So, 2013). Vanderweele (2017) considers family, work, education, and religious communities as major pathways towards outcomes related to human flourishing. In this study, we refer to human flourishing as the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively in the work and home domain. Using as reference the work-home resource model (WH-R) proposed by ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012), we analyze how the relationship between the work and family domain can foster human flourishing. The WH-R model offers a framework that describes the relationship between work and family as a process of depletion and enrichment of resources (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). The WH-R model has a theoretical foundation on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory proposed by Hobfoll (2002). According to COR theory, individuals aim for resources and the possession of them can help generate other resources (Hobfoll, 2002).

Work and family are two domains of human life that are closely interconnected (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Job resources and flourishing can contribute to the understanding of the interaction between the family and work domain (Du et al., 2018). Yet, most research has focused on the conflict or interference from the relationship between work and family roles (Crain & Hammer, 2013). Work-family conflict is a term used to describe the incompatibility between the pressure of the work and family sphere (Amstad et al., 2011) and is based on the assumption that one role results in difficulties on the other role (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2015). Work-family conflict has also been studied in terms of work interference with family and in terms of family interference with work (Amstad et al., 2011).

As part of the work-family research, studies began to ask whether work and family domain might also facilitate one another. Data suggested that work-family



facilitation is a phenomenon that is not just the absence of work-family conflict (Hill, 2005). The inquiry on work-family enrichment as research topic shifted the focus in order to study how positive experiences in one sphere can improve experiences in the other sphere (Crain & Hammer, 2013). Enrichment is used to describe the way in which one domain is associated with improvement in the quality of life of the other domain (Zhang et al., 2018). Research and studies on work-family enrichment analyze other concepts such as *enhancement* or *facilitation*. Greenhouse and Powell (2006) proposed the work-family enrichment model as a framework that explains work and family roles as allies that are considered to be bidirectional.

According to the WH-R model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), contextual resources from either family or work domain lead to development of personal resources, which can facilitate performance on the other domain (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). The model states the possession of resources decreases the possibility of conflict and relates positively to enrichment. Our study gathers information concerning resources generated in dyads, to do that we collected data panel consisted from both individuals of dual earning couples. We explore when, and to what extent, the relationship between work and family can foster well-being at for the individuals, and when resources transfer from one member of the couple to the other.

We use the concept of resources as defined in the social and psychological research: resources are elements that have a value in their own or function as means towards an end (Hobfoll, 2002). Resources have an important role in COR Theory and in the WH-R Model. According to COR theory, the possession of resources work by two spiral processes: one refers to a loss spiral, when depletion happens, and a gain spiral, when accumulation of resources occurs (Hobfoll, 2002). The WH-R model proposes that enrichment is more likely to occur when individual possesses resources and at the same this will make conflict less likely to occur (Bakker et al., 2011).

### ***1.1 Bidirectional Spillover from Work to Home Within Persons and Crossover Within Couples***

There is lots of evidence showing that work resources transfer to the non-work domain, and the other way round. For instance, research by Lin et al. (2017) shows that resources generated at work result in positive outcomes in the family domain. Data at the individual level has suggested that work resources, such as flexibility at the workplace, improve outcomes in both the family and work domain (Hill et al., 2001). Research at the individual level suggests that the transfer of skills from work to home leads to positive outcomes such as mental health (Hanson et al., 2006).

Emotions at work result on work outcomes at work on individuals, but also on their partner at home (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2012). For example, work-family conflict research have found evidence of stress causing consequences on individuals, and

also on their partner's health and well-being (Yucel & Fan, 2019). These dynamics among partners let Hammer et al. (1997) to call for more research that focuses not only on individuals as the unit of analysis, but also to explore crossover effects of work and family between partners. Aligned with the WH-R model, *spillover theory* explores how experiences at work impact an individual's behavior at home (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2015). *Spillover theory* also explores how experiences, feelings, or attitudes spill over from the work domain to the family domain (Lin et al., 2017). Studies have also explored how the spillover outcome can then be transferred to the partner (crossover) (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2015). Research on *crossover theory* has contributed to the understanding of how crossover in work and in home leads to improvement of individuals at work and at home.

## 1.2 Support as a Resource

The purpose of the first part of our research is to study how contextual resources, such as spouse behavior at home, can foster human flourishing through spillover and crossover, resulting in enriched outcomes in the work and home domain. We explore how support for work received from the spouse can lead to the generation of resources such as creativity, self-efficacy, and strategic renewal. Our study contributes to the work and family literature by introducing the concept of work supportive spouse behavior (WSSB), which mirrors the Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors (FSSB) that denotes behaviors by supervisors that favor their employees' role as family members (Hammer et al., 2013). In line with FSSB, we define WSSB as behaviors exhibited by spouses that are supportive of their partner's role in the workplace.

The concept of FSSB is framed within the social support theory. Research has suggested that social support can act as a causal contributor of well-being and of improved mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support is usually measured between emotional support and instrumental support (Aycan & Eskin, 2005) which can come from sources such as spouses, coworkers, or supervisors (Hammer et al., 2013). The FSSB research explores supervisor's behavior as a tool that provides resources to employees and enables them to better cope with managing multiple roles in the home and work domain (Hammer et al., 2013). We intent to explore how WSSB can also help individuals to successfully manage multiple roles in the home and work domain.

Our model (1) proposes social support, given by spouses through work supportive behavior, as a resource that might foster enrichment in the work and family domain. Alongside the WH-R model, we propose that resources in the work domain, such as creativity at work and self-efficacy at work, as well as resources in the home domain, like creativity at home and strategic renewal at home, are more likely to accumulate among individuals who receive work spouse supportive behavior. We also integrate family performance as a possible outcome for work supportive spouse behavior, and as an antecedent for enrichment outcomes. Family performance has

been used usually as a self-report variable. As part of our intention to gather two sources of information, we have turned this into a measure rated by the partner. Studies that include data from both partners contribute a more clear picture of the processes by using information from two sources involved in the crossover and spillover process (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2015).

In line with *spillover and crossover theory*, the second part of our research suggests that resources, in the form of spouse support, may cross over between couples and result in the accumulation of resources of the partner. In our proposed model (2) we suggest *spouse support for strength use given* might cross over as *perceived spouse support for strength use* and then spill over in the work domain in creativity at work and meaning at work from psychological empowerment. We also include possible outcomes regarding the home domain, such as family crafting and self-efficacy, in order to explore spillover in both domains.

In line with the WF-R framework, our model also integrates personal traits, such as love from spouse and perspective taking as personal resources that can be utilized to improve outcomes in the work and home domain. In line with the concept of gain spiral, we suggest personal resources, such as love for spouse and perspective taking, can enable individuals to achieve other purposes effectively, such as giving spouse support for strength use to their partner.

The third part of our research explores how behaviors might cross over between the work and the home domain. The third model we propose takes account of self-efficacy, strategic renewal, and creativity at work as behaviors that may influence and cross over to the home domain as flow, strategic renewal, and creativity at home. We also include proactive personality of the spouse and organizational support for strength use of the spouse as contextual resources that may influence the crossover of self-efficacy, strategic renewal, and creativity from the work to the home interface.

Finally, our third model also integrates self-efficacy at home of the spouse as a resource that could partially mediate between our predictors and our proposed outcomes. Perceived *self-efficacy* can influence a person's choice of activities, of environments and settings, coping efforts, and determine how much they will try to face obstacles against difficult experiences (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to successfully use resources obtained in the work domain for the benefit of their role in the home domain, and vice versa (Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016). Our study suggests that perceived self-efficacy at work domain can lead to skills, values, and opportunities that cross over to the home domain as flow, strategic renewal, and creativity.

Research has found evidence of association between creativity and high levels of well-being on individuals (Huppert & So, 2013). At the organizational level, research has also highlighted how creativity of individuals is beneficial for innovation at organizations (Tierney et al., 1999). Creativity has also been described as an antecedent for innovation, growth, and societal development (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). We suggest that creativity at work can cross over and favor creativity at home as well as other behaviors such as flow and strategic renewal.

## 2 Sample and Procedure

Our study consists of a random sample of 150 US resident couples. Selection criteria for our sample included spouses who had both partners work full time jobs, shared a common residence and be part of a heterosexual couple. We asked the participants to complete an online survey during 7 weeks. Half of the males were assigned to role A, and half of them to role B. Their partners were assigned to the complementary role, so that our final sample would consist of a sample of 50% in which men was A and female was B, and the other 50% males would be B and females would be A. This was done because A and B were different questionnaires, to study the transfer of resources from A to B, and from B to A. Our final sample consists of 150 dual earner couples ( $N = 300$ ), of which 129 (89%) have children. Of the total sample 52% have people under their responsibilities in their job; 54% have a bachelor's degree, while 18% have a master's. The company they worked for had between 251 and 500 employees for 19% of the sample, 501–2500 for 21%, and 2500 or more for 16%. All statistical analysis was tested with MLWIN.

## 3 Measures

Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale where a rating of 1 was equivalent to strongly disagree and a 7 to strongly agree. Since some of the resources in the models are volatile, meaning that they might change over the course of time (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we contacted each couple during 7 weeks in a row, to account for such changes over time. The first week we collected demographic data, and data corresponding to structural resources. These resources are stable and therefore last longer (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

The measures that we collected first week are the following:

- *Love for spouse*: Individuals evaluated four items from *The love Attitudes Scale: short form* (Hendrick et al., 1998). (e.g., *You would rather suffer than let your partner suffer*) ( $\alpha = 0.84$  for group A; mean = 5.57; SD = 0.04).
- *Empathic concern*: Participants evaluated on the scale developed by Davis (1983) which is composed of seven items and describes empathic concern as the reaction someone has to the experiences of the others. We use the empathic concern scale that measures other oriented feelings (e.g., *You often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than you*) ( $\alpha = 0.86$  for group A; mean = 4.61; SD = 0.03).
- *Perspective taking*: We took the seven items of the *Perspective Taking Scale*, also developed by Davis (1983) that measures the tendency to take on the psychological point of view of someone else. (e.g., *You sometimes try to understand your friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective*) ( $\alpha = 0.79$  for group A; mean = 4.94; SD = 0.03).

- *Organizational support for strength use*: We measured five items of the scale on organizational support for strength use, which is a scale that was developed to measure perception of employees on their organization as organizational support (Keenan & Mostert, 2013) (e.g., *Your organization uses your strengths*) ( $\alpha = 0.92$  for group B; mean = 5.53; SD = 0.05).
- *Proactive personality*: We used six items of the proactive personality scale, a reliable self-report instrument to evaluate proactive behavior within the individual level (Bateman & Crant, 1993) (e.g., *You are always looking for better ways to do things*) ( $\alpha = 0.89$  for group B, mean = 5.52; SD = 0.04).
- *Family climate for creativity*: We adapted a scale developed to measure climate for creativity at work in order to measure climate for creativity at home (Zhou & Hoever, 2014) (e.g., *In your home, your partner and family members are open to new ideas and new ways of thinking*). ( $\alpha = 0.82$  for group B, mean = 5.75; SD = 0.04).

From week two to seven, we collected data on resources that we consider volatile. That is, these resources might vary over short time periods. For that reason, we took weekly measures. As previously mentioned, we collected different information for group A and B. The following measures correspond to the data collected for group A:

- *WSSB—Work Supportive Spouse Behaviors (received)*: To evaluate work supportive spouse behaviors we adapted four items from the FSSB developed by Hammer et al. (Hanson et al., 2006). We ask group A to report WSSB received by group B ( $\alpha = 0.88$ , mean = 5.75; SD = 0.04) (e.g., *your partner has made you feel comfortable talking about your conflicts between work and non-work*).
- *Flow at home*: To measure flow at home we used ten items, adapted to the home domain, that measures a state described by being absorbed and optimally challenged in your activities “*This week at home, your thoughts/activities ran fluidly and smoothly*” ( $\alpha = 0.92$ , mean = 5.35, SD = 0.04).
- *Self-efficacy at work*: We used three items of the general self-efficacy scale which includes items such as: *This last week, you felt capable of achieving your work goals* ( $\alpha = 0.87$ , mean = 5.73, SD = 0.04).
- *Creativity at work*: To measure creativity at work we used three items that measure originality and innovation through a scale developed by Tierney et al. (1999) that includes items such as: *This week, you’ve demonstrated originality in your work* ( $\alpha = 0.88$ , mean = 5.15, SD = 0.06).
- *Creativity at home*: It resembles the scale developed for creativity at work, yet it refers to the home domain. This scale had never been used for such domain before. For example: *This week, you’ve demonstrated originality in your home/family life* ( $\alpha = 0.92$ , mean = 5.18, SD = 0.06).
- *Strategic renewal at work*: We measured strategic renewal at work by including four items of one dimension of the scale, and adapted it to a weekly methodology to collect data regarding new ideas to face challenges at work ( $\alpha = 0.94$ , mean = 4.77, SD = 0.07). (e.g., *This last week, you’ve conceptualized new ways of working for your organization.*)

- *Strategic renewal at home*: We adapted the four items that we used for strategic renewal at work to the home domain (e.g., *This last week, you've conceptualized new ways of working for your family*) ( $\alpha = 0.94$ , mean = **4.90**, SD = **0.06**). To our knowledge, this scale had never been used in a non-work domain.
- *Spouse support for strength use*: We adapted a scale developed to measure organizational support strength use to focus it on measuring spouse support (e.g., *You've given your partner the opportunity to do what he/she is good at*) ( $\alpha = 0.91$ , mean = **6.02**, SD = **0.04**). To our knowledge, this scale had never been used to measure support coming from a non-organizational source.

The following measures correspond to the data collected for group B (these are the partners of the sample of group A):

- *Family crafting*: We included five items that collected measures regarding learning, skills, and challenging activities in the home domain. The survey asked for self-reporting on data such as: *Through your family activities, you have looked for inspiration from others* ( $\alpha = 0.89$ , mean = **5.49**, SD = **1.22**).
- *Family performance of spouse A*: We took two items regarding tasks (for example: *To what extent do you think that, in the last week, your partner has fulfilled what your family expects of him/her in relation to maintaining this around home*), and two items of relationships (for example: *Keep family members connected with each other, to measure family performance of the spouse*). ( $\alpha = 0.88$ , mean = **5.72**, SD = **1.21**).
- *Satisfaction with work-family balance of the spouse*: We used three items to measure satisfaction with performance of spouse A reported by B. Survey included items such as: *This past week: to what extent have you been satisfied with how your partner has divided his/her attention between work and home* ( $\alpha = 0.92$ , mean = **5.56**, SD = **1.32**).
- *Perceived spouse support for strength use*: In line with spouse support given measured by group A, we ask group B to report for spouse support received (e.g., *Your partner has given you the opportunity to do what you are good at*) ( $\alpha = 0.93$ , mean = **5.87**, SD = **1.18**).
- *Self-efficacy at home*: We adapted the scale used for group A to report for self-efficacy at work, modified to measure the same variables in the home domain (e.g., *In the last week, you've felt capable of achieving your family duties*) ( $\alpha = 0.84$ , mean = **5.91**, SD = **1.02**).
- *Creativity at work*: We use the same scale used in group A to report for creativity at work ( $\alpha = 0.90$ , mean = **5.56**, SD = **1.28**).
- *Meaning at work from psychological empowerment scale*: We used three items from the scale developed by Spreitzer (1995) that measures meaning at work with items such as: *The work I do is personally meaningful to me* ( $\alpha = 0.91$ , mean = **5.84**, SD = **1.22**).

### 4 Proposed Models

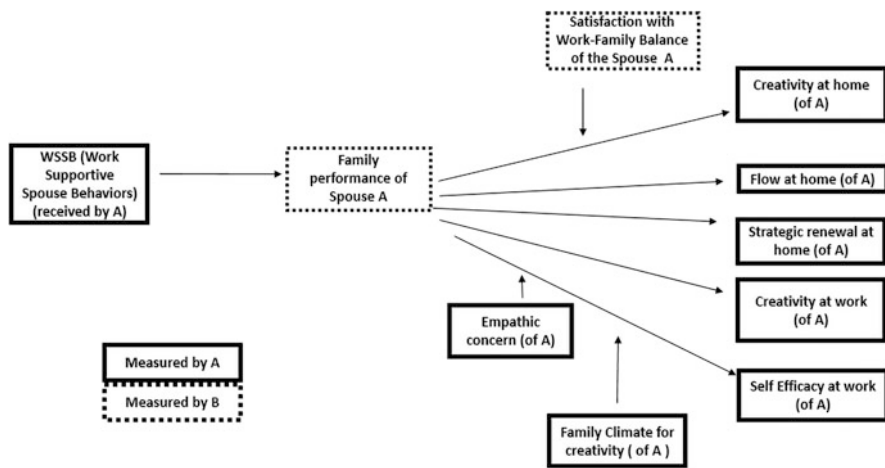
For our first model (Fig. 1), we predict behavioral support to be an antecedent of enrichment outcomes in the work and home domain. In line with social support theory and work-home resource model, we suggest behavioral support is a resource that can foster the generation of positive outcomes. We therefore propose that work supportive spouse behavior (WSSB) received is a volatile resource and its possession can lead to outcomes such as creativity, flow, strategic renewal, and self-efficacy. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1a:* WSSB (received by A) positively relates to: (a) Creativity at home (of A), (b) Flow at home (of A), (c) Strategic renewal (of A), (d) Creativity at work (of A) and (e) Self-Efficacy at work (of A).

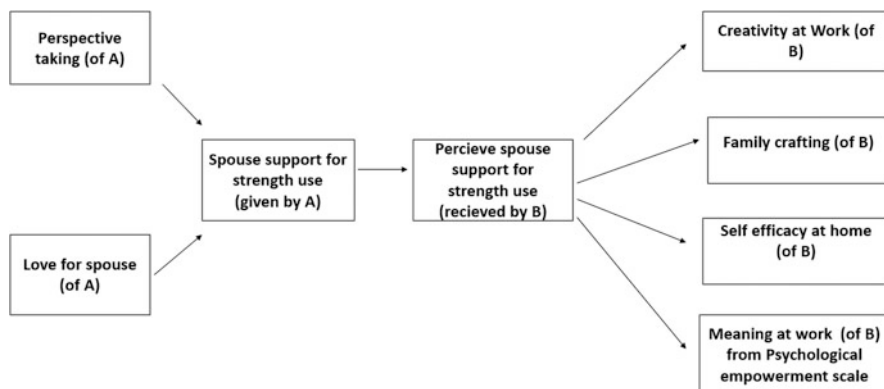
We suggest that family performance is key to understanding the relationship between WSSB and enrichment outcomes, such as the ones tested in our model. Successfully accomplishing family tasks can explain the link between WSSB and creativity, flow, strategic renewal, and self-efficacy. In our model, we tested family performance as a resource that can mediate the relationship between WSSB and work and home outcomes. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1b:* Family performance (of A, reported by B) mediates the effect of WSSB (received by A) on: (a) Creativity at home (of A), (b) Flow at home (of A), (c) Strategic renewal at home (of A), (d) Creativity at work (of A) and (e) Self-Efficacy at work (of A).

We also suggest structural resources, such as empathic concern and family climate for creativity, moderate the relationship between family performance and



**Fig. 1** First model: behavioral support as an antecedent of enrichment outcomes in the work and home domain



**Fig. 2** Second model. Resources of spouse A (perspective taking and love for spouse) leading to further resources of spouse B (creativity at work, family crafting, self-efficacy, and maening at work)

its outcomes such that outcomes are stronger among those with higher levels of empathic concern and family climate for creativity.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Empathic concern (of A) moderates the impact of family performance (of A, reported by B) on: (a) Creativity at home (of A), (b) Flow at home (of A), (c) Strategic renewal (of A), (d) Creativity at work (of A) and (e) Self-Efficacy at work (of A).

*Hypothesis 1d:* Family climate for creativity (reported by A) moderates the impact of family performance (of A, reported by B) on: (a) Creativity at home (of A), (b) Flow at home (of A), (c) Strategic renewal (of A), (d) Creativity at work (of A), (e) Self-Efficacy at work (of A).

Finally, our first model also considers that satisfaction with family balance of the spouse can explain the size of the effect of the relationship between family performance and its outcomes. Therefore, we suggest that the extent to which the outcomes have a positive relationship may be stronger among those with higher satisfaction with work-family balance of the spouse.

*Hypothesis 1e:* Satisfaction with work-family balance of the spouse A (measured by B) moderates the impact of family performance (of A) on: (a) Creativity at home (of A), (b) Flow at home (of A), (c) Strategic renewal (of A), (d) Creativity at work (of A) and (e) Self-Efficacy at work (of A).

*In our second model (Fig. 2) as suggested by crossover theory, we explore how resources lead to generating further resources between spouses.* At the individual level, structural resources, such as personal traits, can work as antecedents for the generation of other resources, such as spouse support for given. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2a:* (a) Perspective taking (of A) and (b) Love for spouse (of A), positively relates to spouse support for strength use (given by A).



In line with spillover crossover theory, our model suggests that the use of personal resources can have crossover effect between spouses and then induce the generation of resources. We believe that spouse support for strength use (given by A) crosses over between spouses and leads to perceive spouse support for strength use (received by B).

*Hypothesis 2b:* Spouse support for strength use given (by A) positively relates to perceived spouse support for strength use received (by B).

We argue that since perceive support for strength use received (by B) is associated with support for strength used given (by A), consequently the effect of perspective taking and love for spouse on perceived support for strength use (by B) will be mediated by the level of spouse support for strength use (given by A). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2c:* Spouse support for strength use given (by A) mediates the effect of (a) Perspective taking (of A) and (b) Love for spouse (of A), on perceived spouse support for strength use (received by B).

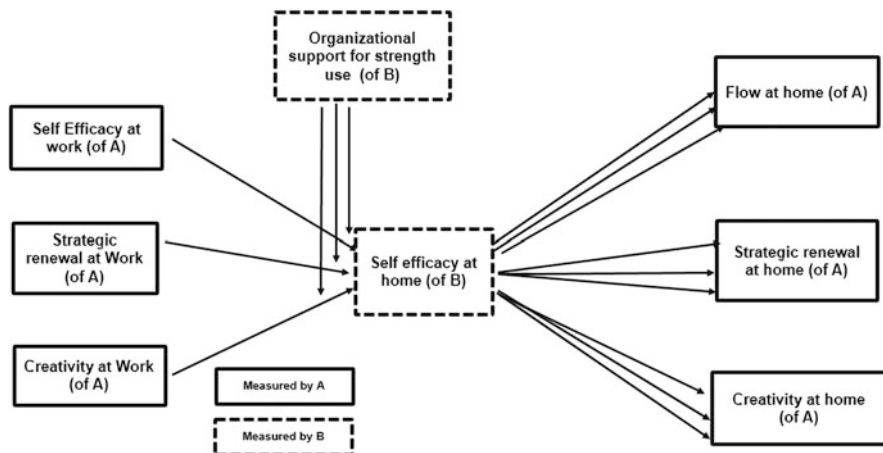
Work-home resource model suggests that gains in resources, such as social support, lead to a gain spiral in which resources accumulate. Therefore, we believe that perceived spouse support for strength use (received by B) can be an antecedent to enrichment outcomes such as creativity at work (of B), family crafting (of B), self-efficacy at home (of B), and meaning at work from psychological empowerment (of B). Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2d:* Perceived spouse support for strength use (received by B) positively relates to: (a) Creativity at work (of B), (b) Family crafting (of B), (c) Self-efficacy at home (of B), (d) Meaning at work from psychological empowerment scale (of B).

We predict that a higher level of perceived spouse support for strength use (received by B) resulting from spouse support for strength use (given by A) will foster a better quality of experiences in the work and home domain. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2e:* Perceived spouse support for strength use (received by B) mediates the relationship between spouse support for strength use (given by A) and: (a) Creativity at work (of B), (b) Family crafting (of B), (c) Self-efficacy at home (of B) and (d) Meaning at work from psychological empowerment scale (of B).

Our third model (Fig. 3) suggests that individual behaviors at the work domain can foster enrichment through crossover between spouses and between domains. Individuals influence the behavior, emotions, and thoughts of their partners and transmit their feelings or events between them. Therefore, we suggest behaviors at the work domain and behaviors at the home domain of the spouse are associated positively. Thus, we hypothesize:



**Fig. 3** Third model: Individual behaviors by spouse A at the work domain leading to positive outcomes of spouse B at home (Self-Efficacy, Flow at home, Strategic renewas, Creativity at Home). This process is dependent on the Organizatioan Support for Strength use of spouse B

*Hypothesis 3a:* (a) Self-Efficacy at work (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at work (of A) and (c) Creativity at work (of A) positively relates to self-efficacy at home (of B).

In the same line, we predict that behavior at the home domain can be an antecedent to behaviors of the spouse in the home domain. We suggest self-efficacy of one of the partners can cross over in the home domain through flow, strategic renewal or creativity at home. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3b:* Self-efficacy at home (of B) positively relates to: (a) Flow at home (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at home (of A) and (c) Creativity at home (of A).

In line with spillover theory, behaviors at work can impact an individual's behavior at home. We predict that this relationship can be mediated through the behavior at home of the spouse. We suggest that high levels of self-efficacy at home (of B) will result in higher effects between behavior in the work and in the home domain. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3c:* Self-efficacy at home (of B) mediates the effect of self-efficacy at work (of A) on: (a) Flow at home (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at home (of A) and (c) Creativity at home (of A).

*Hypothesis 3d:* Self-efficacy at home (of B) mediates the effect of strategic renewal at work (of A) on: (a) Flow at home (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at home (of A) and (c) Creativity at home (of A).

*Hypothesis 3e:* Self-efficacy at home (of B) mediates the effect of creativity at work (of A) on: (a) Flow at home (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at home (of A) and c) Creativity at home (of A).

Finally, we include in our model structural resources and suggest that they can moderate the crossover effect between spouses.

*Hypothesis 3f:* Organizational support for strength use (of B) moderates the effect of (a) Self-efficacy at work (of A), (b) Strategic renewal at work (of A) and (c) Creativity at work (of A), on self-efficacy at home (of B).

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Model 1: Results

Multilevel regression analysis revealed that work supportive spouse behavior had a significant positive effect on creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.497$ ,  $SE = 0.056$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), flow at home ( $\beta = 0.571$ ,  $SE = 0.035$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal ( $\beta = 0.370$ ,  $SE = 0.060$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.484$ ,  $SE = 0.053$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and self-efficacy at work ( $\beta = 0.500$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Supporting *hypothesis 1a*, this suggests that work supportive spouse behavior can influence positive outcomes in the home and in the work domain.

To test for the mediation effect of family performance, we first conducted a regression analysis to test for the direct effect between work supportive spouse behavior and family performance. The test was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.505$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). We also tested and found significant results on the direct association between family performance and creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.609$ ,  $SE = 0.047$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), flow at home ( $\beta = 0.424$ ,  $SE = 0.035$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal ( $\beta = 0.532$ ,  $SE = 0.052$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.517$ ,  $SE = 0.044$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and self-efficacy at work ( $\beta = 0.500$ ,  $SE = 0.039$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In line with what we proposed in *hypothesis 1b*, bootstrapping test confirmed that the indirect effect via family performance is statistically significant at the 95% CI on creativity at home [CI = 0.20, 0.33], flow at home [CI = 0.07, 0.11], strategic renewal [CI = 0.17, 0.31], creativity at work [CI = 0.16, 0.27], and self-efficacy at work [CI = 0.13, 0.23].

*Hypothesis 1c* predicted that empathic concern had a moderating effect between family performance of spouse A and the proposed behavior outcomes. Results show that the interaction between empathic concern and family performance of spouse influence creativity at home ( $\beta = -0.252$ ,  $SE = 0.065$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and flow at home ( $\beta = 0.016$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Supporting *hypothesis 1d*, results indicate that the interaction between family climate for creativity and family performance is significant on creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), flow at home ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), strategic renewal ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $SE = 0.043$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and self-efficacy at work.

*Hypothesis 1e* predicted that satisfaction with work-family balance of the spouse moderated the relationship between family performance and the proposed outcomes.

Results support our hypothesis, as the interaction was statistically significant between satisfaction with work-family balance of the spouse and flow at home ( $\beta = 0.036$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## 5.2 Model 2: Results

Statistical analysis support there is a positive relationship between perspective taking and spouse support for strength use ( $\beta = 0.389$ ,  $SE = 0.054$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as between love for spouse and spouse support for strength use ( $\beta = 0.333$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in line with what we proposed in *hypothesis 2a*.

We run a regression analysis and confirmed *hypothesis 2b*, which suggested that spouse support for strength use given (by A) positively relates to perceived spouse support for strength use received (by B) ( $\beta = 0.695$ ,  $SE = 0.033$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). We tested for the mediating effect of spouse support for strength use and found statistical evidence that it mediates the relationship between perspective taking and perceived spouse support for strength use [ $CI = 0.19, 0.35$ ], as well as between love for spouse and perceived spouse support for strength use [ $CI = 0.01, 0.05$ ] supporting *hypothesis 2c*.

Supporting *hypothesis 2d*, we found that perceived spouse support for strength use positively relates to creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.348$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), family crafting ( $\beta = 0.392$ ,  $SE = 0.037$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-efficacy at home ( $\beta = 0.485$ ,  $SE = 0.028$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and meaning at work from psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.417$ ,  $SE = 0.037$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

To test for the mediation effect suggested in *hypothesis 2e*, we first tested for the direct relationship between spouse support for strength use and the proposed outcomes. We found significant positive relationships between spouse support for strength use and creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.397$ ,  $SE = 0.044$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), family crafting ( $\beta = 0.426$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-efficacy at home ( $\beta = 0.539$ ,  $SE = 0.031$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and meaning at work from psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.486$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). We analyzed for mediation by testing the indirect effect of perceive spouse support for strength use on these associations. We bootstrapped and found significant indirect effects of mediation between spouse support for strength use through perceived spouse support on creativity at work [ $CI = 0.07827, 0.2189$ ], family crafting [ $CI = 0.1171, 0.2472$ ], self-efficacy at home [ $CI = 0.164, 0.2617$ ], and meaning at work from psychological empowerment [ $CI = 0.1098, 0.2382$ ].

## 5.3 Model 3: Results

We used multilevel modeling to test *hypothesis 3a* which suggested a positive relationship between self-efficacy at work ( $\beta = 0.530$ ,  $SE = 0.033$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),

strategic renewal at work ( $\beta = 0.192$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and creativity at work ( $\beta = 0.541$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on self-efficacy at home.

Regression analysis also supported *hypothesis 3b*, which suggested that self-efficacy at home positively relates to flow at home ( $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $SE = 0.039$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal at home ( $\beta = 0.407$ ,  $SE = 0.060$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.453$ ,  $SE = 0.057$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

*Hypothesis 3c* suggested self-efficacy at home (of B) had a mediation effect on the relationship between self-efficacy at work and the proposed behavior outcomes. We first tested the direct relationships which prove statistically significant indicating self-efficacy at work relates positively to flow at home ( $\beta = 0.579$ ,  $SE = 0.033$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal at home ( $\beta = 0.602$ ,  $SE = 0.048$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.626$ ,  $SE = 0.046$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). We tested the indirect effect of self-efficacy at home on these associations, bootstrapped the results and found significant indirect effects on flow at home [CI = 0.095, 0.189], strategic renewal at home [CI = 0.233, 0.367], and creativity at home [CI = 0.014, 0.148].

*Hypothesis 3d* suggested that self-efficacy at home (of B) mediates the effect of strategic renewal at work on the model outcomes. The test for direct relationships suggested a positive and significant association between strategic renewal and flow at home ( $\beta = 0.258$ ,  $SE = 0.022$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal at home ( $\beta = 0.652$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.643$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). To test for mediation we bootstrapped the indirect effects and found significant confidence intervals on flow at home [CI = 0.2731, 0.7371] and creativity at home [CI = 0.024, 0.068].

*Hypothesis 3e* suggested that self-efficacy at home (of B) mediates the effect of creativity at work on the model outcomes. The test for direct relationships suggested a positive and significant association between creativity at work and flow at home ( $\beta = 0.372$ ,  $SE = 0.026$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strategic renewal at home ( $\beta = 0.720$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and creativity at home ( $\beta = 0.733$ ,  $SE = 0.030$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). To test for mediation we bootstrapped the indirect effects and found significant confidence intervals on flow at home [CI = 0.135, 0.213] and creativity at home [CI = 0.016, 0.112].

*Hypothesis 3f* suggested organizational support for strength use had a moderating effect on the relationship between self-efficacy at home, strategic renewal at work, and creativity at work on self-efficacy at home. The interaction proved statistically significant on the relationship between strategic renewal at work and self-efficacy at home ( $\beta = 0.720$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## 6 Conclusions

Through our study, we saw that there could be positive associations between roles in the home and in the work domain: success in one domain can influence greater success in the other. Our results suggest that enrichment in the home domain can be influenced by: social support in the home domain, such as spouse supportive

behavior; support in the workspace, such as organizational support; and positive behaviors in the work domain, such as strategic renewal at work. Alternately, we also saw this to happen in the work domain. Therefore, we conclude that, when individuals develop successful behaviors in one role, the benefits can spill over to the other role. Finally, we add that social support and personal traits can increase the outcomes such that the benefits, and therefore the individual enrichment, are greater.

Thus, we encourage organizations and policymakers to promote practices and policies that help individuals to successfully manage multiple roles in the home and work domain. Society and organizations can benefit from enriched individuals who are able to perform better in the work and in the home domain. Hence, work-family balance can influence greater human flourishing through well-being of women and men.

As a society that constantly strives to adapt to changes in a fast pace world, we can all benefit from understanding the relationship of managing multiple roles. Well-being of women and men should be a priority for organizations as work-family balance is increasingly crucial under current social and demographic conditions. Human flourishing, for those who manage multiple role, is possible and should be promoted as a means for a better and healthier society.

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**Part III**  
**Care and Flourishing**

# Forgiveness in Human Flourishing



Loren Toussaint, Everett L. Worthington Jr, Jon R. Webb, Colwick Wilson,  
and David R. Williams

**Abstract** In this chapter, we examine the association between forgiveness and flourishing. We begin by identifying what forgiveness and flourishing are. We then move to considering conceptual models as well as evidence supporting the connection between forgiveness and flourishing. An early model of the forgiveness and mental health relationship offers a beginning in this regard. Next, we examine the stress-and-coping models of forgiveness of oneself and others. The final model is the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and subjective well-being. These models offer multiple vantage points from which to consider the forgiveness-flourishing connection. Limitations to these models and to the current state of knowledge on forgiveness and flourishing are highlighted, especially the limits to comprehensive assessment of flourishing in the extant literature. Conclusions and future directions for studying and promoting flourishing in people of different religious affiliation, cultures, countries, and life-circumstances are discussed in closing.

**Keywords** Forgiveness · Flourishing · Stress-and-coping model of forgiveness · Mental health · Physical health · Happiness

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The notion of human flourishing is one that encompasses an exceptionally broad range of positive human experiences. Seligman (2011) argued that flourishing pushes the discussion about human well-being beyond a focus on individual positive emotion to a focus on attaining sustained comprehensive well-being for individuals, communities, and entire societies. Nonetheless, Seligman (2011) retained positive emotions as a central component of his model of flourishing, which also includes engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). Accordingly, these are, in his view, the ingredients to lasting fulfillment. Seligman is a psychologist. Others in the field of medicine have comprehensively tackled the question of what constitutes flourishing. For instance, the 100 Million Healthier Lives project ([www.ihl.org/100MLives](http://www.ihl.org/100MLives)) conducted at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement has focused on life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, and social and financial well-being as the building blocks of flourishing. In a recent study of over 23,000 Americans, this model of flourishing served well in characterizing the sample and its levels of flourishing (Stiefel et al., 2019). However, the conceptualizations of flourishing used in these models leave out a critical aspect of flourishing, namely the development of good character—what we might simply call being a good person. Character virtues have been a topic of great philosophical interest for centuries (Gardiner, 2005) and interest in virtues by scientists was stimulated largely with the encyclopedic work of Peterson and Seligman (2004) with the publication of *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. However, it has only been more recently that interest in the inclusion of virtues into the notion of flourishing has developed. VanderWeele (2017) has argued that human flourishing should be thought of as containing many of the same aspects of human experience that others have discussed including happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, and close social relationships, but character and virtue should also be included. It is this last addition to the model of flourishing that is most relevant to the present chapter. That is, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the connections between forgiveness and human flourishing, and as such, the aim here coincides nicely with the work of VanderWeele and his colleagues (VanderWeele, 2017; VanderWeele et al., 2019) highlighting character and virtue as an important aspect of human flourishing. After all, forgiveness can be considered a character virtue (McGary, 1989), and it has received much attention from multiple disciplines. In this chapter we provide definitions, models, and limits of our understanding of the forgiveness and flourishing connection. Table 1 provides an overview of the key takeaways.

## 1 Definitions

If forgiveness is a virtue and can be considered an important contributor to flourishing, then it is critical to understand its meaning. Furthermore, as flourishing is clearly a broad and comprehensive construct that at times is examined in its entirety and at other times the focus might be on specific dimensions of flourishing,

**Table 1** Key takeaways and implications regarding forgiveness and flourishing

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- Forgiveness is thought of as a decrease in negative and increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and motivations toward an offender, oneself or another

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- Multiple forms of forgiveness exist including: forgiving oneself, forgiving others, feeling forgiven by others or a higher power, and seeking forgiveness

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- Flourishing, as thought of in this chapter, is made up of mental and physical health and happiness. Some models of flourishing additionally include things such as social and financial well-being, as well as meaning, purpose, and achievement

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- Forgiveness and unforgiveness are connected to flourishing through both direct and indirect routes. In terms of indirect paths, forgiveness may enhance flourishing because it improves perceptions of control. Forgiveness helps people gain and keep friends, and it helps reduce ruminating on bad things that happen. People might even live healthier lives by doing things like sleeping better because of forgiveness

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- The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness and self-forgiveness can be used to understand how forgiveness is connected to flourishing. The basic premise of these models is that feeling unforgiving toward oneself or others is stressful. The stress arising from this unforgiveness can erode mental and physical health and happiness and ultimately undercut one’s ability to flourish. Forgiveness serves as a healthy coping mechanism that reduces the negative effects of unforgiveness on one’s capacity to flourish

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- A key aspect of flourishing is the experience of positive emotion and overall happiness. The scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being asserts that forgiveness contributes to happiness in many ways. In some part, it enhances relationship harmony, maintenance, and mastery. Forgiveness also promotes healthy identity development and perceptions of self-acceptance and self-worth

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- Research on forgiveness and flourishing possesses sample, measurement, and design limitations. More diverse samples need to be studied, better measures of flourishing need to be used, and designs that allow for understanding the causal effects of forgiveness on flourishing need to be used more commonly

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- Forgiveness can be learned. As such, becoming more forgiving could lead to more flourishing. How much of a change in forgiveness is necessary to notice improvements in flourishing probably varies widely across individuals

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it is equally important that the framing of the concept of flourishing also be clear. To that end, we first define forgiveness and second define the particular parameters of flourishing that we will examine.

### **1.1 Forgiveness**

Scholarly papers, books, and dissertations have been devoted to understanding how to properly define forgiveness. Lay-folks struggle to come to agreement on what forgiveness is, and religious doctrine differs about the necessary requirements of forgiveness. As is often the case in scientific work, definitions of forgiveness really are important because they tend to drive what is studied scientifically and what is focused on when trying to help people forgive. Despite the wide variety of common-sense understandings of forgiveness, there has been a surprising consistency in how scholars defined forgiveness early in the development of the psychology of forgiveness field. Scholars generally agree that forgiveness is experienced internally

because of some offense that occurs (usually) in social space. For example, one can feel forgiven by God, can experience self-forgiveness as a response to self-condemnation, can experience human-to-human forgiveness, and can forgive in-group or out-group members. Legitimate representatives of groups (such as a country's President) can express societal forgiveness. In 2005, just a few short years after the founding of the field of positive psychology, Everett Worthington, Jr., one of the founding fathers of the study of forgiveness commissioned the *Handbook of Forgiveness*. In the concluding chapter to that handbook, Worthington noted that, considering human-to-human forgiveness, "There seems to be a near consensus" (Worthington, 2005, p. 557). To be clear, Worthington noted that scholars agree most about what such forgiveness is not. That is, it is not excusing, denying, or condoning bad behavior. It is not reconciling with an offender, merely saying "I forgive you," seeking forgiveness, nor seeking justice because all of those are social experiences within the context of forgiving interactions, but are not internal experiences of forgiveness per se. This agreement is enduring and as recently at 2015 when the book *Forgiveness and Health* was published there was continued support for the notion of forgiveness as a multidimensional construct (Toussaint et al., 2015). With this background in mind, it might be useful to consider a common definition that has been used for human-to-human forgiveness and has also been adapted to self-forgiveness. That is, forgiveness is thought of as a decrease in negative and increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and motivations toward an offender, oneself or another (McCullough et al., 1997). Although this might be one of the most common definitions that scholars rely on when trying to define forgiveness, as noted above, the variety of types of forgiveness are currently gaining interest.

## 1.2 Flourishing

Flourishing is a broad concept. Sometimes it invokes an emphasis on positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011). Other scholars include similar aspects but also emphasize mental and physical health and health-related variables such as social and financial well-being (Stiefel et al., 2019). The present examination will focus on health and happiness aspects of flourishing. This includes mental and physical well-being as well as subjective well-being or happiness. Although other aspects of flourishing are also important, the literature on forgiveness is uneven, and more attention has been paid to health and happiness than to meaning, purpose, achievement, relationship quality, and other elements of flourishing. One other issue that might be worth considering is that while some models of flourishing include character strengths and virtues in the broadest sense, we examine the specific virtue of forgiveness excised from the broader flourishing concept and consider it as a correlate/predictor of other flourishing outcomes. Most studies don't allow for disentangling the nature of the forgiveness-flourishing relationship. Our model for this chapter conceptualizes forgiveness as a possible contributor to flourishing not merely a co-occurring component of the flourishing itself.

## **2 Theory and Evidence of Connections Between Forgiveness and Flourishing**

There are likely numerous ways of thinking about the connection between forgiveness and flourishing. This being the case, we will highlight three helpful models for understanding how forgiveness is related to three core components of flourishing, those being, mental and physical health and happiness.

### ***2.1 An Early Model***

In the early days of forgiveness research, Toussaint and Webb (2005) proposed a model for the connection between forgiveness and mental health. Their model begins with the experience of forgiveness or the tendency to experience forgiveness, often referred to as trait forgivingness, and its direct connections to mental health. There is often a sense of immediate relief or feeling of lightness, clarity, or fullness when one forgives an offense (Rowe & Halling, 2004). That may well have direct positive benefits for mental health. Yet, it is likely that forgiveness acts through multiple mechanisms to offer more and more lasting mental health benefits. Toussaint and Webb (2005) offer some specific psychosocial mechanisms for consideration. These include the propositions that forgiveness is related to improved social support, interpersonal functioning, and health behavior. Likewise, forgiveness is thought to reduce perceived lack of control and rumination. In turn, greater support, improved interpersonal functioning, and more positive health behavior and less perceived lack of control and lowered rumination are modeled as being correlates/predictors of improved mental health. These proposed indirect effects of forgiveness on mental health rest on years of research identifying these mechanisms as key correlates/predictors of mental health. Early research suggested that forgiveness was related to these mediating variables. (Over 15 years of subsequent work has supported that.) Toussaint and Webb (2005) also provided for the option that many benefits to mental health come directly from the reduction of unforgiveness and its associated blame, shame, anger, and hatred, all of which have negative effects on mental health.

### ***2.2 Stress-and-Coping Model of Forgiveness***

Since the early years of research on forgiveness and mental health, other models have been offered to explain how forgiveness might impact not only mental health but also physical health. In this regard, no model would have greater prominence than the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness (Strelan, 2020; Strelan & Covic, 2006; Worthington, 2006, 2013). The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness is

based in the transactional theory of stress developed by Lazarus and colleagues (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this transactional theory of stress, there are several cognitively mediated processes that occur when someone experiences stress. First, an objective event or subjective perceived event is experienced as a stressor. Second, it is appraised (i.e., primary appraisal) as being harmful, threatening, or challenging. Third, secondary appraisal involves evaluating one's ability to manage or cope with the stressful event. Fourth, resources for coping with the stressful experience are evaluated. Fifth, an approach to coping is actively engaged, and coping recursively affects earlier processes. Sixth, adaptational outcomes such as improved (or less harmed) mental or physical health are experienced. The entire stress process is considered a transaction between the person and environment and has repercussions for biological, psychological, and sociological outcomes.

The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness applies the transactional theory of stress to situations involving interpersonal offenses and victim's reactions to them in the following way. Let's consider a common situation. Anuradha and Anh are co-workers. Anh believes that Anuradha slighted his contributions to a big work project in a very important and high-level meeting. Anh, in short, is aggrieved. Where does this come from? It is Anh's subjective impression or appraisal of the situation that leads to his grievance. Anuradha might have intended to hurt him, but even if she didn't, Anh believes it to be so. He thus experiences an injustice gap. This is the difference between what Anh wanted to happen and what actually did happen. This injustice gap, if not resolved by the passage of time or by Anh's actions of seeing justice done, turning the matter over to God, tolerating, forbearing, or accepting the offense, or forgiving, will likely create unforgiveness over the event. Unforgiveness is a negative emotional experience motivating vengeance or avoidance of Anuradha. Unforgiveness is experienced as stressful. This represents the primary appraisal of stress in the transactional theory of stress.

Once stress is experienced, the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness suggests that Anh will evaluate his options for coping with the offense that he has suffered. This may include several different options. He might choose to seek outright retribution and wait for the perfect opportunity to overlook Anuradha's contributions on the next big project. Anh might choose to simply deny the intention of Anuradha to being hurtful and attribute this to an accidental oversight on Anuradha's part. Anh might also find a way to condone this poor behavior, excuse it, or explain it away somehow. Anh might seek to put the event behind him by tolerating it (although tolerance can have negative emotional loading), forbearing (which is choosing not to respond negatively for the good of the group, thus finding some benefit in not responding negatively), or accepting the event and moving on (in which accepting decouples the event from one's emotions). Anh might also seek a resolution through a problem-solving conversation. Or, Anh may choose to forgive—either in combination with other means of coping or as the primary means of coping.

Although only one choice among many, the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness suggests that coping through forgiveness is one of the more effective ways of reducing stress and adapting positively to being hurt. After all, especially in the

workplace, it is often the case that outright retribution cannot be had without forfeiting one's job and condoning or excusing might lead to long-term relational difficulties. Even if a productive problem-solving conversation takes place, it is unlikely that such a conversation will take the sting and stress out of the experience of being hurt. This is where choosing forgiveness as a means of coping can be productive and healthy. And indeed, much research has documented the benefits to mental and physical health of forgiving (Toussaint et al., 2015). As one example, in a recent review of the literature on forgiveness and mental health, Webb and Toussaint (2020) identified many consistent associations of forgiveness with depression, anxiety, stress, substance use, and suicidality. Similarly, in an outcome-wide, prospective analysis of multiple forms of mental health in samples of 5000–7000 individuals, Chen et al. (2019) found that reduced depression and anxiety were associated with forgiveness of others. Finally, forgiveness of others has been linked to physiological, endocrine, immunological, and self-rated health outcomes (Seawell et al., 2013; Seybold et al., 2001; Witvliet et al., 2001).

### ***2.3 Stress-and-Coping Model of Self-forgiveness***

The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness is without a doubt the most prominent model that has been used to conceptualize the connection between forgiveness and health. Not only has the transactional model of stress developed by Lazarus and colleagues been used to understand connections between forgiving others and health, but it has also been extended to forgiving oneself when experiencing self-condemnation (Toussaint et al., 2017). To understand how self-forgiveness might be understood through a stress-and-coping framework, let's return to our example above of Anuradha and Anh in the workplace. However, this time, let's focus on Anuradha's thoughts and behaviors. First, consider that Anuradha decided Anh needed to be taken down a notch and put in his place. She believes he needs to understand seniority in the company, and she has been working there much longer than him. She decides this is necessary. She intentionally hurt Anh. After the actual event, Anuradha feels terrible about what she has done. She is ashamed of herself, feels guilty about acting hurtfully, and begins to loath herself because of what she has done. Collectively, these experiences combine into a sense of self-condemnation. Self-condemnation is the starting point for the stress-and-coping model of self-forgiveness. That is, self-condemnation is stressful, activating similar physiological processes as unforgiveness toward others. Thus, it negatively impacts health.

According to the stress-and-coping model of self-forgiveness, the experience of self-condemnation may elicit several psychosocial experiences that may hurt one's mental and physical health. That is, feelings of self-condemnation likely engender experiences of hopelessness, pessimism, and loneliness along with desires to self-medicate through substances (Webb, 2021; Webb et al., 2017). Just as in forgiving others, forgiving oneself begins with the choice to use self-forgiveness as a coping



strategy despite the availability of many other options, few of which may be as productive for one's personal experience (e.g., letting oneself off the hook) and might be perceived negatively by people affected by the transgression or by observers (e.g., a self-serving response) and thus have negative social consequences.

Again as in forgiving others, the process of self-forgiving can be a key to feeling better. Self-forgiveness involves many different steps and processes (Worthington, 2013), among them, acknowledging one's wrongdoing, making amends if possible, invoking prayer for those spiritually or religiously inclined, and other means of repentance for more secular-minded folks. Ultimately, self-forgiveness requires a transformation of values and restoration of self-esteem (Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2012). When self-forgiveness is increased in an individual considerable health benefits can be realized. For instance, Chen et al.'s (2019) outcome-wide, prospective study also showed that self-forgiveness was related to less depression and anxiety. Davis et al. (2015) meta-analyzed 18 studies including about 5700 participants and found a moderate-sized association between self-forgiveness and physical health of 0.32. The same meta-analysis examined 65 studies of nearly 18,000 people and found a slightly stronger association of self-forgiveness with mental health of 0.45.

#### ***2.4 Scaffolding Self and Social Systems Model of Forgiveness and Subjective Well-Being***

To this point, we have discussed models of forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness that have as their endpoints mental and physical health outcomes. While those are central to flourishing, it is common to include subjective well-being or happiness in the mix of constructs that comprise flourishing. In fact, some models of flourishing propose that it is primarily a combination of subjective well-being and mental and physical health (Stiefel et al., 2020). For these reasons, it is important to consider separately a model of the connections between forgiveness and subjective well-being.

The scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being explicates the association between forgiveness and well-being and explains important mediating mechanisms of this association (Hill et al., 2015). The model begins with the premise that while several models of forgiveness and its connections to mental and physical health purport to explain why forgiveness promotes well-being, most actually offer reasons why forgiveness reduces *ill*-being and disease as opposed to discussing why forgiveness promotes *well*-being. To explain why forgiveness would be related to greater happiness, the authors look to those traditional drivers of happiness and fulfillment for humankind. First, it is argued that forgiveness of others promotes happiness because it promotes relationship harmony. Knowing the importance of strong relationships for long-term happiness, the model suggests that tools that ensure harmony help to support the happiness resulting from said relationships.

This is particularly true for close relationships where couples may have to endure difficulties and conflicts and work to resolve discrepancies that may threaten the stability or longevity of the relationship. Research supports this assertion. Couples who are more forgiving toward each other enjoy better conflict resolution and stronger marital stability and quality (Fincham et al., 2007; He et al., 2018). Second, this model suggests that forgiveness of others helps promote relationship maintenance and mastery. That is, forgiving others helps not only reduce potential downsides of relationships, but it also helps a person develop and maintain closer relationships and perceive these relationships as being more stable and within their control. The model suggests that forgiveness is at its core a social construct and it may for that reason pose evolutionary advantages. In short, one might say people who are more forgiving are easier to get and stay close to, and relations with more forgiving people are less chaotic, variable, and unpredictable. Supporting the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being is the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004) which suggests that positive experiences, like the relief that comes from forgiving others or oneself, broaden one's capacity for positive experiences and build positive resources—both of which are extremely important for well-being. Additionally, the undoing of harm is the third and highly relevant leg of the broaden-and-build model. Third, the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being suggests that forgiving others supports identity development by allowing others to share impressions of one's identity more freely, and this information may be available from a broader and richer network of social contacts for a more forgiving person. Self-forgiveness may promote adaptive identity development also, especially for adolescents and young adults. This is possible because self-forgiveness frees the individual from rumination about past wrongdoings and allows more mental energy for exploring and reflecting on one's identity. Finally, self-forgiveness is thought to enhance perceptions of self-acceptance and self-worth, both of which are associated with improved well-being.

While the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness offers a unique approach to understanding how forgiveness is connected to a central component of flourishing, research aimed at comprehensively testing this model is limited. The model implies that relationships, identity development, and self-acceptance and self-worth are important for well-being, and considerable work supports these contentions (Baumeister et al., 2003; Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Moza et al., 2019). The other legs of the model are less well-established. Yet there is promising research in some areas. For instance, Bono et al. (2008) showed in a longitudinal investigation that prospective increases in forgiveness were associated with prospective increases in well-being and vice-versa. Toussaint and Friedman (2009) showed that forgiveness of others, self, and situations was associated with several happiness measures. Further, positive and negative affect explained a portion of the forgiveness–happiness relationship. Research cited above (Fincham et al., 2007; He et al., 2018) points to the association between forgiveness and relationship harmony and maintenance. Some research suggests that forgiveness is related to development of moral reasoning, which is one aspect of identity development

(Enright, 1991). Finally, limited work also suggests that forgiveness of a specific offense is positively related to self-esteem (Eaton et al., 2006).

### **3 What Limits Our Understanding of Forgiveness and Flourishing?**

After having reviewed three different models of the connection between forgiveness and flourishing and having highlighted some empirical work supporting these models, we consider some limits of our knowledge. While it seems clear that forgiveness is related to three key components of flourishing—mental health, physical health, and happiness—there are gaps in our understanding. We'll consider some limiting circumstances below.

First, almost all of what we know about forgiveness and flourishing is based on analyses of individual components of flourishing. Most studies examine only one or two outcomes at a time. Comprehensive assessment and analysis of how flourishing is connected to forgiveness are lacking. A notable exception, however, is the work of VanderWeele and his colleagues who have recently conducted outcome-wide analyses that incorporate many outcomes relevant to flourishing in a single analysis (Chen et al., 2018; Long et al., 2020). Even in these broad outcome-wide analyses, the outcomes are skewed toward mental and physical health and happiness and fewer assessments include other key aspects of flourishing such as meaning and purpose, character and virtue, social relationships, and financial and material stability. In part, this may be because many of these variables are often considered nuisance variables that are to be controlled while examining more interesting outcomes such as health and happiness. But, the flourishing model calls us to consider not just health and happiness but also many other dimensions of flourishing in our studies. These additional dimensions of flourishing need to be front-and-center in our specific aims for these studies, not relegated to socio-demographic control variables.

Second, aspects of research design and methodology limit our understanding of how forgiveness is related to flourishing. For example, many studies are correlational. That, in itself, is not a bad thing. However, it limits our ability to infer causality. Whereas experimentation is an easy way to determine causality where the experimenter has control over manipulated and measured variables, experimentation also introduces concerns about generalizability and ecological validity. Few researchers truly believe that manipulating a participant's thoughts or feelings about forgiveness in the laboratory will make the person's daily life happier, healthier, more purpose-filled, more meaningful, more financially and materially stable. So, the answer to understanding how forgiveness might affect flourishing probably has to come from applied, longitudinal designs that span years. Even then, current design and statistical methods do not permit parsing how the many aspects of flourishing might change other aspects of flourishing. Sampling limits our understanding as

well. Many samples are from western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies. We need to understand how forgiveness interacts with flourishing and its individual aspects in samples where the environment and conditions may be more adverse and less supportive of flourishing than in WEIRD samples due to lack of access to healthcare, unfulfilling careers, or lack of or very low income and material wealth. Sometimes measurement tools used for both forgiveness and flourishing can pose problems in the research. Thankfully, numerous measures of forgiveness that are psychometrically sound have existed for some time (Worthington et al., 2014) and useful additions continue to be developed (Griffin et al., 2018). However, measures of flourishing are much less well developed outside of a couple of good options (Stiefel et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2017).

## 4 Conclusions and Future Directions

Flourishing is comprised of several components including mental and physical health, happiness, meaning and purpose, social engagement, character and virtue, and financial and material stability (Stiefel et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2017). A good body of both theoretical and empirical work supports the notion that forgiveness is an important trait that is related to three core components of flourishing we have considered most crucial, mental health, physical health, and happiness. The evidence ensuring that forgiveness is a *contributor* to and not merely a *concomitant* of flourishing is more circumstantial than convincing. For these reasons, it is important to consider some avenues of continued pursuit.

Perhaps first and foremost on the to-do list is the examination of forgiveness and flourishing per se. Many current studies lack a comprehensive assessment of flourishing making it difficult to see fully how forgiveness and flourishing might be connected directly and through mediators and moderators. This will require researchers to specifically address this issue. It will require openness to new and alternative conceptualizations of outcomes appropriately considered under the umbrella of flourishing. Yes, mental and physical health and happiness are key to flourishing, but they are not everything.

Second, the study of forgiveness and flourishing across different cultures and religions is necessary. For instance, does the relationship between forgiveness and flourishing differ depending on whether one is a member of a low-, middle-, or high-income country? Likewise, might the salience of forgiveness and its importance for flourishing differ by religion? What about the growing number of spiritual but not religious individuals? How might they compare to religious adherents in the connection between forgiveness and flourishing?

Third, becoming better at forgiving is something that can be learned (Worthington, 2020). Can the same be said for flourishing? Can someone be taught to flourish? If so, in teaching folks to forgive, do they also learn to flourish? These questions will require carefully designed interventions and equally well-designed trials to establish their efficacy.

Fourth, what dose of forgiveness actually leads to substantial flourishing. If one forgives a single, minor transgression, that clearly would not affect one's mental health, physical health, and happiness greatly. But if one became a transformed forgiver and practiced the virtue frequently, we might expect that to affect flourishing. But how much dose of forgiveness is actually needed to make a difference?

A fifth and final question might be, can learning to flourish be of use to individuals who have in the past or are currently living in exceptionally adverse circumstances? Often adversity involves perpetrators (e.g., oneself, neighbors, friends, leaders, governments) and learning to forgive has been related to better post-traumatic stress symptoms in these circumstances (Cerci & Colucci, 2018), but could it also support flourishing?

There is promising evidence to support a connection between forgiveness and flourishing. But it is much too soon to call this a definitive relationship, let alone a causal one. Yes, we do know that forgiveness is related to better health and well-being, and in some cases the designs are sufficient to suggest that forgiveness is a likely contributor to health and well-being. In other places, our designs and measurement strategies have not fully matured and leave us to speculate about the connections. Professionals should know that there is promising evidence in this area, but also be cautioned that there is much more work to be done. With the advent of more sophisticated measures of flourishing, the continued development and improvement of forgiveness measurement and designs, and an ongoing interest in bringing to light ways in which people can live better and more fulfilling lives, the necessary insights on the connections between forgiveness and flourishing are sure to come in future studies as our science continues to mature.

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# Human Flourishing Until the End: The Core Values of Palliative Care



Andrea Rodríguez-Prat and Cristina Monforte-Royo

**Abstract** Human flourishing has been defined as a subjective and holistic sentiment related to growth, prosperity, fulfillment, and sense of life completeness. This definition may lead to think that human flourishing is unique to people living under privileged circumstances of health and well-being, whereas people with life limiting illnesses are deprived from this possibility.

In this paper, we reflect on the idea of human flourishing in the context of palliative care. Although people with advanced illnesses experience in a special manner the limits of human life and vulnerability, and the final stages may inevitably imply considerable suffering, we argue that it is also possible to experience this final stage as an opportunity for personal growth, to live it in full accordance with one's beliefs and values, and to reestablish a profound connection to oneself and to others. In sum, the end of life may also be a time of human flourishing.

**Keywords** Dignity · End of life · Human flourishing · Palliative care · Values

*Human flourishing* has been defined as a subjective and holistic sentiment related to growth, prosperity, fulfillment, and sense of life completeness (Lee & Mayor, 2022). This definition may lead to think that human flourishing is unique to people living under privileged circumstances of health and well-being, whereas people with life limiting illnesses are deprived from this possibility.

In this chapter, we reflect on the idea of human flourishing in the context of palliative care. Although people with advanced illnesses experience in a special manner the limits of human life and vulnerability, and the final stages may inevitably

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imply considerable suffering, we argue that it is also possible to experience this final stage as an opportunity for personal growth, to live it in full accordance with one's beliefs and values, and to reestablish a profound connection to oneself and to others. In sum, the end of life may also be a time of human flourishing.

## 1 Introduction to Palliative Care

The World Health Organization describes palliative care as an approach aimed at improving the quality of life of patients and their families who are faced with a life-threatening illness (WHO, 2000). By identifying early and then addressing patients' needs, whether physical, psychosocial, or spiritual, palliative care can prevent and relieve suffering.

Each year, an estimated 40 million people worldwide are in need of palliative care, although only 14% actually receive it (WHO, 2000). In fact, meeting the care needs of patients with advanced disease has become one of the most important challenges facing health systems today.

Palliative care emerged during the 1960s, primarily through the efforts of Dame Cicely Saunders (1965), at a time when increasing emphasis was being placed on the role of anti-tumor therapies and medical technology. Its guiding philosophy offered a counterpoint to the then widespread view that nothing more could be done for a person with a terminal illness who was facing the end of life. In stark contrast to those who saw only the futility of curative treatment, the proponents of palliative care argued that much could still be done to address the patient's symptoms, whether physical or psychological.

People who are diagnosed with a life-threatening illness will experience important changes in different spheres of life, and their suffering may be not only physical but also emotional, social or spiritual/existential. As their physical health deteriorates and they become increasingly dependent and aware of the proximity of death, their quality of life, as well as that of their family, will be greatly affected. In such a context, it can be difficult to hold on to the notion of *human flourishing*.

### 1.1 Challenges of Today's World

An awareness of death and of the finite nature of life is rarely a feature of public discourse in contemporary Western societies. Indeed, in recent decades, several scholars have drawn attention to what has been called the "taboo of death" (Ariès, 2005; Han, 2021; Kellehear, 2007), while others have highlighted how overconfidence in the power of new curative treatments can lead us to see life as always within our control (Conrad, 2008).

The primacy of instrumental reason (Taylor, 1994) has also contributed to an image of human beings defined essentially in terms of their productive capacity and

utility. This view has become widespread within Western societies, and many studies have shown how, among patients with cancer, the feeling of being a burden to others is one of the main reasons underpinning the desire to die (Chochinov et al., 2007; Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2019). A further consequence of the instrumental paradigm is that, in the context of aging or advanced illness, people often perceive a loss of identity and dignity (Franklin et al., 2006; Street & Kissane, 2001).

## 2 The Core Values of Palliative Care

You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die. Cicely Saunders

As the above quote from Cicely Saunders makes clear, what lies at the heart of palliative care is a basic recognition of personal dignity and of the need for a holistic approach capable of protecting that “you.” In his classic article entitled *The nature of suffering and the goals of medicine*, Cassel (1982) introduced a key definition for understanding holistic medicine: suffering is experienced by persons, and relieving suffering means helping a person to be whole again.

In what follows, and drawing on the scientific literature, we will discuss a number of key values underpinning the philosophy of palliative care that can help us understand how the end of life may also be a time to embrace dimensions of human existence that might seem incompatible with life-threatening illness. As already mentioned, the final stages of life can be the opportunity of a full experience of human flourishing.

### 2.1 *Respect for Personal Dignity*

In recent decades, the concept of dignity has come to be seen as an important value in clinical practice. Indeed, numerous publications have discussed the meaning of dignity in health care, a common view being that it is an intrinsic and irrevocable feature of human life, something that people see as part of their identity and which is influenced by a range of factors (physical, psychological, spiritual, and social) that are mediated by life experiences, including illness (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2016).

In a quantitative study conducted by our research group, we found that a perceived loss of control and functional impairment were risk factors for both a perceived loss of dignity and symptoms of depression, with the latter two factors being the main antecedents of the wish to hasten death in patients with advanced cancer (Monforte-Royo et al., 2018). These findings led us to conclude that identifying and alleviating a patient’s functional impairment and loss of control are important for preventing depressive states, a perceived loss of dignity, and a wish to hasten death. In another study involving a total of 213 patients in palliative care

(Chochinov et al., 2002a), the results of a multiple regression analysis showed that the factor most strongly associated with a perceived loss of dignity was a deterioration in personal appearance, followed by a sense of being a burden to others, needing help with bathing, requiring inpatient care, and being in pain.

When seeking to define the concept of dignity, it is also important to consider the relational dimension, insofar as how a person is seen by others (health professionals, relatives, etc.) may serve to protect or threaten that person's sense of personal dignity. Accordingly, ensure that patients' care needs are adequately met while preserving intimacy and privacy is important for maintaining their perceived dignity.

In a systematic review and meta-ethnography, our group analyzed the relationship between perceptions of dignity and control in patients with advanced illness (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2016). The explanatory model that emerged from this analysis suggested that the experience of all participants was shaped by their illness experience (primarily, their functional status), the social context, and the impact of illness on their personal identity. For example, we found that the loss of physical functionality, linked to perceived dependency, was the primary mediator of a diminished sense of dignity. However, the dependency that results from illness cannot be understood in isolation from the new relationship that patients must establish with their immediate surroundings, or from the construction of a new identity characterized by the need for help. Within this model, two contrary positions were observed. Those patients who emphasized awareness of an intrinsic sense of dignity maintained a positive view of themselves, despite the distress caused by their illness. By contrast, patients whose sense of dignity was based on values such as autonomy or the ability to control their circumstances found that their dignity was undermined.

Taken together, the findings reviewed above highlight the need for health professionals to be alert to the factors that may threaten a person's perceived dignity. As illustrated by the following two quotations, taken from studies that conducted interviews in the context of palliative care, dignified care is that which helps patients to maintain a sense of their own value as persons at a time when they might easily succumb to the stigma of illness:

Our dignity has been maintained because of the care we have been receiving in the hospital. The staff has been marvelous. They have been helping us as much as they can. I think part of dignity is trying to make him feel that he is still of value (Chochinov, 2002, p. 2253).

That they can still see me as the person I once was. Not Mrs. So-and-So, not the patient, no, "me" (Choo et al., 2020, p. 7).

What needs to be fostered among professionals, therefore, are not only technical skills but also their human qualities, an attitude of openness, empathy, and compassion, and the capacity to recognize what Arantzamendi and Centeno (2017) refer to as the *intangible values* of the end of life. In this context, Choo et al.'s (2020) dynamic reciprocity model of dignity, which regards patients' sense of dignity as being inextricably connected to both family caregiving and the qualities of professionals, suggests that compassionate personalized care should be informed by what they call *mindful humanity*.

From the perspective of dignified care, human flourishing may occur once the sick are freed from the reductionist gaze that treats them as an object (the patient) or as a medical problem to be solved. When the focus of therapeutic intervention is the person, the *you* that is more than the sum of its parts, then it is possible to relieve suffering and to gain greater insight into what lies within<sup>1</sup>, as is illustrated by the following extract from an interview with a professional in the palliative care context:

I once had a patient who told me she was had [*sic*] excoriating pain and she could not sleep. The first thing that I thought of was giving her a higher dose of morphine . . . But then she said, can you stay with me for a while? So I stayed by her bedside, and gradually, she was able to fell [*sic*] asleep. I realized then, all she ever wanted was some company. This understanding was so valuable . . . this experience worth [*sic*] more money than anyone could ever give me (Ho et al., 2016, p. 443).

## 2.2 *The Recognition of Relational Autonomy*

People with an advanced illness, such as cancer, experience a heavy symptom burden whose impact may be felt in numerous ways: loss of physical control or of independence in performing daily activities, the need for help both within and outside the family, etc. In a recent study about perceived control in patients with advanced cancer, we identified several areas or issues over which they wished to have some control (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2022). More specifically, we found that subjective well-being was better among those patients who felt they had some control over the information they received about their diagnosis, prognosis, and the impact of different treatments, over their diet, and over their physical exercise.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to ways of empowering patients, with studies highlighting the benefits of their being active agents in their own care and in aspects related to their beliefs and values (Link et al., 2004; Walshe et al., 2017). On an existential level, autonomy, or the capacity to decide for oneself, has likewise come to be seen as a basic ethical value in the clinical context (Monforte-Royo et al., 2018). The most extreme example of this view can be found among advocates of euthanasia, assisted suicide or medical assistance in dying, the idea being that people should have the right to decide when and how they die (Downie et al., 2021).

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<sup>1</sup>It is worth noting here the definition of *care* proposed by the Italian philosopher, Maria Teresa Russo, who describes, in profound and simple terms, how care and love are closely related to dignity: “If we consider the Latin etymology of the word ‘cure’, we realize that it has to do with *cor*, which means heart, and according to the definition of the ancient Roman scholar, Marcus Terentius Varro, with ‘what warms the heart’ (*cura, quod cor urat*). Hence, to cure, to heal—or to care—is a form of love [. . .]. Healing (cure, care) [. . .] is an integral part of any relationship between people, within whom, on different levels, there are always needs and wounds. This consideration can help us understand how caring [. . .] requires a series of personal aptitudes, the result not only of acquired skills but attributable also to an act of virtue that recognizes the other as a bearer of dignity” (2015, p. 388).

Alongside this defense of autonomy as a supreme value, various authors have proposed a relational concept of autonomy (Gómez-Vírveda et al., 2019; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). The premise of relational autonomy is that human beings do not exist in isolation from their social networks, and thus it is impossible for an individual to make decisions that do not in some way impact not only the immediate family environment but also society as a whole. In our aforementioned study about control in patients with advanced cancer (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2022) we found that one of the things that helped patients to cope better with their illness was to include family members in their care. Insofar as this caring relationship was accepted by both parties, the receiving of help was experienced not as something negative but as an extension of the patient's own wishes, in this case through others. Thus, although it may appear paradoxical, human beings may be freer when they acknowledge their dependence and accept the help of others:

I believe that my life is still in my hands. The thing is . . . I depend more on the people around me to achieve my goals [ . . . ]. But hey, it's always up to me if I want to accept people's control over me [ . . . ]. Obviously I need people to help me, [ . . . ] but I'm the one who decides to do one thing or another, and they cannot make me do what others want (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2022)

Given this, it is surely alarming that one of the main reasons given by patients with advanced cancer who express a desire to die is precisely that they feel a burden to others (Gudat et al., 2019; McPherson et al., 2007). However, as Rehman-Sutter (2015), among others, has pointed out, feeling that one is a burden to others does not necessarily mean that this is the case. In fact, the participants in our recent study said that although they did not wish to make their loved ones suffer, as they perceived this as being unbearable both for them and their family, their experience had taught them that it was possible to overcome extreme situations that they would never have imagined were surmountable (Rodríguez-Prat et al., 2022). This suggests that promoting a culture informed by the notion of relational autonomy is crucial for generating new narratives in which illness is dissociated from ideas of burden and guilt.

In the context of palliative care, the possibility of human flourishing requires increased awareness of our intrinsic vulnerability and dependence as human beings. Although the tendency nowadays is to see ourselves as isolated individuals (social atomism), capable of living without reliance on significant others (Taylor, 1994), it becomes clear at the end of life that this is not in fact the case. Authors such as Agich (1993) or, more recently, Mackenzie (2008) and Gómez-Vírveda et al. (2019) have highlighted the need to include a relational perspective that both normalizes and gives rights to those individuals who, for whatever reason, are regarded as dependent and vulnerable.

Although the end of life has often been described as a series of losses (Pearlman et al., 2005; Toombs, 2004), it is necessary to ensure that patients have the means to exercise some control over what is still and should be in their hands. For example, by helping them to live in the present, to plan for the short term, to adapt to each moment of their illness, to accept what can't be changed, to express themselves

within the family or to recognize that suffering and love go hand in hand, we may enable patients to retain a sense of control over their lives. A broader acceptance of the idea of natural death might also help to foster a more realistic view of control. Life can now be prolonged artificially through medical technology, but the idea that we might end our lives sedated and unable to say farewell to loved ones has come to be seen as an undignified death—and for some it is a reason why euthanasia or assisted suicide should be legalized (Battin, 1995). It is important, therefore, to reflect on the impact that medical treatments have on patients and their families. Unless strictly necessary, medical intervention is not always for the best, especially if its consequences are to the detriment of the person's values, beliefs, or quality of life.

A final point to consider here is that ideas about care of the dying changed radically around the 1930s, when the site of death shifted from home to hospital (Ariès, 2005; Baudrillard, 1980). As a result, the responsibility for accompanying the dying was passed to doctors, as opposed to the family or the priest, as had generally been the case previously (Ariès, 2005; Walter, 1994). Within the medical context, death and dying were redefined, insofar as the emphasis now was on health, privacy, dignity, independence, and discretion (Walter, 1994). In the process, families lost touch with the caring rituals that for centuries had been employed to accompany the dying. Once the hospital became the place where life would end, it was no longer clear to relatives or close friends how they should behave in the presence of their dying loved one, and this is often still the case today in Western societies. In this respect, a renewed engagement with the *ars moriendi* (the art of dying) and the ethics of care would help us, perhaps, to live more in accordance with who we are: social beings whose very nature is the need for others. As Agich (1993) points out, in the classical view of therapy it is ultimately the community that heals because the function of the therapist is to reintegrate the patient into the symbol system of the community. Fostering community awareness, that includes the perspective of families, may also, therefore, serve a healing function.

### 2.3 *Meaning in Life*

Faced with the awareness of imminent death, many people begin to reflect on the meaning of life and on what their legacy will be. When we speak of our legacy, we are generally thinking of how we will be remembered after we die, of the trace we will leave behind in others, whether family, friends, or wider society (Breitbart, 2016). Meaning in life is a similarly complex concept that has both a cognitive component (ideas, beliefs) and a volitional one (the fulfillment of useful activities), and people vary in terms of which of these has greater weight for them as individuals (Guerrero-Torrelles et al., 2016). Based on his own experience and that of others in Nazi concentration camps, the psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1991) came to believe that meaning rests on the attitude that a person chooses towards suffering.

Psychological distress in the form of depression or demoralization syndrome is common among patients with advanced cancer, with reported prevalence rates, respectively, of 5–30% (Lie et al., 2015) and 13–33% (Ramos Pollo et al., 2018). This highlights the importance of adequate assessment so as to ensure that patients' psychological needs are addressed. Palliative care, as a holistic approach, pays close attention to existential and spiritual issues, and a variety of interventions have been developed that take into account these more intangible aspects of human life (Cohen-Almagor, 2011; Johansen et al., 2005). These include meaning-centered therapies (including logotherapy) (Güell et al., 2015; McCormack, 1998; Saunders, 1992), measures aimed at improving perceived dignity (Chochinov, et al., 2002b; Güell et al., 2015; Monforte-Royo et al., 2018), motivational interviewing, compassion therapy, mindfulness, and resilience enhancement (Branigan, 2015). Interventions such as these can make a useful contribution to the management of physical and psychological symptoms, which are better tolerated when there is a sense of meaning. It has also been suggested that a sense of meaning or purpose in life is what enables people to retain a more hopeful outlook, even when there is no possibility of cure (Chochinov, et al., 2002a).<sup>2</sup>

In 2016, our research group carried out a systematic review and realist synthesis of the literature on meaning-in-life interventions in patients with advanced disease (Guerrero-Torrelles et al., 2016). The review identified common elements in the proposed mechanism of action of these interventions and found that a core component was the interpersonal encounter between patient and therapist. In the context of a therapeutic conversation, patients may begin to reflect on their life, connecting past, present, and future, and redefining their identity and relationship to others on the basis of new-found meaning. This can take time, and therapists must work to create a space in which patients feel safe and confident enough to talk about important aspects of their life.<sup>3</sup> Gradually, however, through a therapeutic dialogue characterized by an attitude of reflection, exploration, acknowledgment, awareness, and acceptance, patients may come to find meaning in the end of life. Our review also considered the strategies used by different interventions with the aim of enhancing patients' sense of meaning in life: these included exploring concepts and sources of meaning, encouraging a sense of gratitude for a life lived, preparing and organizing farewell gatherings with significant others, leaving an intergenerational legacy, leaving a spiritual will, and resolving past conflicts (Guerrero-Torrelles et al., 2016).

Above and beyond any specific psychotherapeutic interventions that may be offered, the focus on intangible values that lies at the heart of palliative care means that the patient-professional encounter and the use of strategies that facilitate meaningful conversations in which to reflect on the legacy of a life are an integral

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<sup>2</sup>We are grateful to Remei Agulles for these observations on psychotherapeutic interventions at the end of life.

<sup>3</sup>In this respect, it is interesting to note how the duration of an initial consultation in the palliative care setting differs from that of a primary care consultation (Irving et al., 2017).



part of everyday clinical practice. And while the emphasis within the current medical paradigm is on latest generation therapies and the promise of bioengineering, the palliative care literature continues to highlight the importance of compassion, attentive listening, active presence, and meaning-in-life interventions (Brown-Johnson et al., 2019; Saracino et al., 2019). Contrary to the view that a point is reached when nothing more can be done for a person with a terminal illness, it is, in fact, possible to provide accompaniment and care until the very end of life.

## 2.4 *Towards a New Vision of the End of Life: The Esthetics of Care*

In the print and other media, the end of life is often portrayed in purely negative terms. A qualitative analysis of newspaper articles referring to palliative care in our country, Spain, found that they mainly concerned socio-political issues such as proposed end-of-life legislation or controversial legal cases (Carrasco et al., 2019). The authors also noted that there was rarely any description of what palliative care involved or of how it might benefit patients and families. Indeed, in both Spain and other European countries, the media focus tends to be on extreme cases of patients with incurable diseases, commonly portrayed as examples of a life without dignity in which death would be preferable to suffering (Rodríguez-Prat & van Leeuwen, 2017). Accordingly, the photographs, videos, or articles that are published often serve to encourage the view that death is a taboo and that suffering is inevitable. This equating of the end of life with suffering and a loss of meaning may be more acute in countries that have legalized euthanasia or assisted suicide (Van Brussel, 2014). Influenced by a narrative that associates the end of life with a loss of meaning and dignity, and with the sense of being a financial, emotional, and social burden, a person may indeed conclude that ending their life is the only option. But is this the only possible narrative? Might we not consider the dying process as a normal and natural stage of life? Can we, as a society, learn to tell a different story and see the end of life, too, as a time of (inter)personal connection in which meaning can be found?

In research that has explored the experiences of health professionals or volunteers in the sphere of palliative care, one often finds statements such as those below, in which life and its end are referred to as a gift, as a thing of beauty, as an encounter with something real:

But I experienced a lot of great *gifts* from these people, which *was also very helpful* for me in many ways . . . I think everybody has a way *to shine* [. . .] it was a very *moving experience* and he did it [he died] with such ahh (takes time to think) *beauty*, it was amazing (Rodríguez-Prat & Wilson, 2021).

I worked Downtown in the oil and gas industry and found that *there was no sense of reality* working Downtown, so I wanted to, I guess, get more in touch about what reality is, which is here [. . .] I guess you come down to the very bottom of things here and see that there's a lot

of goodness and there's a lot of kindness and people make home for all different cultures (Rodríguez-Prat & Wilson, 2021).<sup>4</sup>

As these quotes illustrate, the end of life may be experienced as a time of transformation, of great emotional intensity, and this raises a number of important questions. How is it possible for the end of life to become an esthetic experience, to be seen as something beautiful or sublime? How does palliative care relieve existential suffering? How is it that palliative care can be a cathartic experience, not just for patients but also for families and health professionals?

Barbara Carper (1978) defined four fundamental patterns of knowing in nursing: empirical, personal, ethical, and esthetic. In palliative care, the esthetic dimension is revealed through engagement with a range of profound—and seemingly paradoxical—emotions (e.g., pain and love, fragility and connectedness, loss and reconciliation) that lead those involved towards an encounter with the reality of human existence and with universal values (Siles-González & Solano-Ruiz, 2016). This kind of knowing has also been referred to as ontological evidence, and it implies that true reality can become visible in all its beauty and goodness (Eriksson & Martinsen, 2012).

Esthetic experience occurs at the intersection between sensitivity and understanding, the instinctual and the conceptual, and it is reflected in the values, feelings, and ethical and cultural principles that inform our approaches to care. If ethics and esthetics are inseparable, as is implied in the Platonic principle of “good is beautiful” (Siles-González & Solano-Ruiz, 2016), then we may experience the beauty in human life by taking care of others. Never more so, perhaps, than at the end of life, where we may encounter the esthetic dimension through caring for a sick relative, offering consolation in a time of suffering, or coming to recognize the intrinsic dignity of another person.

By shaping a new narrative that stresses the importance and possibility of living meaningfully until the very end, we may help to shift societal attitudes towards a more positive view of death. As human beings, experience teaches us that we are often capable of bearing more than we imagined, and that, perhaps to our surprise, we can be happy despite it all. The work of philosophers such as Havi Carel or Kay Toombs, both of whom have reflected deeply on the experience of illness, is illuminating in this respect. In her paper entitled *Can I be ill and happy?*, Carel (2007) argues that illness induces adaptability and creativity, such that a person may become able, for example, to confront loss, transcend suffering, reformulate the self, and show courage in the face of adversity. The psychologist Marie de Hennezel (1996), a pioneer in palliative care in France, has similarly written of how beauty can be found at the end of life if it is lived with awareness and intimacy. Through their writings, all three of these women bear witness to how pain and love, fragility and connectedness, loss and reconciliation may indeed co-exist, because they reflect different expressions of the same reality.

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<sup>4</sup>The italics are ours.

**Table 1** Implications for practice

The core values of palliative care	Implications for practice
Respect for personal dignity	Preserve and promote the intimacy and privacy of the person
	Ensure optimal care
	Help the patient to feel valued
	Recognize the person beyond “the sick self”
The recognition of relational autonomy	Encourage patient decision-making
	Empower the family to care for their relative
	Facilitate patient–family relationship
	Normalize the need for care and avoid the stigma of dependency (be seen as a burden)
Meaning in life	Promote significant encounters between patient-family and patient-professionals
	Explore past significant life events
	Share biographical legacy
	Facilitate forgiveness processes (ask for forgiveness and forgive)
The esthetics of care	Promote acceptance of death as part of life
	Encourage gratitude for what has been lived
	Validate paradoxical feelings: Pain-love, sadness-joy, etc.
	Highlight the positive aspects of the situation

### 3 Summary

The premise of palliative care is that the end of life is an important stage of human experience, one in which a person has the opportunity to write the final chapter of a life lived. Enabling this requires a holistic approach that takes into account the different dimensions of selfhood: physical, psychological, social, and existential. In Table 1 we summarize some implications for practice.

Although respect for personal dignity has come to be considered a basic human right, some have argued that, in the medical context, the concept is often used vaguely or merely as a slogan of little value (Macklin, 2003). In this respect, models of dignity in care, in which what it means in practice is more clearly set out, can help to shed light on how best to safeguard the intrinsic value of each person.

A recognition of relational autonomy is also crucial for empowering—as far as is reasonably possible—those individuals who will, inevitably and progressively, begin to lose their faculties as a result of illness. Educational and support programs in which patients and families are listened to and where they are given the tools they need to achieve all that is still achievable may help to improve patients’ subjective well-being and strengthen bonds within their immediate social environment. Similarly, providing a space for patients in which they can reflect on all that gives meaning to life, share their legacy, express gratitude for a life lived, and forgive others or ask for forgiveness may enable a sense of inner peace to emerge as they approach the end. Facilitating this dialogue, this kind of conversation between

professionals (physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers) and patients and families is an important part of palliative care, and the resulting encounter often has a transformational effect on all those involved.

Finally, it is essential to promote not only research into how to improve the quality of people's lives as they approach the end but also a new paradigm in which death and dying are treated as a normal part of living. It is here that recognition of the esthetic dimension can help us to approach and embrace the limits of our existence, a place where love and suffering, togetherness and separation are inextricably entwined. By so doing, we may take the final step towards human flourishing, the ideal to which we aspire.

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# Fatherhood Involvement as a Source of Human Flourishing



Marc Grau-Grau 

**Abstract** This chapter attempts to connect fatherhood involvement with human flourishing. We begin by presenting to the reader the reasons why fatherhood involvement matters. We then review fatherhood as a transformative event, together with the barriers that may limit the transformational aspect of fatherhood. Next, we review the concept of generativity, and a new definition of paternal generativity is also provided. Then, we present a model that connects fatherhood to human flourishing, partially explained by the role of paternal generativity and relational flourishing. Finally, the chapter ends with implications for researchers, organizations, and governments.

**Keywords** Fathers · Fatherhood involvement · Paternal generativity · Human flourishing

## 1 Why Fathers?

This chapter aims to connect fatherhood involvement with human flourishing. As we will elaborate, being an involved father might generate generative actions, which are necessary for relational flourishing, and consequently, for human flourishing. Before that, it is necessary to present to the reader why it is necessary to focus on fathers, while they might look like a privileged group in an unequal world (Grau-Grau et al., 2021).

We are witnessing a growing interest in fatherhood involvement, not only in the academia (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020), but also in the political arena (Kvande & Brandth, 2019) and in the corporate world (Atkinson, 2021). Several reasons might explain this new attention, which can be summarized in at least three groups: fatherhood is in transition, fatherhood involvement offers a rich constellation of

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positive consequences, and fatherhood involvement is one of the pathways towards a more egalitarian society.

Fatherhood is in transition (Grau-Grau, 2020). Some cultural and social aspects of fatherhood are changing in many societies, explaining, or explained by, new behaviors among contemporary fathers, especially in postindustrial societies. In LaRossa (1988), such a transition implies that the culture and conduct of fatherhood are changing. For example, studies using time have used diaries to reveal substantial changes in fathers' participation at home (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001). At the same time, empirical evidence using data from values surveys has found that traditional gender-role attitudes have "uniformly declined" towards greater egalitarianism (Knight & Brinton, 2017, p. 1485). These changes in attitudes and behaviors situate fathers, fathering, and fatherhood as renovated objects of study.

The mounting evidence of the impact of fatherhood involvement is another important reason for explaining the growing interest in fathers, fathering, and fatherhood (Grau-Grau & Bowles, 2022). New evidence has found that fatherhood involvement has important consequences not only for children (Kotelchuck, 2021a; Yogman & Eppel, 2021; Yogman et al., 1995), but also for mothers and mothers' pregnancy (Alio et al., 2013), fathers themselves (Kotelchuck, 2021b; Lo et al., 2022), their organizations (Grau-Grau, 2017), and society in general (Chan et al., 2017; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002).

Finally, fatherhood involvement is one of the pathways towards a more egalitarian society. The gender revolution is stalled and unfinished (Gerson, 2009; Goldscheider et al., 2015). The first half of the gender revolution, women's participation in the paid labor market, is advancing; however, the second half of the revolution, men's participation in the private realm, is far from being fulfilled. Understanding and encouraging fatherhood engagement seems to be one of the pathways to unfolding this second half of the revolution.

## 2 Fatherhood as a Transformation Event

Fatherhood is powerful per se. Becoming a parent is one of the greatest transformative experiences in adult life. It may generate a significant reconfiguration of priorities (Parker & Wang, 2013), as well as important physical, emotional, and psychological adjustments. Such reconfigurations and adjustments might lead to new rewards, but also to new conflicts and tensions (Cooklin et al., 2016; Harrington et al., 2011). In the case of fathers, some evidence has revealed that the work-family conflict has increased in recent years (Aumann et al., 2011), probably explained by a new dilemma between two contradictory calls: being a full breadwinner and being a nurturing or involved dad.

The role of fatherhood has evolved from a moral teacher to a new nurturant father (Lamb, 2000), although some historians have highlighted another narrative (Daatland, 2007), showing that the ideal father in England during the second half

of the eighteenth century period was “tenderly affectionate, sensitized and moved by babies” (p. 267). Today, it seems that there is a genuine interest among fathers in their role as fathers.

Fatherhood involvement has been conceptualized in different ways. For example, Russel and Radin presented paternal involvement in five categories: presence at birth, general availability, time spent on childcare, time spent in play, and degree of responsibility (Russell & Radin, 1983). Lamb and their colleagues made a similar effort that has been widely used, presenting fatherhood involvement in three dimensions: availability, engagement, and responsibility (Lamb et al., 1985, 1987). High levels of the three dimensions are necessary to consider a father an involved father.

However, the realization of fatherhood involvement does not happen in a vacuum, but in a given context. Such contexts may offer opportunities for vivid fatherhood involvement through protective and enhancing factors such as social policies, flexible work arrangements, or a new caring and egalitarian culture. At the same time, such a context may limit fatherhood engagement through risk factors such as lack of political support, flexibility stigma in organizations, or a non-egalitarian culture (Ewald et al., 2020; Kotelchuck & Lu, 2017; Moran & Koslowski, 2019; Petts et al., 2018).

A recent study explored different barriers that limit fatherhood participation. These barriers were classified in three groups: contextual barriers, organizational barriers, and internalized barriers (Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020). The contextual barriers comprise two sub-barriers: poor political support and the common past. The organizational barriers comprise three main sub-barriers: poor management support, poor peer support, and anticipation of career consequences. Finally, there are two main internalized barriers, internalization of the ideal worker image and internalization of traditional gender norms.

The internalization of the (classic) ideal worker image is quite problematic, because it challenges the new notion of the involved father, generating tensions among fathers. It is true that empirical evidence suggests that fathers in reality, contrary to mothers, who continuously suffer a penalty in their careers (Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007), enjoy a fatherhood premium (Hodges & Budig, 2010; Killewald & Gough, 2013). More research and policies are necessary to reverse this situation. It would be interesting also to study if the fatherhood premium fully applied to involved fathers. At the same time, it is necessary to deeply explore the personal, family, and social implications of a recurrent action after becoming a father: returning to work (Grau-Grau, 2020).

In sum, fatherhood involvement has the capacity by itself to be a transformative event, resulting in a rich constellation of positive consequences as reviewed above, and a propulsor for gender equality, but this transformative event needs to be accompanied, to some degree, by contextual factors, in order to be a source of flourishing.

### 3 Fatherhood as a Form of Generativity

In order to connect fatherhood involvement with human flourishing, it is necessary to present the concept of generativity. The construct generativity was coined by Erikson in 1950. It was one of the seven stages in the theory on personality development. According to Snow, this rich concept “encompasses the constellation of desires, concerns and commitments that motive individuals and societies to pass on legacies to future generations” (Snow, 2015, p. 263). In short, generativity is defined as the concern of establishing and guiding the next generations.

According to Erikson’s theory on personality development (see Table 1), our ego identity is developed throughout our entire life. More specifically, our personality is explained through eight stages, from infancy to adulthood. Each stage is a psychological crisis that could have, or not have, a positive outcome for our human development, such as hope, will, care, or wisdom. The theory suggests that the successful fulfillment of each stage leads to a healthy personality. For example, in Stage 1, infants suffer their first psychological crisis between trusting or mistrusting others. The successful completion of this first stage brings hope.

For this chapter, Stage 7 (generativity) is a key point. In this case, the seventh stage is the turning point in developing generative actions towards others. According to Erikson, in middle adulthood, we suffer a new psychological crisis between self-care and others-care, in other words, a tension between stagnation and generativity. For Erikson, generativity is the hallmark of adult maturity.

**Table 1** Summary of Erikson’s theory on personality development

Stage	Age	Outcome	Existential questions
1. Trust vs. mistrust	Infancy ( <i>birth to 18 months</i> )	Hope	Can I trust the world?
2. Autonomy vs. doubt	Early childhood ( <i>2–3 years</i> )	Will	Is it okay to be me?
3. Initiative vs. guilt	Preschool ( <i>3–5 years</i> )	Purpose	It is okay for me to do, move, and act?
4. Industry vs. inferiority	School age ( <i>6–11 years</i> )	Confidence	Can I make it?
5. Identity vs. confusion	Adolescence ( <i>12–18 years</i> )	Fidelity	Who am I?
6. Intimacy vs. isolation	Young adulthood ( <i>19–40 years</i> )	Love	Can I love?
7. Generativity vs. stagnation	Middle adulthood ( <i>40–65 years</i> )	Care	Can I make my life count?
8. Integrity vs. despair	Maturity ( <i>65 to death</i> )	Wisdom	Is it okay to have been me?

Source: Erikson (1993)

According to Snarey, the task of middle adulthood is to achieve a positive balance of generativity over stagnation or reactivity (Snarey, 1993), understood as a kind of indifference towards others. The strength of the successful completion of this stage is care or an ethic of care.

Generativity involves more than biological acts. For example, Kotre distinguished four types of generative care (Kotre, 1984): *biological generative*, which refers to the bearing and nursing of offspring, with the infant as the generative object; *parental generative*, which refers to childcare activities to promote offspring, with the child as the generative object; *technical generative*, which refers to teaching specific skills to a successor, with the apprentice and skill as generative objects; and *cultural generative*, which involves “creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system—the “mind” of a culture—explicitly passing it on to successors” (p. 12), with the disciple and culture as the generative objects.

In a similar vein, Snarey distinguished and measured three types of generative care (Snarey, 1993): *biological generativity*, involving initial nurturing of the infant; *parental generativity*, involving childrearing activities that promote children’s ability to develop their full potential in the form of autonomy (Stage 2), initiative (Stage 3), industry (Stage 4), and identity (Stage 5); and *societal generativity*, involving “caring for other younger adults, serving as a mentor, providing leadership, and generally contributing to the strength and continuity of subsequent generations” (p. 22). In this sense, Snarey presented the concept of generative fathers as “men who contribute to and renew the ongoing cycle of the generations through the care they provide as birth fathers (biological generativity), childrearing fathers (parental generativity), and cultural fathers (social generativity)” (p. 1).

Snow (2015) perceived the logic sequences of generative care proposed by Snarey as problematic, as in some sense they imply that without procreation it is difficult to develop a generative disposition. For Erikson, generativity includes productivity and creativity, as well as procreativity (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). He assimilates generativity to a parent-like form of care, but this does not necessarily mean a being a parent form of care. In Snow’s article, we found an interesting definition of generativity by McAdams and his colleagues, who presented generativity as the goal of providing for the next generations, including seven features: (a) inner desire, combined with (b) norms experienced as cultural demands to produce (c) concern for the next generation, reinforced by (d) a belief in the goodness of human action, leading to (e) generative commitment, which in turn may produce (f) generative actions (McAdams et al., 1998). Such a definition implies that it is not necessary to become a parent to generate generative actions.

Combining elements of this last definition (McAdams et al., 1998), together with other elements from Kotre (1984) and Erikson (1993), Snow defined generativity as “an other-regarding desire to invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self. It is ideally reinforced by a belief in the goodness or worthwhileness of the human enterprise. It is typically expressed by a concern for and commitment to future generations. It includes, but is not limited to, productivity and creativity” (p. 268).

Snow's definition also implies that generativity could be generated without the need to become a parent. In fact, we can easily find good examples of people with a high generativity disposition who never become parents. At the same time, the evidence suggests that becoming a parent is one of the greatest transformative experiences in adult life, facilitating the capacity to develop generative actions. For fathers, the early postnatal period could be the most sensitive transformation life event for their own psychological development (Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009). This period may lead to paternal generativity.

Snarey defined paternal generativity as "the ways good fathers constructively care for their daughters and sons in childhood and adolescence and promote their children's social emotion, intellectual-academic, and physical-athletic development" (Snarey, 1993, p. 1). In addition Kotelchuck and Lu use paternal generativity "metaphorically for defining the essence of fatherhood, beyond just the biology of procreation, to represent one of the highest developmental characteristic of men's health, successfully nurturing the next generation" (Kotelchuck & Lu, 2017, p. 2028).

The rationale for generating a new definition of paternal generativity is to reinforce two ideas: (1) the importance of a particular period in men's adult life as a biographic moment to generate new concerns towards others, and (2) these new generative concerns may generate generative actions, not only towards their own children, but also towards other people, projects, or ideas. For that reason, and combining elements of Erikson (1993), Snarey (1993), Snow (2015), and Kotelchuck and Lu (2017), I offer the following definition:

- Paternal generativity takes place when the experience of being an involved biological or social father leads to a new concern for, and commitment to guiding the next generations, which in turn might generate generative actions towards children, but also to other people, projects, and ideas.

## 4 Generativity as a Form of Flourishing

As we argued in the last section, becoming a parent can positively affect the capacity for generativity. This section will describe how generativity might be related to human flourishing. To do this, it is necessary to present two concepts: human flourishing and relational flourishing.

Flourishing means living well (*vivere bene*). It is another rich and complex notion with Aristotelian roots that the rest of my colleagues in this edited book have studied in depth. For Aristotle, happiness (*Eudaimonia*) is not pleasure, honor, or satisfying personal appetites, it is an activity of the soul in order to achieve the best in us, an activity to flourish.

Willen and her colleagues consolidated a good range of contemporary definitions of human flourishing (Willen et al., 2022). For example, VanderWeele presented flourishing as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good. We might also

refer to such a state as complete human well-being, which is again arguably a broader concept than psychological well-being” (Vander Weele, 2017, p. 8149). Another example is provided by Huppert and So, who consider that “flourishing refers to the experience of life going well. It is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively” (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 838). Both definitions capture flourishing as a holistic notion with different constitutive elements.

For more details, VanderWeele presents various elements of human flourishing such as happiness and satisfaction with life, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relations (Vander Weele, 2017). Ryff, the author of the first chapter of this edited volume, also elaborated a model of well-being in order to facilitate its operationalization, based on theoretical proposals from authors in different disciplines interested in positive functioning such as Jung, Erikson, Frankl, Jahoda, Jung and Maslow, among others, involving six dimensions: personal growth, autonomy, positive relationships, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). Both models have many elements in common, one of which is the importance of quality of relationships in order to have a flourishing life.

Aristotelian virtues are normally presented in an *individualistic* form, as a way for self-perfectionism, to become who you are. But rarely are they presented in a *relational* way. We argue that virtues make sense, not only if their development implies an improvement or perfectionism of their possessors, but especially if these new possessors develop a new *relationship* with their environment.

Among different form of relationships, personal relationships are universally endorsed as central to optimal living (Ryff & Singer, 2000). The results of the longest longitudinal study (Harvard Study of Adult Development) also suggest that the quality of relationships is related to quality of life (Vaillant, 2012). In Akinin’s chapter, in this edited volume, we also read that having a person to count on when there is trouble is the best predictor of life satisfaction around the world (Helliwell et al., 2019). So, quality ties with others are one of the core elements for human flourishing. Erikson also argued that adult development tasks are highly interpersonal, including intimate union with others (intimacy—Stage 6), and showing concern for guiding others (generativity—Stage 7). Snow also argued that it is hard to flourish without being generative (Snow, 2015).

All of this mounting evidence confirms the importance of quality ties with others. If quality ties exist, one can expect relational flourishing. Fowers and his colleagues, using the example of couple relationships, argued that relational flourishing occurs when those in a relationship are able to positively assess meaning, develop personal growth, and share goals within their relationship. This can be expanded beyond couple relationships (Fowers et al., 2016). Relational flourishing might exist throughout the relations in intimate circles, but also through other types of relationships, which might even include relationships with strangers. Relational flourishing is a premise of human flourishing. It is difficult to imagine a person flourishing without quality ties with others.

Having presented the concepts of fatherhood involvement, generativity, and paternal generativity, together with the notions of relational and human flourishing,

we argue (see figure 1) fatherhood involvement is a (potential) source of human flourishing. Paternal behavior is explained by a very complex network of elements, which can be divided between micro-level meso-level, and macro-level factors,<sup>1</sup> which positively or negatively influence the level of fatherhood involvement.

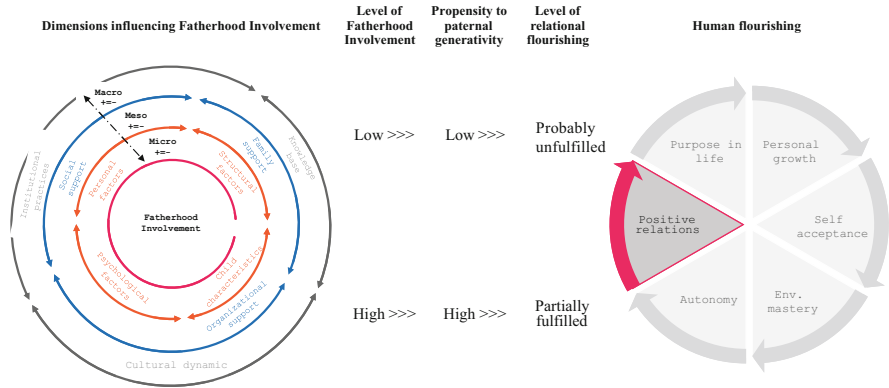
According to this circle of elements that influence fatherhood involvement, each father will have a different level of fatherhood involvement, explained by their sublevels of availability, engagement, and responsibility. This level of fatherhood involvement is not only important for the rich constellation of benefits reviewed above, but also because it might be the turning point to develop paternal generativity. Low levels of fatherhood involvement will not generate paternal generativity. It is theoretically possible that uninvolved fathers develop generativity, but this generativity will not be considered paternal generativity, because it is not *because* of the experience of being a father that they develop a concern towards others, but for other reasons. Returning to the case of involved fathers, such involvement is intrinsically a favorable balance of others-care over self-care, as generativity is a favorable balance between others-care over self-care. For that reason, we assume that those fathers with a high level of fatherhood involvement are more likely to show high levels of paternal generativity. A new ethic of care reigns, at least partially, in their life. They are, by choice, in a secondary position, which is a sign of maturity.

Developing a high level of paternal generativity, understood as a new concern for, and commitment to guiding next generations, which in turn might generate generative actions towards others, including children, might be positively related to relational flourishing. Following Erikson's model, the strength of the successful completion of the seventh stage (generativity vs stagnation) is care or an ethic of care. This new ethic of care will reshape the *relational* way in which the possessor of such new ethic interacts with others, potentially generating relational flourishing. Generativity brings care as an ego strength, and such care has the capacity to reconsider all of the relationships as ends, and not means. When this occurs, relational flourishing emerges.

Finally, relational flourishing is a premise for human flourishing. It is not sufficient but is necessary. As we have reviewed, social connections are one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Among the micro-level factors, we can distinguish sub-elements such as personal factors (i.e., educational level, occupation, skills, and past story), psychological factors (i.e., motivation, generative ethics, sensitivity), child characteristics (i.e., age, gender, and temperament) and/or structural factors (i.e., residence-nonresidence, distance, and family arrangements). Among the meso-level factors, we can distinguish sub-elements such as social support (i.e., health system, media, and community programs), organizational support (i.e., policies, work-family balance, and family-friendly supervisor behaviors) and/or family support (i.e., mother's characteristics, mother's attitudes, and relationship with extended family). Among the macro-level factors, we can distinguish sub-elements such as institutional practices (i.e., national policies such as parental leaves, national programs, and the nursery and school system), cultural dynamics (i.e., ideologies (male identity), cultural norms, and SEC opportunities) and/or knowledge base (i.e., health research, sociopolitical research, and management research). This is only a first sketch of a circle of elements enhancing or limiting fatherhood involvement that deserves further development.



**Fig. 1** Fatherhood involvement as a potential source of human flourishing. *Source:* Own elaboration based on different conceptual underpinnings: Fatherhood involvement (Lamb et al., 1985, 1987), Risk and protective factors (Kotelchuck & Lu, 2017), Paternal generativity (Snarey, 1993), Relational flourishing (Fowers et al., 2016), Human flourishing (Ryff, 1989)

essential features of human flourishing. Relational flourishing means having quality ties with others. It is for that reason that we assume that relational flourishing is a necessary condition for experiencing human flourishing (Fig. 1).

## 5 Conclusion and Implications

This chapter attempted to connect fatherhood involvement with human flourishing. We began by presenting the reasons why fatherhood involvement matters. We then reviewed fatherhood as a transformative event, together with the barriers that may limit the transformational aspect of fatherhood. Next, we reviewed the concept of generativity, where a new definition of paternal generativity was provided. Then, we presented a model that connects fatherhood to human flourishing, through the development of paternal generativity and relational flourishing. However, empirical evidence is needed to confirm such relationships.

For this reason, the first set of implications are for scholars. While important efforts have been made in measuring fatherhood involvement, as far as we know there is no scale that measures paternal generativity. If the connection between fatherhood involvement and relational flourishing is explained by the development of paternal generativity, it is necessary to develop an instrument to measure it. Moreover, although fatherhood is becoming a hot topic, current studies lack a comprehensive comparative of the essence of fatherhood involvement across regions, as well as potential and different risks and protective factors.

Organizations are playing a crucial role in fatherhood involvement (Ewald et al., 2020; Haas & Hwang, 2019b; Haas & Hwang, 2019a; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). Many fathers perceive a flexibility stigma in using flexible work arrangements, while



**Table 2** Implications of fatherhood involvement as a (potential) source of human flourishing

Actors	Implications
Academia	To develop scales of paternal generativity
	To understand, empirically, the relationship between fatherhood involvement and paternal generativity, and between paternal generativity and relational and human flourishing
	To examine in more detail using different approaches how the risks and protective factors limit or enhance fatherhood involvement
	To compare the essence of fatherhood involvement, globally
Organizations	To unmask those organizational barriers that limit fatherhood involvement
	To reflect on the new notion of the ideal worker
	To promote new avenues and spaces to support involved fathers
Governments	To offer, temporally, non-transferable resources to fathers
	To encourage fatherhood involvement from the perinatal period
	To work with statistical institutes to measure human flourishing

Source: Own elaboration

others sense a lack of legitimacy (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013). Thus, it seems necessary to unmask those visible and invisible barriers that limit fatherhood involvement, together with reflecting on the notion of the ideal worker, which might affect fathers' decisions in using such flexible work arrangements. Finally, organizations could promote new avenues and spaces to talk openly about fatherhood.

Finally, despite some governments making important efforts to encourage fatherhood involvement through parental leave, especially by offering parental leave exclusively to fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 2009, 2016), some other measures need to be considered, such as encouraging fatherhood involvement from the perinatal period. Moreover, governments could make an effort to work with statistical institutes to measure human flourishing, not only among fathers (Table 2).

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# Flourishing with Moral Emotions Through Conversational Agents



Minha Lee and Jessica Contreras

**Abstract** This chapter concerns how artificial agents can be used to bolster moral emotions like compassion that are linked to well-being. While technology-based interventions for well-being are plentiful, e.g., wellness apps, two critical components for flourishing in the twenty-first century are currently overlooked: (1) *promoting moral emotions*, e.g., gratitude, that relies on complex emotional experiences rather than simple negative or positive affect, and (2) *using conversational agents*, e.g., chatbots, rather than other technological interventions, e.g., mobile apps, which reframes well-being interventions as *conversations*. We look into gratitude and compassion as specific moral emotions that can be fostered by *talking with* technology rather than *clicking through* technology. This extends our relations of care to include artificial agents, in which we explore flourishing along with (not despite) technology in a new light.

**Keywords** Flourishing · Technology · Conversational agents · Moral emotions · Gratitude

## 1 Introduction

Moral emotions that range from justified anger to heartfelt gratitude serve as an ethical compass; we communicate moral norms through how we emotionally condemn or value people's actions. In this, exemplars like compassion and gratitude can contribute to our individual flourishing (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). Flourishing, compared to languishing, means to have the ability to synthesize passing positive emotions. This positive emotions that broaden our behavioral repertoire. For instance, integrated positive emotions help us go beyond fight or flight reactions to playful or explorative behaviors as emotional experiences, which then builds long-term well-being (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). While positive emotions' influence

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on flourishing has been recognized, positive *moral* emotions have received less attention. In a similar vein to positive emotions like joy, positively valenced moral emotions can counter psychological negativity, acting as a powerful emotional reservoir for building psychological resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

The distinguishing factor of *moral* emotions is that they convey ethical judgments or motivate morally pertinent behaviors. Showing compassion and gratitude to others can foster *interpersonal* moral appreciation between people, but also aid *intrapersonal* flourishing, e.g., accepting one's flaws through self-compassion (Neff, 2003). The chapter thus focuses on how moral emotions can contribute to our flourishing and touch upon the role of technology. Given the fact that we live in a highly digitalized world, how to conceptualize and practice digital well-being, i.e., well-being in the context of rapidly advancing technologies in our society, is an open project (Burr & Floridi, 2020; Vallor, 2016). In this, we discuss cultivating moral emotions through various forms of technology, like conversational AI, as a path to flourishing in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Recent research suggests that conversational agents, like chatbots, can be conduits to promote positive moral emotions like compassion (Lee et al. 2019a, b). Although there is a lack of normative agreement on what counts as digital well-being (Burr et al., 2020), we propose that promoting specific moral emotions, like gratitude and compassion, based on empirical research, is one way towards flourishing. Technology can be used to stimulate flourishing, specifically through moral emotions shared with and through artificial agents, which we provide empirical results on. Here onward, we explain reactive attitudes and emotions with a focus on compassion and gratitude. Then, we describe what artificial agents are, how they can extend our relations of care, and end with how human–computer interaction, e.g., talking with a conversational agent, for gratitude and compassion may help us flourish.

## 2 Moral Emotions and Reactive Attitudes

How we feel exemplifies our psychological state. For instance, *languishing*, as a feeling between depression and flourishing, is identified as a common emotional experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, characterized by a sense of emptiness due to the dullness and repetitiveness of everyday life with a lack of social connections (Grant, 2021). Hence, emotions inadvertently represent a shared sense of reality during notable events, e.g., languishing during the pandemic. As with languishing as an example that is relevant in the time of writing, emotions are a barometer of our well-being and contribute to personal development across our lifespan (Lazarus, 2006) since how we feel shapes what we believe (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000). For instance, if languishing is the lens to feel one's reality, our beliefs about the pandemic may be influenced; if compassion instead is the emotional filter, our beliefs about how to relate to others during the pandemic may be

readjusted. Emotions then extend to regulating our ethical beliefs and actions (de Sousa, 2001; Prinz & Nichols, 2010).

Emotions signify ways in which we hold each other morally responsible (Strawson, 2008 [1963]). Thus, emotions are seen as essential to human morality; we can be motivated through emotions to act, such as helping those in need through empathy or compassion (Hume, 2003 [1739]; Hutcheson, 2008 [1726]). In this, *moral* emotions are defined as emotions that “are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (Haidt, 2003, p. 853). What is important here is that moral emotions are intertwined with *other-regarding* behavior. The ability to feel for others as a motivator can inform concerted moral action.

Yet, when interacting with others, it is difficult to ascertain how (and what kinds of) emotions are felt and if one’s emotions are truly upholding others’ interests or welfare. Additionally, emotions towards oneself, such as self-gratitude, may not be towards anyone else, while still being morally pertinent. Being thankful towards one’s actions towards oneself, like kind self-talk, can habituate moral goodness for an audience of one. To capture emotions shared during a morally relevant interaction with others and ourselves, we take moral emotions to be nested under *reactive attitudes*. Reactive attitudes are *reactions* to others’ or our own behavior; they include emotional expressions that signal moral accountability in interpersonal contexts, according to Strawson (2008 [1963]).

Moral emotions are hence seen as *reactions* during morally relevant interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions. We communicate and reset our moral compass through how we emotionally react to one another and to ourselves. By responding to unfair treatment from someone else with, e.g., disgust, or reacting to one’s violation of moral norms like cheating with, e.g., shame, we set moral boundaries. In this way, we demonstrate certain values through emotions as reactive attitudes, e.g., upholding fairness when displaying disgust at unfairness (McCarthy, 1994). Moral emotions, then, are seen as correlates to diverse moral values and concepts that are directly or indirectly communicated when interacting with others and ourselves (de Sousa, 2001).

To connect moral emotions to well-being, of importance is that moral emotions often allow us to experience positive and negative emotions together (Haidt, 2003). Consider gratitude that may occur alongside grief, sadness, and happiness when reflecting on the kindness of someone who passed away. Mixed emotions can represent eudaimonic well-being, which can arise from searching for a meaning-driven life rather than pleasure-maximizing life (Berrios et al., 2018). Moral emotions, as complex emotional experiences, differ from basic emotions, like Ekman’s categorization of surprise, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and anger, that are based on short-term, prototypical facial expressions (Ekman & Friesen, 1971, Ekman, 1992; Ekman, 1993). Basic emotions can still be nested within our experience of long-term moral emotions that stay with us and change along with us. In moral emotions research, less attention has been put on positive moral emotions that include awe or empathy, among others, than on negative moral emotions such as guilt or shame (Tangney et al., 2007). Given this backdrop, I turn to *gratitude* and



*compassion* as exemplary positive moral emotions that are valuable for our well-being.

## 2.1 *Gratitude*

Gratitude helps us appreciate what we have in the present (Emmons & Mishra, 2011). This includes the gratitude we feel when appreciated by others (Gordon et al., 2011), as well as when we cherish others' kindness by being thankful towards them (Emmons, 2004; Watkins et al., 2003). Additionally, gratitude sharing spreads outwards; acknowledging gratitude from one person can result in gratitude towards many others (Algoe et al., 2008; Nowak & Roch, 2007). Yet, gratitude can help more as a lasting affective trait than as a passing emotion. As an affective trait,<sup>1</sup> gratitude can be cultivated over time, with practice (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Watkins et al., 2003). A grateful person can experience a greater: (1) *intensity* of experiencing gratitude, (2) *frequency* of how often they feel grateful, (3) *span* of how widely they are grateful towards a variety of life circumstances, and (4) *density* of how many people or sources they feel gratitude towards. So, becoming a grateful (as an affective trait) means one experiences gratitude intensely, often, and towards a large number of people in multiple circumstances in life.

Many prior studies indicate a strong relationship between gratitude and well-being (Wood et al., 2009, 2010; Alkozei et al., 2018; Emmons & Mishra, 2011; Killen & Macaskill, 2015). Feeling grateful can directly and/or indirectly contribute to well-being (Killen & Macaskill, 2015). Indirectly, gratitude is said to “dampen” the effect of negative emotions, leading to greater well-being (Emmons & Mishra, 2011). Additionally, gratitude can directly enhance well-being by helping us focus on life's positive sides (Alkozei et al., 2018). There is a significant potential for gratitude to benefit collective well-being; gratitude accompanies prosocial behavior, like “paying it forward” of generosity begetting generosity by spreading care (Jia et al., 2015), which differs from spreading the feeling of indebtedness (Mathews & Shook, 2013).

According to empirical studies, gratitude can be increased through three types of interventions: (1) formulating a list of what or whom one is thankful for (keeping a gratitude diary), (2) reflecting on grateful situations or specific events in which one felt thankful (grateful contemplation), and (3) behaviorally expressing gratitude towards a specific person, such as writing a letter (Wood et al., 2010). These interventions all contribute to well-being. A gratitude diary increases well-being and lowers signs of stress, anxiety, and depression (Southwell & Gould, 2017),

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<sup>1</sup> *Emotions* are taken to be passing reactions to one's environments and situations, while *moods* last for a slightly longer timescale (like days), and *affective traits* are a part of one's stable identity (Rosenberg, 1998). However, we believe that moral emotions transcend this division, as they are often more than passing reactions.

gratitude contemplation and thanking someone through a letter and delivering it both increase positive affect (Seligman et al., 2005).

Interpersonal relationships are a fundamental part of development, stimulation, and perception of gratitude (Gordon et al., 2011). Gratitude is not only experienced individually, but it also comes from sharing gratitude through our various relationships (Gordon et al., 2011; Algoe et al., 2008). People share gratitude as romantic partners or close friends or even with third parties (Algoe et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2011). To share gratitude, it is necessary for one person to express and feel grateful towards another person, so that they can feel appreciated and also return the felt gratitude in a reciprocal way. Shared gratitude enhances the individual's well-being and satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2008; Algoe et al., 2010; Chang et al., 2013). For romantic partners, showing appreciation and gratitude towards your significant other reduces the symptoms of depression in the partner, since they feel supported, empowered, and understood (Chang et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2011). Sharing gratitude can thus enhance *collective* well-being.

## 2.2 Compassion

Compassion is another positively-valenced moral emotion that stands for ameliorating suffering we feel with loving-kindness (Haidt, 2003; Gilbert, 2014; Nichols, 2004). Schopenhauer argued that compassion is the root of ethics (1995 [1840]), as inspired by Buddhist philosophy (Shantideva, 1979), particularly of the Mahayana tradition (Reeves, 2018). While at first glance, empathy and compassion may seem the same, it significantly differs: empathic concern may cause empathic distress of vicariously “living through” others’ suffering (Nichols, 2004; Calvo & Peters, 2014). Compassion can start with empathizing with others, but it offers a *balanced* perspective of relating to others, i.e., evoking action-oriented altruism rather than empathic distress (Nichols, 2004). Perhaps empathy occurs more naturally, e.g., emotional mimicry, and compassion requires training, which is what brain imaging research shows; the neural circuitry of empathy and compassion differs (Klimecki et al., 2014).

In Buddhist philosophy, compassion is one of four brahmavihara (divine abidings), which are *loving-kindness (metta)* of limitless benevolence, *compassion (karuṇā)* of “being one with” suffering of all lifeforms, *sympathetic joy (mudita)* of generously feeling others’ joy as our own, and *equanimity (upekkhā)* of practicing mindfulness over one’s passing emotions (Shaw, 2006). However, in current psychological research, all are compiled under *compassion*, e.g., in measuring self-compassion. Neff’s self-compassion scale has three parts: being *kind* rather than judgmental, being *connected* to greater humanity rather than feeling isolated, and being *mindful* rather than over-identifying with emotions (Neff, 2003). Thus, being compassionate is to also be self-compassionate so one chooses self-kindness, connectedness to others, and mindfulness, which are linked to divine abiding or guiding virtues of Buddhism that emphasize the virtuous role that emotions play.

Given that compassion is a unique emotional experience that most likely requires training, it is difficult to place it under the distinction between passing emotions, moods, and affective identity as per above (Rosenberg, 1998). It may combine passing empathy, kindness, but also acknowledging suffering while not falling prey to distress through mindfulness of one's emotions. If we look at it as a *divine abiding*, it intertwines emotional and rational aspects of who we are in transforming emotional experiences as virtuous reflections. Measurements like the self-compassion scale allow for an empirical research on well-being (Neff, 2003).

Self-compassion and well-being are causally interconnected, according to a meta-analysis (Zessin et al., 2015). This has implications for mental health care, for being highly self-compassionate and reduces psychological negativity like depressive symptoms and stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012).

There are many compassion-based interventions, such as compassion-focused therapy that is for becoming sensitized to and accepting suffering of oneself, as well as others (Gilbert, 2009) or mindful self-compassion that is specific to self-compassion cultivation through activities like meditation and interoceptive body awareness (Neff & Germer, 2013). Unlike other types of psychotherapy that may focus more on self-evaluation or grasping unconscious thought patterns, compassion-related therapy allows for people to focus on social affiliations and prosocial growth (Kirby, 2017). This means that compassion contributes to well-being because it helps people appreciate and reach out to their social connections (Seppala et al., 2013). But, compassion's "social" characteristic runs deeper, i.e., it helps us envision the interconnected nature between self and other living beings, going beyond our own immediate community or even species to find "wholeness" (Shaw, 2006; Schopenhauer, 1995 [1849]).

Like gratitude, compassion points to our prosocial nature as a positive moral emotion. Yet it may have a broader scope than gratitude when considering that compassion seeks to view others as "myself once more" (Schopenhauer, 1995 [1849], p. 277). In practice, compassion helps one acknowledge that suffering and challenges in life are common experiences for all beings, making one less likely to feel isolated in difficult times (Neff, 2003). Gratitude and compassion can support each other in promoting well-being. Compassion, like gratitude, can come with mixed emotions, e.g., sadness and deep affection. And as aforementioned, exploring in what ways one finds meaning through mixed emotions to arise is one path towards well-being (Berrios et al., 2018). Given the relevance of gratitude and compassion to well-being, we now turn to artificial agents for that we can utilize for enhancing well-being in a conversational manner.

### 3 Artificial Agents

Artificial agents, like robots, voice-assistants, or chatbots, are now utilized for functional tasks like turning on the music with one's speech or simple customer service via web-based chats (Dale, 2016; Clark et al., 2019a, b; Rapp et al., 2021).

Yet they have been around since the 1960s, with ELIZA as an early example of a pattern-matching response system that people attributed intelligence to (Weizenbaum, 1966). The word chatbot is derived from “chat robot,” that is any software application or machine agent with the ability of engaging in a conversation or interaction with humans through text or voice (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2019; Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2018; Dale, 2016). Hence, they are often referred to as *conversational agents* or *conversational user interfaces* (CUIs), which include both chatbots and robots.

While CUIs cannot have elaborate conversations to the degree a human can, agents can manage simple interactions like telling jokes or checking in on users, e.g., Facebook Messenger, or Telegram. For now, their behaviors are mostly limited to simple interactions, be it answering simple questions about a mobile phone contract on a website or actions like guiding people to specific locations at airports. But, chatbots show the evolution of how technologically mediated *space* (like social media) now allow for non-embodied artificial agents as social entities to populate this space (Lee et al., 2017). Similarly, embodied agents like robots populate our physical space and are taken to be “social” agents due to their behavioral affordances, e.g., speech, gestures, posture, and more (Breazeal, 2004). So, whether it is in physical or virtual environments, various types of artificial agents already expand our social circle. In one view, these agents may expand our moral circle as well, i.e., performing ethically relevant behavior that can be equated to what we may expect from other humans (Danaher, 2020), in which case emotional conversations are key.

Many different conversational agents can mimic humans’ emotional expressions like emojis used by chatbots or gaze by robots when interacting with people. But, these interactions still are in technical infancy rather than serving as true *conversations*; “conversation-sensitive design” of agents therefore may be a more apt framing (Reeves, 2019). Specific characteristics of conversational agents, like how they appear to have an identity or how proactively they should initiate conversations, are ongoing topics of research (Chaves & Gerosa, 2021). Yet as these advances are being made, many artificial agents are now taking on roles usually reserved for human caregivers or even therapists that require a basic “performance” of emotions, e.g., empathetic responses.

Embodied CUIs, like robots, have been evaluated for care-based support; these robots’ effectiveness and appropriateness need to consider their context (e.g., hospital vs. home-care), practice (e.g., washing vs. chit-chat), roles (e.g., doctors vs. care-bot), robot type (e.g., humanoid vs. mechanical arm for lifting), and moral aspects (e.g., attentiveness or competence) when designing and deploying these agents (Van Wynsberghe, 2013). There are thus many ways that technology can be embedded into our care practices, ranging from heavy-lifting duties that may ease caregivers’ tasks to small-talk. But, a worry may be that people end up relying on or preferring care from artificial agents (Vallor, 2011; Sharkey & Sharkey, 2012). There are signs of emerging trends on human-machine bonds in which humans prefer relationships with machines (McArthur & Twist, 2017).

Akihiko Kondo is married to a popular anime character and virtual celebrity, Hatsune Miku, since 2018 (BBC News, 2019). Davecat has female-looking humanoid dolls as his “synthetic partners”; one is his wife and the other is his mistress (Beck, 2013). His wife cost him \$6000 to buy (Beck, 2013). For Davecat and Kondo, artificial agents are not mere “things,” but beings they are in love with, though they know (and even appreciate) that their partners are artificial. What Kondo and Davecat have in common are experiences of being emotionally or socially vulnerable before finding artificial love, either due to bullying that led to social isolation (Kondo) or relationships with human partners gone awry (Davecat). For people who cannot or do not form meaningful human–human relationships, “synthetic partners” can benefit their psychological well-being; but if a strong societal norm develops to include artificial agents as beings we care for, a concern is that many of us may become emotionally overwhelmed with additional care duties (Nyholm & Frank, 2017) and become dependent on artificial agents that take on care-related roles (Sharkey & Sharkey, 2012). So, both over-reliance on care *from* and *towards* artificial agents in various contexts, like healthcare or romantic relationships, are valid concerns (Vallor, 2011; Nyholm & Frank, 2017).

However, empirical research suggests a different view.

A long-term field study shows that older adults are not impacted by robots’ behavior in assessing technology acceptance or forming attachments; over time, older adults increasingly see robots’ *ease of use* to be higher, but potentially deceptive behavior like robots showing artificial emotions is not a strong factor in how people accept or become attached to these agents (Van Maris et al., 2020). A robot’s display of emotions increases its perceived social presence, but people’s emotional attachment to it is low even after long-term use; people mostly would miss the robot and would use it again in the future, but this does not translate to attachment (Van Maris et al., 2021).<sup>2</sup> Thus, agents’ artificially rendered emotions, like virtual tears or chatbots’ emojis, can be what humans grasp as socially relevant cues when interacting with machines *without* the presumption that we would form attachments due to such behavior. For Davecat and Kondo, becoming attached to their digital loved ones is a choice that came beforehand. It is their relationship arrangements based on past history and personal preference that fostered attachment, not behavioral elements designed into artificial agents as the starting point. Here, we need to carefully separate between *ease of use* and *attachment*. The increasing *ease of use* of everyday technology over time that does not demonstrate emotions, e.g., a hairdryer, is a form of functional reliance. The view that potentially deceptive artificially created emotions can cause us to *over-rely* on artificial agents through attachment requires more attention. Robots or chatbots that express emotions can be

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<sup>2</sup>Broad concepts like attachment, dependence, and reliance deserve further dissection as they are often left unspecified or underspecified (Vallor, 2011; Sharkey & Sharkey, 2012; Van Wynsberghe, 2013; Nyholm & Frank, 2017). I take attachment to be “feelings of connections one has for other people” (p. 2, Van Maris et al., 2021) that can also be found in relationships with animals (Haraway, 2013) or inanimate objects that one feels connected to.

seen as functionally easy to use and understand without humans necessarily forming emotional attachment to them.

### ***3.1 Extending Well-Being with Artificial Agents***

Artificial agents that take on morally relevant roles, such as care duties, build on social behaviors (Lee, 2021), e.g., social acts like saying or waving “hello” become nested in care practices such as reminding people to take their medicine on time in a conversational manner. If morality is reflected in reciprocal caring relations and attitudes between people (Noddings, 2015), one avenue is to consider if and how care can be *reciprocal* with or through technology, and if CUIs then can help us flourish.

### ***3.2 The Benefit of Conversational Agents***

Digital well-being can come in many forms, be it behavioral interventions in VR or mobile applications for mood-tracking (Calvo & Peters, 2014). Compared to other forms of technology, there are benefits to conversational agents, whether or not they are seen as conduits for how we care for self and others. Firstly, unlike technologies that cannot converse or refer to itself, e.g., a VR headset, conversational agents can call themselves “I”; the self-referential, first-person perspective of these agents are evoked during interactions even if they are seen as just machines. Secondly, people may have an easier time disclosing sensitive or personal information to conversational agents since they are seen as mere “talking machines”; machines are seen as inherently not as judgmental as other people, which can help people open up about sensitive issues, e.g., PTSD or other psychological problems (Lucas et al., 2014, 2017).

When people believe that they are talking to a computer rather than a person, they can experience lowered fear, heightened willingness to disclose and share more expressions of sadness (Lucas et al., 2014). This is also the case for chatbots seen as less judgmental than humans; people may prefer to vent or rant to a chatbot without the fear of being judged by other humans (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017). The fear of other people’s judgment also relates to self-compassion; self-judgment lowers self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Hence, an asset that should not be overlooked is how technology can invite people to disclose due to perceived machine-likeness rather than human-likeness, but in a conversational setting. If technology as a conduit can *lower* perceptions of negative self-judgment and the perception of others’ judgmental stance, it can be beneficial to consider how artificial agents can foster our moral emotions.

### 3.3 *Conversational Agents for Moral Emotions*

Vincent, a chatbot for self-compassion is an example (Lee et al. 2019a, b). Vincent (named after Van Gogh) was designed as two versions: *caregiving* Vincent that *gave people advice* on practices for fostering compassion, like journaling, and *care-receiving* Vincent *received advice from people* on how to manage everyday problems from its fictional angle, e.g., being embarrassed about arriving late for a meeting at an IP address (Lee et al. 2019a, b). We measured people's change in self-compassion (scale by Neff, 2003) before and after two weeks of interaction with Vincent; *care-receiving* Vincent increased people's self-compassion more than caregiving Vincent (Lee et al. 2019a, b). This means that by giving advice to a chatbot on Facebook Messenger about its daily foibles, people were able to be less self-judgmental, kinder, more mindful of their emotions, and related more to greater humanity compared to seeing their problems as isolated (or separate from problems others may also have), i.e., more self-compassionate (Neff, 2003). To compare their conversational strategies, caregiving Vincent would coach participants, e.g., "[...] see if you can think of a kinder, more caring way to motivate yourself to make a change if needed. What is the most supportive message you can think of that's in line with your underlying wish to be healthy and happy? Try to write it below [...]" compared to care-receiving Vincent that would seek care and compassionate advice, e.g., "What do you think, am I the dumbest bot you've ever seen or what? [...] Am I being too hard on myself?"

By caring for Vincent's fictional foibles, people could learn to become more self-compassionate. Reciprocity, here, is to see technology as a *mirror* for giving and receiving care to and from oneself (Lee, 2021). If care is based on reciprocity between giver and receiver (Noddings, 2015) and attachment is based on "feelings of connection" (Van Maris et al., 2021), the overlooked aspect then is how artificial agents allow for (1) self-to-self care, (2) self-to-other care, and (3) thus mediate how we connect to others. Like with Vincent, an agent can be in-the-loop to foster self-to-self-care, e.g., increasing self-compassion; an agent can similarly be in-the-loop for self-to-other-care, e.g., when one reaches out to other people *through* an agent's reminder; this mediation then is an extension of ways we relate to and care for others, e.g., self-compassion aiding compassion towards others. Self-compassion is inherent to compassion, or more strongly, one cannot be compassionate to others without having compassion for oneself. If compassion thus helps us accept our own and others' imperfections (Breines & Chen, 2013; Zhang et al., 2020), ways in which agents can aid the growth of emotions to be shared with others are not mere "band-aid" solutions but *adding to* our ways of flourishing.

Another example is a gratitude chatbot we named Ro Bot, whose name was chosen to minimize biases that human names can introduce. We wanted to see if a chatbot that promotes and shares gratitude for three consecutive days would influence people's reported gratitude, alongside their positive and negative emotions. Ro Bot had two objectives. First was to *promote gratitude* by asking people to write down grateful moments that they have experienced during the day and during a

specific moment in their lives, alongside to writing a letter to a person they are grateful towards. Ro Bot ask questions such as: “What is one thing that makes you feel grateful today?,” “What would be one thing that made you feel grateful last summer?” or “Do you have someone special who inspires you? What would you say to that person to show that you are grateful for them?.” And its second objective was to *share gratitude* by providing grateful thoughts to another person in order to make them feel appreciated, e.g., “I want to share that I am thankful to YOU for chatting with me!” or “I am so fortunate to be able to chat with you and learn a little bit more about human experiences.”

Ro Bot was created alongside the control condition: Movie-bot; this chatbot only had conversation about movies. As a result, the participants that interacted with Ro Bot showed a slight increment in their gratitude while the people who chatted with the Movie-bot showed lowered gratitude (the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) by McCullough et al., 2002). Additionally, participants in both conditions (chatted with Ro Bot or Movie-bot) reported having higher levels of positive feelings and lower negative feelings at the end of the study (positive and negative feelings measured with the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences SPANE by Diener et al., 2009). We thus learned that it is possible for people to show a *deduction* in *gratitude* while experiencing an *increase* in *positive affect*, like happiness, according to our control condition (Movie-bot) participants.

Both studies on human–chatbot interactions for compassion and gratitude demonstrate that moral emotions can be experienced and enhanced through conversational agents. This means that participants were able to be grateful or compassionate towards themselves while talking to the chatbot “everyone makes mistakes” (care-receiving Vincent), other people they know through the chatbot, e.g., “my mum is inspiring as she’s gone through a lot and is brave [. . .] I love you and I miss you terribly” (in conversation with Ro Bot), or towards the chatbot itself, e.g., “it’s usual to get rejected sometimes, just keep on going [. . .]” (to care-receiving Vincent). There are also cases of people revealing personal information to the chatbot, e.g., “a girl told me she loves me. And I love her too” (to caregiving Vincent). What these statements to the conversational agents reveal are that people are able to foster targeted moral emotions as research design intended, but also, they are able to reflect on and feel various types of emotions ad hoc, e.g., love, depending on how the conversation flows and how much they want to share.

## 4 Discussion

Coupled with continuous technical developments of conversational agents, moral emotions’ potential for flourishing in the twenty-first century is only beginning to be explored. While cultivating moral emotions through artificial agents seem like a possible endeavor given our prior sections, there are several points to be attentive towards. We first start with how moral emotions in general and their relation to our



well-being deserve more attention before moving on to a discussion on artificial agents.

Positive moral emotions, like gratitude and compassion, are overshadowed thus far compared to negative moral emotions like shame (Tangney et al., 2007). Given that positive emotions can contribute greatly to human flourishing (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004), what makes *positive* moral emotions different from basic positive emotions like joy should be distinguished. A potential difference may be that positive moral emotions may contain both positive and negative emotional experiences, e.g., gratitude towards family and friends in spite of negativity like languishing during the pandemic (Lee et al., in press). As mentioned above on our gratitude study, simultaneously experiencing lowered gratitude and increased general positive affect is possible. This aligns with Berrios et al.'s research on how mixed emotions can represent an active search for meaning in life, a sign of eudaimonic well-being (2018).

Besides the distinction between positive moral emotions and general affect, we need a better understanding of how various moral emotions themselves are similar or dissimilar. Compassion is often grouped together with or is said to relate to sympathy, empathy, grief, or even pity (Cartwright, 1988; Nichols, 2004), while neuroscientific research demonstrated that empathy and compassion response follow different neural pathways (Klimecki et al., 2014). There thus may be divergence in how we experience moral emotions compared to how the terms are linguistically understood. Relatedly, diverse cultural dimensions of moral emotions can be considered. For instance, compassion can be looked at from a Kantian angle regarding how reason assists compassion (Guyer, 2012) or from a Confucian perspective on how compassion can be practiced at societal and political levels (Wong, 2015), as well as compassion in Buddhist philosophy (Shantideva, 1979; Shaw, 2006). We did not discuss gratitude or compassion in a thorough manner in this chapter.

Beyond short-term emotional experiences and the search for a “universal” understanding of emotions, e.g., basic emotions (Ekman, 1992; Ekman, 1993, Ekman & Friesen, 1971), research on long-lasting, complex, and potentially non-universal experiences of moral emotions is in order. At the same time, empirical research on the value of technology in cultivating moral emotions, as we have done on gratitude (Lee et al., in press) and compassion (Lee et al., 2019a, b) can be strengthened. We should be mindful of extant criticism on the use of technologies.

As conversational agents become equipped with greater intelligence in the coming years, their presence may become common for care-related duties that purport to help with well-being. Concerns such as increasing human dependence on such technologies (Sharkey & Sharkey, 2012), and in tandem, our care *towards* artificial agents (Nyholm & Frank, 2017) can mean people take on more emotional care duties towards technologies while having less opportunities to develop meaningful human–human relationships. We must remain careful in how various types of intelligent agents could potentially do more harm than good. Already, there are many cases of AI deployment that has done harm, such as unwarranted data-sharing between public and corporate partnerships that largely overlook citizens' data privacy (Crawford et al., 2019). Especially when it comes to collecting data about people's emotions,

there is a chance that people’s reliance on intelligent systems to “feel well” or to “feel connected” can mean emotional control by those who harvest sensitive data (Han, 2017).

Yet, the benefits of using technology like conversational agents for well-being, such as for gaining compassion and gratitude, are only beginning to be explored, as well as how exactly moral emotions may play a role in contributing to our well-being. Flourishing with, not despite, technology may require novel tactics, such as rethinking what virtues are and how to develop them in this century and beyond (Vallor, 2016). We can ask if the expansiveness of compassion’s reach to include humans and non-humans should extend to artificial agents as well, and if gratitude’s characteristic “pay it forward” thankfulness can scale up to also include these agents that cannot feel like us, but may help us feel more compassionate and grateful to those around us and ourselves.

**Key Points**

Moral emotions	Regulate ethical boundaries and norms through emotions by communicating moral judgments and behavior as <i>reactive attitudes</i> .
Gratitude	Is an appreciation of generosity or kindness that mitigates the impact of negative affect and encourages “pay it forward” beneficence.
Compassion	Is loving-kindness towards suffering through balanced relatedness (rather than distress) in “being one with” greater humanity for prosocial action.
Flourishing	With moral emotions (like gratitude and compassion) is to cultivate emotional experiences that (1) connect self- and other-oriented morality and (2) integrate positive and negative emotions as a part of one’s identity and moral growth.
Artificial agents	Like robots or chatbots can aid flourishing through conversational interactions that promote compassion or gratitude towards oneself and others.

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**Part IV**  
**Arts, Fashion and Literature**

# Balenciaga and the Importance of Creativity in Human Flourishing



Ana Balda

**Abstract** One of the clearest manifestations of a flourishing life is manifested in the positive impact one projects on society, in the sense of making other lives flourish. Cristóbal Balenciaga is a paradigm of a flourishing life in the fields of creation and education within fashion. This article explains his professional achievements from a doble perspective, artistic and entrepreneurial, and his contribution to the flourishing of clients, workers, and even the fashion of future generations. The legacy of Balenciaga show that human flourishing may be considered as the result of a creative process, for which setting goals, audacity, resilience and consistency are required. When these capacities are put into practice they transcend the improvement of the personal well being to create an expansive mechanism that generates flourishing societies.

**Keywords** Cristóbal Balenciaga · Human flourishing · Fashion · Cultural heritage · Legacy

Human flourishing may be considered as the result of a creative process, for which setting goals, audacity, resilience, and consistency are required. When these capacities are put into practice, they transcend the improvement of the personal well-being to create an expansive mechanism that generates flourishing societies.

One of the clearest manifestations of a flourishing life is manifested in the positive impact one projects on society, in the sense of making other lives flourish (Hinchliffe, 2004; Diener et al., 2010; Seligman, 2011; Huppert & So, 2013; VanderWeele, 2017). There are many ways to positively influence improvement in the lives of others and, undoubtedly, there is a way to measure that impact. Two areas in which there are clear examples of this personal and external flourishing are the arts and education. Artists flourish in the exercise of their creative activity and contribute to the flourishing of other lives through the enjoyment of the beauty of their works or through the intellectual development that involves analyzing and

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understanding them. In the field of education, the influence of a good master on the intellectual and vital development of their students is unquestionable. In both fields, there are examples of artists and masters whose lives have flourished in the exercise of their crafts and who have contributed to the vital improvement of their contemporaries, in many cases creating schools of thought, and even to vital improvement of future generations through their legacy.

Cristóbal Balenciaga is a paradigm of a flourishing life in the fields of creation and education within fashion. Without going into the already extensive debate on whether fashion is an art or not, it is clear that it is a sector close to art since it implies a creative-innovative effort to produce original works and due to their eminently aesthetic nature. But it is also a business, as it is established for business ends; those of commercial success. Furthermore, in fashion, the final work is not destined to remain permanently, its nature is ephemeral. Precisely for the reasons of business profit inherent in it, it is called to be supplanted by other works in an endless cycle in which novelty is the supreme value (Lipovetsky, 2010, p. 114). The fashion designer has to concentrate on his clients forgetting his past creations and focusing on those of the present, working within the dynamic of the self-destruction of their own work. Balenciaga is an exception in this regard, since 50 years after his death, current generations of designers and experts continue to study with admiration the mystery of the timelessness of his legacy.

This article looks at the achievement of Balenciaga's flourishing life as a personal improvement with respect to his point of departure, and his contribution to the flourishing of clients, workers, and even the fashion of future generations. To this end, this article is divided into three sections. The first is a short biography of Balenciaga to introduce him. The second focuses on the personal flourishing of the designer from the perspective of his work in fashion. Due to the dual aspect of the sector as art-business, previously referred to, this section is divided into two sub-sections: the first talks about the creative side and the second about the business side. The third section studies Balenciaga's contribution to the social dimension through his concept of fashion and his legacy.

## **1 A Brief Biography of Balenciaga**

Cristóbal Balenciaga Eizaguirre was born in Getaria, a small coastal town in the province of Guipúzcoa, on January 21, 1895. The youngest son of José Balenciaga, a fisherman and skipper of a small state-owned vessel, and Martina Eizaguirre Embil, a town seamstress. In one of the few interviews he ever gave, he himself stated that the Marchioness of Casa Torres, great-grandmother of Queen Fabiola of Belgium was the crucial influence that inspired him, at the tender age of 12, to dedicate his life to the craft of haute couture (Merlin-Teysserre, 1968, p. 57).

Balenciaga's professional life has two distinct stages. The first, based in San Sebastián takes place between 1907 and 1936, the latter being a year marked by the

outbreak of the Civil War in Spain, and the second, based in Paris from 1937 to 1968, the year of his farewell to the world of fashion. The first stage corresponds to his learning and professional development; from his incorporation as an apprentice in a tailor shop in San Sebastián, to the founding of his own company in 1917, in a context in which San Sebastián, a town near the French border, had become a cosmopolitan spa town, home to the summer holidays for the King and Queen of Spain. By the mid-1920s, the couturier had already managed to gather a prestigious Spanish clientele, including women of royalty (Arzalluz, 2010, p. 135). The establishment of the Second Republic in Spain in 1931 negatively affected the luxury sector in San Sebastián and, therefore, also damaged his business. In an attempt to diversify his clientele, in 1933 and 1935, respectively, he opened his headquarters in Madrid and Barcelona.

The Parisian period of the couturier started from the serious economic and social uncertainty caused by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936. With the financial help of Vladzio Zawrorowski d'Attainvill and Nicolás Bizcarrondo, Balenciaga was able to open his Paris headquarters and successfully present his first collection to the international press in August 1937 (Jouve & Demornex, 1989, p. 31). This unusually rapid achievement was not accidental: throughout the years of developing his clientele in Spain, the couturier had traveled periodically to Paris to see the collections of the main French couture houses, where he bought garments that his Spanish clientele might like, but he also purchased those that caught his attention due to their degree of innovation or the technical difficulty they entailed (Jouve & Demornex, 1989, pp. 23–31). He did it with the aim of analyzing and studying them in detail and also with the intention of making garments based on those samples of haute couture, introducing variations so that his clients could wear the latest Paris fashions at more affordable prices. Through this process, Balenciaga perfected his technique and began his own innovative process.

In this aspect, that of innovation, he stood out in the international fashion scene of the 1950s and 1960s and created the Balenciaga style, recognizable for its excellent technical qualities and an aesthetic language that aimed to enhance women. His merits were publicly recognized by his direct competitors. Christian Dior claimed “Balenciaga is the master of us all” (Miller, 2007, p. 7), and Coco Chanel, little given to flattery, referred to him as the “only one I admire” (*Women’s Wear Daily* 1963, 2 July). After having dressed the most select and elegant clientele in the world, the couturier announced, in the controversial month of May 1968, that he was going to cease his activity. He closed all his workshops in Paris and Spain, leaving only active his subsidiary *Parfums Balenciaga*, and he returned to establish his habitual residence in San Sebastián. In the Gipuzkoan capital, he collaborated with some friends in starting businesses in the ready to wear sector, which, at the time of his death in Valencia on March 24, 1972,—due to a heart attack—, were not prospering (Balda, 2020).

## 2 Personal Flourishing Through His Profession

### 2.1 *Balenciaga, Couturier. A Marriage Between Technique and Cultural Heritage*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Frederick Worth laid the foundations for a new profession in Paris: that of a couturier (Cerrillo, 2019, pp. 55–79). In contrast to traditional dressmakers who sewed custom-made garments following the instructions of their clients, the couturier as envisioned by Worth developed the good taste and was responsible for proposing luxury novelties to clients, for dressing them exclusively and, at the same time, for working to the highest standards in terms of technique and the use of materials. Thus, the couturier had to be someone very knowledgeable in the technique of sewing and, at the same time, a creator of aesthetic novelties, which gave rise to unique garments. That is, in accordance with his standards, a couturier was comparable to an artist. Worth's idea spawned the proliferation of luxury fashion houses, referred to as haute couture. The fashion press spread Worth's concept of haute couture and publicized the names of those producing new creations in the field. At the time of Balenciaga's birth, the concept of haute couture was ingrained and it was generally accepted that the most prestigious haute couture houses settled in the French capital.

Balenciaga chose the profession with a fairly clear idea of what it meant, judging by the account of his beginnings as told in his own words in an interview with the magazine *Paris-Match* after he retired:

My father was a fisherman, my mother a village seamstress. My luck was that a woman of nobility, the Marchioness de Casa Torres, who would go on to be the grandmother of the future Queen Fabiola, had her summer residence in this small town (Getaria) near San Sebastian. I only had eyes for her when she came to church on Sunday, getting off her tilbury, with her long dresses and lace parasol. One day, I gathered all my courage and asked if I could visit her wardrobe. Amused, she accepted. And so I spent wonderful months: every day after school, I worked with the Marchioness' ironers on the top floor of the palace, caressed the lace, examined every fold, every point of all those masterpieces. I was 12 years old when the Marchioness authorized me to make an initial model for her. You can imagine my joy when, the following Sunday, this noble woman came to church wearing my dress. That's how I made my first entry into Haute Couture and high society (Merlin-Teysserre, 1968, p. 57).

The testimony shows that, while still a child, his trade standards were high. He refers to what he saw in that wardrobe of the Marchioness as “masterpieces” from which he wanted to learn. The Marchioness was, in effect, a client of some of the prestigious French haute couture houses (Arzalluz, 2010, p. 61). Probably, his mother would have already instilled in him the beauty of quality sewing, even if it was a humble garment and, thanks to her and his benefactress, he would also have had access to fashion magazines with which he was able to expand his first knowledge about haute couture of prestige.

Once he was introduced to the dynamics of the profession, first as an apprentice in a tailor shop in San Sebastián, then in the fashion section of the Louvre Department

Store branch in the city and, finally, as head of his own company, Balenciaga strove to emulate the technique of French couturiers. Back then this technique was not taught through formal training, so he decided to learn it with his own method: buying in reputed Parisian houses those designs that entailed technical difficulties that provided solutions still unknown to him. The couturier who introduced the most complex technical innovations in fashion in the 1920s was Madeleine Vionnet, who was considered “the most difficult to copy.” Balenciaga became a regular buyer of Vionnet and other prestigious Parisian houses (Jouve & Demornex, 1989, p. 23, 31). By 1925 he was already known in the Parisian haute couture circles (Andia, 1925, p. 2) and by the mid-1930s, Balenciaga had mastered the technique of the trade, thanks to his self-taught method and his tireless pursuit of matching his craft to the best. His command of technique is what allowed him to become one of the great innovators in fashion.

But innovation in fashion, the ability to create novel garments, in addition to technique, requires ideas that give rise to creations that visually, thanks to their shape and color, are aesthetically novel. Where did Balenciaga’s ideas come from? Considering that he had a long professional life, his ideas came from various sources. Among all of them, those that came from the traditional culture of his country of origin stand out. The couturier worked based on those sources, especially after settling in Paris, at a time when Spain was a particularly hot topic due to the civil war. The international fashion press were already echoing the Spanish influence in the chronicles of his first Parisian collection presented in August 1937. Coincidentally, three months earlier a new International Exhibition was inaugurated in the French capital, in which Spain wanted to be present despite the war. Picasso’s *Guernica*, which the Republican government had commissioned, was the main draw of the Spanish pavilion (Alix). In addition, popular costumes were exhibited along with photographs from “*España Tipos y Trajes*” by José Ortiz Echagüe (Ortiz-Echagüe & Montero, 2011, p. 404). At that time Pablo Picasso was a great representative of the French avant-garde. This circumstance had the effect of attracting to the exhibition personalities from broader artistic circles, among whom were representatives of fashion, such as Gabrielle Chanel (Madsen, 1988, p. 252). It cannot be ruled out, therefore, to think that, as the French dressmaker did, other couturiers, including Balenciaga, would come to see the “*Guernica*” and also enjoy the aesthetics and diversity of the popular Spanish costume. Furthermore, during the months of June, July, and August 1939, an important exhibition of works from the Prado was held at the Museum of Art and Natural History in Geneva. These paintings, among which were paintings by Diego de Velázquez and Francisco de Goya, had been evacuated from the Prado Museum during the Spanish Civil War and were exhibited before their return to Madrid (Vivas, 2006). Subsequent references in the fashion press to the influence of Spanish aesthetics in some Parisian collections are also understood in the context of this large exhibition of the Prado paintings (Miller, 2017, p. 26).

It would be consistent to deduce that all these cultural events led Balenciaga to make the decision to cultivate the aesthetics of the Spanish tradition in his future Parisian collections because he was, among all the couturiers established in the

French capital, one who could better interpret it as it formed part of his original visual imagery. In his autumn-winter 1939 collection, Balenciaga presented various dresses inspired by Velázquez's portraits of the ladies of the Spanish court, which the fashion press dubbed the *Infanta* style. The couturier sold some adaptation licenses of this dress in the United States so they could be replicated in cheaper versions. The specialized press of the time echoed the success of this Balenciaga dress at the threshold of World War II (*Women's Wear Daily* 1939, 20 September). There are also two documentary pieces of evidence that confirm Balenciaga's express intention to develop the aesthetics of traditional Spanish clothing. The first of these is his collection of historical clothing, in which some samples of popular Spanish clothing stand out. This compilation of garments did not have, in itself, a simple desire to collect, but was compiled by the couturier as a source of inspiration and work material. The second is the appearance of a copy of "El traje regional de España" among the work documentation of the couturier. It so happens that this book was also exhibited at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition (Alix, 1987, p. 169). This book, by Isabel de Palencia and published in 1926, is a compilation of texts, photographs, engravings and paintings of traditional costumes from the different Spanish regions, written with the intention of displaying the considerable wealth and diversity of traditional Spanish apparel (Palencia de, 1926, p. 9).

Fashion historians consider Balenciaga an innovator for having presented alternative proposals to the fitted Dior silhouette, which dominated the 1950s fashion world. Many of these new silhouettes were inspired by popular costumes. The Spanish cape, typical of men's clothing, and the mantle of feminine attire, are especially present and reinterpreted in multiple variations in his collections from the 1940s and 1950s. Also present in these collections were the loose shirts worn by sailors and peasantry around his native Getaria. From these garments emerged the sailor blouse and jacket and the cocktail coats made of gathered yoke, dressed by the most elegant women on the international scene. This exploration by Balenciaga of folk costume not only demonstrates his expertise in interpreting the patterns and the ornamental richness of the costume, that is, his mastery of the trade, but also his ability to innovate and to do so from tradition, thereby disseminating his cultural heritage (Balda, 2019).

## ***2.2 Balenciaga the Businessman. The Art of Converting Problems into Opportunities***

Balenciaga triumphed on the international fashion scene in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. That success was built first by his mastery of the trade and subsequently by his innovative capacity. But fashion is not just art or skill; to succeed in this area also requires entrepreneurship. Unlike today's fashion business models, where the creative and business responsibilities are often divided amongst different people, in the traditional high fashion business model of the Balenciaga era, especially in the

run-up to World War II, the majority of responsibilities fell to the same person. The couturier was a creator and, although he had financial support or the help of third parties for the different non-creative tasks, he was also a manager, in the sense that he also had to make decisions of, among other things, a commercial, financial, or legal nature. If Balenciaga is studied from this point of view, it is discovered that he had to face a multitude of problems, many belonging to the fashion sector, but others of a totally different sort. By facing these problems, his company became one of the most successful in the industry.

The couturier opened his first fashion store in San Sebastián in 1917, in the middle of World War I when the city became the destination of an international and cosmopolitan population with a high degree of purchasing power that was fleeing the war (Unsain, 2016, pp. 216–217). Thanks to Spanish neutrality and the characteristics that had made it a favorite summer vacation spot for Spanish royalty, the city offered the possibility of a quiet, luxurious life, far from the rumblings of war. The increase in wealthy population further boosted economic activity around the luxury sector and was a propitious setting for the couturier to undertake his first business venture. He was 22 years old, but with his previous professional experiences he had acquired knowledge about the city's clientele, about their tastes, and thanks to his trips to Paris as head of the women's fashion section at the *Au Louvre* department store in San Sebastián, he would already have notions about the modes of operation of the city's fashion sector. In the concept of haute couture devised by Worth, the houses that produced this type of fashion had to be centrally located, in the same area where his potential clientele resided. In addition, their salons, the rooms where clients were received, had to be decorated in the same luxury standard in which their houses were decorated (Cerrillo, 2019, p. 67). These requirements represented a significant initial financial outlay. In addition, he would have to hire the necessary personnel: cutters, dressmakers, embroiderers, ironers, models, etc., prepare a suitable workspace for them and make an initial investment in the purchase of fabrics and all the materials necessary for the manufacture of garments that were successful with his target audience. He opened the business in Vergara 2, a central street in San Sebastián, but judging from the documentation that is preserved, his first investment must not have been enough, since in 1918 he associated with the Lizaso sisters, who were dressmakers, under the name *Balenciaga y Compañía* for a period of six years. While they contributed 60,000 pesetas in cash, he contributed stocks of materials valued at 7362.25 pesetas, which would come from his professional experience during the previous year. This documentation also states that the company would be dissolved in the event of the death of the couturier, which would not happen if one of his partners died.<sup>1</sup> All this information gives testimony to the role the couturier played as the pillar of the business and to his ability to obtain the financial resources that were not at his disposal. In 1924 he established himself as "Cristóbal Balenciaga. Couturier. San Sebastián" on Avenida de la Libertad 2, a location that improved on the previous one. In October 1925, *El Pueblo Vasco*, a

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<sup>1</sup>Public Documentation from 2-8-1919, page 1.419 Registro Mercantil de San Sebastián.

local newspaper, even described the luxury atmosphere of this new House (Andia de, 1925, p. 2). So, it can be deduced that his association with the Lizaso dressmakers was profitable and that thanks to the profits obtained he was able to start his business alone, in what would be the definitive headquarters of his business in the capital of Gipuzkoa.

In the mid-1920s, the emerging middle-class bourgeoisie was replacing the aristocracy in San Sebastián (Unsain, 2016, p. 223). Moreover, the success that he had already achieved by this time gave rise to illicit copies of his designs (Arzalluz, 2010, p. 153). These factors are among the reasons that explain Balenciaga's decision to expand and diversify his offerings. Thus, in 1927 he opened another business dedicated to dressmaking. It consisted of offering a series of designs with the possibility of being adapted to clients, or of being reproduced with fabrics less expensive than those available in his haute couture workshop. In this way, he managed to lower the final price of the garments and satisfy the demand of a new type of client, who, although she did not belong to the aristocracy, was well versed in fashion and held in high esteem the Balenciaga brand.

The couturier would subsequently go back to being bold on numerous occasions. The fall of the Spanish monarchy in 1931 did serious harm to the luxury business in San Sebastián and, therefore, also his own. Instead of closing the business, as others in town did, he decided to settle where he could increase his clientele, and open his headquarters in Madrid and Barcelona, in 1933 and 1935, respectively (Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, 2019, p. 38). The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 set another stage of great economic and social uncertainty in the country. It did not seem like an auspicious moment to invest in new locations, however, Balenciaga went forward: it was the moment chosen to open his Paris headquarters and make himself known in the international fashion market (Jouve & Demornex, 1989, p. 31). World War II and, especially, the German occupation of Paris in June 1940, opened another turbulent moment in the Parisian fashion sector where Balenciaga had already successfully presented several collections since August 1937, and it turned out to be another critical moment for his business. Nevertheless, the war years were for him a period of intense work and sales in the United States. Balenciaga opened this commercial avenue thanks to Spanish neutrality during the war, and he did it not only for himself, but also for other Spanish couturiers who needed to revive their businesses after the Spanish war, such as Pedro Rodríguez and Ferrer Artigas (Vogue, 1941, p. 15).

Despite the stiff competition that the appearance of the Christian Dior brand in 1947 represented for Balenciaga, the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s were years of undeniable success. In this period, what is known as the Balenciaga style was developed, characterized by loose lines that abstract the female waist. Balenciaga's researches had an impact on the extent of his innovation and the technical and aesthetic excellence of his creations during this stage. But above all we must see in all this, Balenciaga's entrepreneurial vision for offering a remarkable and a differentiate style in order to maintain and improve his share of the luxury fashion market.

These successes, intensely praised by the international press of the day, also gave rise to an international market for illegitimate copies that caused him significant

damage. The *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* was in charge of organizing the Paris fashion shows since it was institutionalized in 1908 with the intention of making French haute couture known to the international press and buyers from prestigious fashion establishments. But the plan, according to which the fashion shows were held, gave rise to a breeding ground for illicit activities. An initial showing was held in the morning for the press, who were expressly forbidden to draw or to take photographs of the collections so that they could not immediately publish any graphic material that would generate the illicit production of copies. In the afternoon, another show was held for department store purchasing agents (Dior, 2007, pp. 114–115). Wholesalers and individual customers would see the collection in the following days. Representatives of department stores and wholesalers, unlike the others, had to pay a high fee for entering the fashion show. In the case of Balenciaga, the figure could reach the equivalent price of two evening dresses, generally the most expensive designs in a collection, but set at considerably higher prices, more than twice the usual price for private clients. It was a practice that the couturier used to avoid an excess of copies in the market, which could vulgarize his image and, consequently, harm the exclusivity for his final clients (Miller, 2017, p. 101). Despite the fact that the *Chambre* expressly prohibited the press from publishing information until four weeks after the shows were held, many fraudulent copies were made from sketches or photographs that were published in violation of the norm, immediately after these presentations, and it was even common for them to appear in store windows before the licensed copies. To deal with this problem, the couturier decided to dissociate himself from the official protocols stipulated by the *Chambre* and offer two passes separated in time: one for department store buyers, wholesalers, and private clients and the other, four weeks later, for the press. This guaranteed the exclusivity to his licensees for a month; the period necessary for the Balenciaga licensed copies to reach the points of sale (Balda, 2013, p. 422). This measure turned the press against the couturier, but served to protect his licensees and restore their confidence in his brand.

Balenciaga could have determined this problem was unsurmountable and decided, consequently, to retire. Let's not forget that on this date he was already 61 years old, that he had been working since he was 12 and that in 1956 he was enjoying undeniable recognition. However, he tried to contain the damage and, thanks to the action taken, he was able to extend the life of his business for another 12 years, until 1968, the year he decided to retire. Fashion historians consider this farewell as the end of the most flourishing era of haute couture.

### **3 Balenciaga. His Social Contribution. Concept of Fashion and Legacy**

With his creations, Balenciaga contributed to the enhancement of his clients and, consequently, contributed to their flourishing because it made them, in some way, happier. It was, indeed, the purpose of his fashion. His obsession with perfecting



technique must be understood within the framework of this objective. In his mind, fashion did not consist of an exaltation of the body, but in an exaltation of the person, of the woman, hence, design should serve to enhance the virtues and hide the imperfections of the body, which was never perfect. Diana Vreeland, fashion editor at *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, contemporary with the couturier, captures that concept well in her memoirs: "(...) He believed totally in the dignity of women. Balenciaga often said that women did not have to be perfect or beautiful to wear his clothes. When they wore his clothes, they became beautiful" (Vreeland, 1997, p. 106). Hence, some of his innovations responded to his search to find technical solutions to enhance the body, which was always limited. However, his designs were not considered by specialists as revolutionary innovations, which changed drastically from season to season, as was the case with other renowned couturiers. His latest innovations were a progression from the novelties that he had introduced in the previous season (Chavane, 1950).

The testimony of his own dressmakers corroborates the idea of the concept that inspired Balenciaga. "Many times, we performed surgery," recalls Elena Aizpitarte, a seamstress at the Barcelona workshop, trying to explain that, on occasions, it was necessary to dress more difficult bodies, which required solutions that could be satisfied only with the knowledge and mastery of extraordinary sewing (interview with the author 2018, 12 October). The couturier himself took steps to insure that his teams learned and mastered all those techniques. Various testimonies from the workers at his shops in Spain and France confirm the couturier's attention to these details because they learned how to produce garments of excellent craftsmanship. "If you showed interest, he would go to great lengths, he would show you all the secrets," said Carmen Carriches, executor of the dress of Queen Fabiola of Belgium (interview with the author 2010, June 11). He also knew that some of these workers would start their own businesses in the future, and he made sure they would be thoroughly prepared. This is the case of Emmanuel Ungaro and André Courrèges, who started their own businesses once they had achieved and acquired sufficient experience (Emilas, 2017, 143–144). Thus the couturier created a fashion philosophy, he needed to share his knowledge and experience with those who were interested and knew they would perpetuate his craft into the future. Like good masters, he contributed to the flourishing of his disciples.

This mentality of enhancing women is not original to Balenciaga himself. The French haute couture tradition, to which the couturier was an heir, worked in this direction in the period before World War II. The prestigious specialized magazines emphasized the art of the couturiers, more than other issues, such as the beauty of the models. The fashion editors saw to it that the photographers and illustrators faithfully portrayed the Parisian creations from the point of view of their inner characteristics: degree of innovation, quality of the materials used, originality with the use of color, etc. Their art had to be subordinated to display the art of fashion creators. "Concentrate completely in showing the dress, light it for its purpose and if that can't be done with art then art be damned," was the maxim of Edna Woolman Chase, the first editor of *Vogue*, in her demands of illustrators and photographers in order to work for her magazine (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006, p. 84). This concept gradually changed

throughout the 1950s and by the end of the 1960s, it was practically forgotten. The economic development of the United States and Europe had promoted a mass-produced fashion industry, inspired by the designs of Parisian haute couture, but at much more affordable prices, which satisfied the demand from middle-class women who also wanted to dress in fashion. Throughout these same decades the fashion press was already publishing articles with original photographs, never seen before in the sector, in which the art of photography supplanted that of the creators of fashion. In the same vein, the model's physiques, their beauty and the idealized bodies that appeared in the magazines, were also supplanting the aesthetic qualities of the clothes they were wearing. Thus, *prêt-à-porter* was gaining relevance to the detriment of haute couture, and the concept of elegance, which had inspired couturiers like Balenciaga, disappeared. It was at this point that the couturier decided to retire. Haute couture had ceased to be a business, but not only that, fashion would no longer move along the coordinates of enhancing women, the coordinates in which he had worked since his beginnings in San Sebastián. So it is easy to understand that some of his clients cried when they found out about the closure of the House of Balenciaga; they felt that no one would dress them like him anymore (Vreeland, 1997, p. 107).

Balenciaga's expertise was widely praised by clients, industry specialists and, as we have seen, even by his competitors. But contemporary design and conservation scholars continue to praise Balenciaga's excellence and underscore the timelessness of his fashion. Herein lies the mystery of his legacy. His work developed patterns that have not been surpassed and which continue to be solutions, to this very day, to compensate for the body's limitations and enhance its strengths, and has made him the creator of timeless fashion par excellence. Hence, the justification for Balenciaga's entry into museums is also evident. Those most critical of the conception of fashion as art recognize that Balenciaga is the exception. His creations are, due to their aesthetic qualities, worthy museum pieces. However, his fashion is not simply a matter of good taste; above all, his legacy is mostly technical. Thanks to the donations that many of his clients have made to various museums, future generations of designers will continue to study Balenciaga creations as prototypes to transform imperfect bodies into elegant silhouettes.

## 4 Conclusion

The study of practical cases is one of the possible methods for investigating the influence of art and creation in human flourishing. The work should be carried out researching a statistically significant number of cases and following a common methodology to obtain valid conclusions that could be the basis of a consistent theoretical corpus, which would be helpful, above all, in the field of education. This article, focused on specific chapters of Cristóbal Balenciaga's professional career, is an initial contribution to this avenue of research. It is a practical case, presented at the *Human Flourishing Experts Meeting*, which may already be complemented and

contrasted with the case of Antonio Gaudí, presented at the same event by Josep Maria Tarragona. From everything that has been analyzed about Balenciaga from the point of view of human flourishing, at least four conclusions can be drawn.

The first one is the importance of setting goals and being bold enough to achieve them. The chapter on the prodigious copy, narrated by the couturier himself, is clairvoyant in this sense. Balenciaga's childhood request of the Marchioness to copy one of her dresses reflects an unusual audacity, from which we can intuit a strong desire to know more and, probably, to be part of a world that, a priori, was inaccessible to him. That courage changed the course of a life, professionally linked to the sea, to a brilliant career in international fashion. From a perspective afforded by the passage of time, and with the evidences we have today on Balenciaga, the first lesson that can be extrapolated to other careers and lives is that boldness is an essential attitude for personal flourishing. But there is a second one, which should not be overlooked. It is commonly considered that to achieve a fully enriched life, the vital context of one's beginnings is decisive, as if one's initial circumstances were to impede progress on the path of life in a definitive way. From this point of view, Balenciaga's circumstances to dedicate himself to the world of haute couture were insurmountable: he was geographically and socially far from the fashion arena. However, his experience shows that the background (family, country, moment in history), while they may limit or make it more difficult to attain certain achievements, they do not make them impossible; a bold decision at the right time can eliminate barriers considered, a priori, as insurmountable (Csikszentmihaly, 1996, pp. 128–133). Subsequently, once he started in the profession in San Sebastián, he set another goal: to learn from the best and master their techniques. And for two decades, the 1920s and 1930s, he traveled to Paris regularly and worked intensely to achieve this mastery. The fact that he set himself this goal explains how he mastered the craft and is at the heart of his subsequent innovations.

The second thing we learn from his example is the necessity of resilience to achieve a fulfilling life. Balenciaga forged ahead with his creative task thanks to his persistence to not let himself be overcome by adversity. The outbreaks of the Civil War and World War II placed him in scenarios that were not exactly prone to developing a successful career in international fashion and they would have been justified occasions to abandon the profession, at least temporarily; he could have waited for the situation to improve. However, for him they became contexts to keep moving forward. This is a particularly interesting reading in light of current events. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the health and economy of a large part of the world's population and, consequently, has canceled many projects that were underway. However, the case of Balenciaga serves to understand that persevering in one's work, despite the economic limitations that appear on the horizon, can be fruitful and even profitable, once the storm has passed.

Thirdly, Balenciaga's fashion, which sought proportion and balance, in short, beauty, was based on a fact, a fundamental truth; the limitations of the human body. This truth was the basis of his creative process and is at the origin of the consistency of his brand image. Being consistent with his concept and following his path in that direction, regardless of changes in tastes or market circumstances, also explain his

**Table 1** Learnings and implications from Balenciaga as creator

Learning from balenciaga as creator	Fulfilling a flourishing life
Setting goals and boldness	Achieving personal objectives
Resilience	Personal growing and maturity
Knowing the constraints	Accomplishment of realistic goals avoiding dissatisfaction
Consistency	Objectives not varying constantly make it easier a full life
Influence on other creators	Flourishing society

success. For his customers, Balenciaga was a safe asset. It is a lesson that is applicable to the sphere of branding in the business aspect, but also applicable to that of branding from the point of view of one's own personal brand in the broader context of fulfilling one's lifelong project. The definition of objectives and the audacity to achieve them are not enough, if those objectives vary constantly, depending on the context, even to the point of contradicting each other, which only makes it more difficult to reach the ultimate goal of living a full life.

Finally, Balenciaga's experience shows that the creative process with clear and coherent objectives expands to the point of forming its own philosophical following. A good creator automatically becomes a master, transcends his own creative process, seeks to make others participate in what he has learned, and sets in motion an expansive mechanism. Balenciaga and his disciples continue to create a school of style for those who want to learn. In much the same way, the individual process of seeking a full life does not end in the subject who carries it out, but rather, thanks to the social nature of man, expands to his family, work and friendships, in other words, contributes to the construction of a flourishing society (Table 1).

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# Travel Literature as an Example of Human Flourishing



Ángel Pérez-Martínez

**Abstract** Travel Literature can be a way of approaching *eudaimonia* and an interdisciplinary meeting point. When travelling, the individual is exposed to a multiple encounter experience. On the other hand, travelling is an intergenerational experience, and it will be increasingly so. From this perspective, it is possible to enrich studies by focusing on tourism and globalization, but also on relationships with technology. It is also possible, from this angle, to open new ways of developing new narratives that deepen in the encounter with oneself, with other cultures and that define new values in an ethics of human flourishing. The attempt to synthesize Travel Literature, an “elusive genre”, does not only contribute to sort out a tenuous typology, but also evidences the need to keep thinking about two fundamental dimensions of human existence; the dimension of circumstance, and the dimension of imagination.

**Keywords** Travel literature · Human flourishing · Hispanic literature · Narrativity · Cervantes

Narrativity can be a form of knowledge, or a tool to build our identity. And the literary description of travels are a materialization of this type of narrativity. Not in a journey forced by circumstances, but the travel dictated by one’s own desires and which determines some sort of personal growth. The *Grand Tour* tradition in Europe is, in a sense, a paradox compared to other many types of journeys that have taken

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place throughout the history of humankind. The encounter with others is also described in it and is, in some ways, a study on otherness.

During travel knowledge expands in multiple directions. It is not only one type of exterior understanding, of the places and the people that the traveler chances upon during the journey. It is also a way of asking individual questions. The pursuit search for certainties begins with our own circumstance that gives shape to our way of learning. This has geographical and temporal variables. The places we visit are located, described, and appreciated based on it and they also help us change our paradigms. Therefore, the journey will allow us to expand them or alter them. In this process we transit through more or less objective spheres that overlap with our inner world. The question is: What does this have to do with human flourishing? The journey as a freely exercised option is one of the keys to deepen in its meaning.

## 1 Some Chronological Notes

For centuries, traveling was a possibility reserved to only a few, and this explains its fictional success. For a long time, with very few exceptions, there was no place for leisure cruises or scientific expeditions. Most journeys were the result of obligations related to the military or trading activities, or mere survival.

Nomadism, military exploration, migration, and the knowledge of our surroundings are—in one way or the other—phenomena that were part of human condition. These were necessary actions, although among the exceptional journeys of the ancient world it is worth mentioning those of Herodotus of Halicarnassus or Polemon of Athens. Herodotus claimed that he traveled to obtain certainties about those places that he had heard of. About Phoenicia, he wrote:

I moreover, desiring to know something certain of these matters so far as might be, made a voyage also to Tyre of Phoenicia, hearing that in that place there was a holy temple of Heracles (Herodotus., 2002).

The impulse that drove Herodotus to set off on his journeys bears a certain resemblance to the attitude that characterized philosophers of the Socratic school. These philosophers also set themselves apart from the other citizens of the polis, whose motivations were rather pragmatic or linked to immediate purposes. This link, which at first may seem as barely significant, provides an interesting clue.

According to the *Apology* (Plato, 2003), one of the allegations against Socrates is that he distracted younger minds away from public affairs to wonder about the heavens and earth. The big paradox of the Socratic school is that it is there where the scientific pattern is marked: The love for a knowledge lacking immediate or practical applications. And the departure point for this knowledge is, precisely, the awareness of his famous ignorance (Plato, 2003). Building on this carefulness, the Socratic school embarks on a project that seeks to understand the cosmos building on a logical and rational basis. In other words, searching for certainties. These are the foundations—probably invisible—of a new type of knowledge that will also be linked to ethics and aesthetics.

Similarly, Herodotus heralded a new way of traveling, based on the idea of “exploring to look at the world” (*theories héneken*), detached from any obligations, which became the prelude to the journalistic article, ethnography and modern tourism. Even more interesting is that his forays had a textual dimension from the start. His travels took him across the Persian Empire, Egypt (as far as Aswan), Libya, Syria, Babylon, Susa in modern Iran, Lydia and Phrygia. With Herodotus begins the tradition of the descriptive voyage and, even more, that of the annotation of the ancient city (Vignolo, 2001). But maybe, at this point, what is more important is that the travel has the possibility of becoming a way of acquiring knowledge, as, for example, Ryszard Kapuściński claimed (Kapuściński, 2008). The relationships between itinerancy and reflective capacity will linger afterwards. The Greek tradition did not stop there, but instead enlightened the West for a long time. The concept of the *kosmopolita*, used for the first time by Diogenes Laërtius, will have an important connection with the experience of the trip (Nussbaum, 2019).

Perhaps religious pilgrimages were another type of journeys that were not necessarily linked to classical necessities. It is necessary to take a closer look at its roots to better grasp the role it played in the history of travel, especially considering that here's where the first travel guides were written (Adams, 1983). It is also probable that the purpose of these pilgrimages was linked to some type of imperative or penance. But the truth is that both their origin and end were far from being merely pragmatic. The first pilgrimages date back to polytheistic antiquity. The Egyptians visited the sanctuary of the goddess Serket or the oracle of Amun in the Siwa desert. The Greeks traveled to Delphi to seek advice from the god Apollo and to the sanctuary of Asklepios in Epidaurus to pray for healing. Mexicans visited the Quetzal temple, Peruvians journeyed—and still do to this day—to Cuzco to partake in the Festival of the Sun celebrations, while Bolivians attended ceremonies held in lake Titicaca (Jarrett, 1911).

Traveling was also a key element in the traditions of all major religions. Buddhists started making pilgrimages to holy sites during the second century BC and the Muslim tradition the pilgrimage to Mecca is also an ancient one, although in this case there is an explicit obligation. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem—where the Ark of the Covenant rested—finds its roots in the Old Testament. In Christian Occident, there are landmarks such as the journey of Empress Saint Helena to the Holy Land in the third century, the accounts of a Gaul pilgrim's journey or Egeria's pilgrimage in the fourth century. In his work *Church History*, Eusebius of Caesarea also provides an account about of Bishop Alexander's pilgrimage from Cappadocia to Jerusalem.

Other travelers whose accounts could be considered akin to travel guides were the chroniclers. Their antecedents can be traced back to the so-called general histories penned by authors such as Isidore of Seville or Gregory of Tours in the early Middle Ages. Some were commissioned by the ruling monarchies, while others pursued more academic interests. Many of their works are indeed accounts of travels like those by British authors Raphael Holinshed or James Howell in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Bartolomé de las Casas, or Bernal Díaz del Castillo were some of the so-called chroniclers of the Indies, whose



works built on the legacy of Columbus or Vespucci's travel logs. Although it should be noted that these descriptions are the result of a political necessity to record conquests and new explorations. It is also worth mentioning the travels of explorers or merchants such as Marco Polo, whose *Il milione*, as Luis Alburquerque notes, is a descriptive story that focuses—first and foremost—on the sense of sight (Alburquerque, 2019). In other works Alburquerque also pointed at the differences between literature that includes travel-related passages and travel writing (Alburquerque, 2004).

It was erudite travelers who paved the way for a new type of narrative. With the arrival of the industrial revolution, possibilities also broadened. Since the end of the twentieth Century, thanks to large infrastructures and modern means of transportation, traveling has become democratized and an experience related to leisure, pleasure, and well-being. And this is evidenced by the phenomenon of tourism and the studies around it.

Among the authors that drew inspiration from the exploratory dynamism and enlightened pursuit, in *Emile ou de L'Education* Jean-Jacques Rousseau promoted a pedagogy of exploration and knowledge of the world which he later be applied in *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. Some of the travel works of the same era were written by authors as relevant as Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1729), Henry Fielding, *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755), Louis de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde* (1771), James Cook, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* (1777), John Barrow, *Travels in China* (1804), Melchor de Jovellanos, *Diarios* (1810) or Mesonero Romanos, *Recuerdos de Viaje por Francia y Bélgica* (1862).

The *Grand Tour* tradition, which began in the seventeenth century in Europe before spreading to other continents, was one of the key movements that contributed to expanding the concept of liberal travel. Although always reserved to the most privileged classes, it can be pointed out as a direct precedent of tourism. Afterwards—and this is a crucial point—it started expanding socially, thematically, and geographically, until there came a time where traveling became a type of action aimed at self-sufficiency and personal enjoyment. Obviously, this travel model is also linked to a narrative tradition.

We can easily access many of the travel books published during the mid and late twentieth century. And there is a whole body of travel-related literary works from the last decades of the nineteenth century that is virtually awaiting to be discovered. These works are linked to the *Grand Tour* tradition which saw traveling as a rite of passage for young aristocrats. Only a few could afford to have their experiences published. The description of the technical and scientific innovations of the first industrial revolutions can also help trace a timeline across the different chronological strata which can be extremely useful in a number of ways. For example, regarding the way cities are currently laid out, the knowledge of new cultures, tolerance or appreciation of other cuisines. As Helen Carr noted in *Modernism and Travel* transit facilities developed not only as a result of technological progress, but also of city growth, migrations, and the expansion of trade (Hulme & Youngs, 2002).

## 2 Literature and Travel in the Spanish Tradition

The relationship between literature and travel is very old. From the time of Homer the narratives included transfers. In the *Odyssey* Ulysses goes through “many cities.” Some of them are Thrace, Libya, or the Italian peninsula. This is how a very special network of trails and navigations is drawn up. This network had a subjective and objective character at the same time. Because in the history of literature many fictional characters toured real places. In the Hispanic tradition, these relationships are maintained.

The Spanish tradition includes the treatment of the trip from its beginnings. For example, in the transfers described in the *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Or the roads that Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar visits in the *Cantar del mío Cid*. In Don Quixote, the hero blooms when he begins to walk. And his travels allow him to meet other people. In these encounters the protagonist makes decisions. These possibilities transform the character and make him a better knight. Cervantes makes a new configuration of virtue. The narrative exposure of a madman to the world of decisions is paradoxical. And this character flourishes by cultivating virtues in the realm of fantasy.

In the contemporary Hispanic tradition, we can cite Miguel de Unamuno, Benito Pérez Galdós, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Camilo José Cela, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Javier Reverte, or Alfonso Armada. In Latin America we can mention Domingo Sarmiento, José Martí, José Juan Tablada, José Clemente Orozco, Gilberto Owen, Ricardo Rojas, José de la Riva Agüero, Luis Rafael Sánchez, or Alejo Carpentier. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many authors in Spain and Latin America made numerous trips from new perspectives. From the betrayal of the travel story, that is the non-fiction, we find works such as the *Viaje a Rusia* by Josep Pla, published in 1925. The author, a young journalist, describes Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is the chronicle of a traveler who arrives from Catalonia and who contributes precisely with his new vision of the others.

## 3 Some Notes on Cervantes

The idea of travel is found in Cervantes’ work in several ways. In the *Quijote* we find it on the routes that the protagonist undertakes. For example, in the *Novelas ejemplares* in the mentions of the routes and places where the characters move. Cervantes projects his life experience and his own travels into his works. There is a very interesting theoretical background in Cervantes’ works that relates travel and movement. This, apparently redundant, is embedded in more complex reflections. In some way the trip is also connected with the inner experience of the traveler. Precisely because every trip is a change, and change affects us. Deep down, Cervantes invites us to experience movement on the moral plane. This idea is found in many of his works. For example, in *La Gitanilla*, one of the so-called *Novelas ejemplares* (Exemplary Novels). In *La Gitanilla* the protagonist is a young

dancer. The prejudice about the young dancers was a reality in the writer's time. But travel is a form of movement. For a long time it was thought that this change could affect people's moral lives. Cervantes exposes a young woman in *La Gitanilla* to two types of movements: travel and dance. And its protagonist has extraordinary moral qualities.

Following this tradition, Cervantes takes the protagonist of the *Quijote* through different places in Spain such as Ávila, Barcelona, Cartagena, Ciudad Real, Córdoba, Cuenca, Madrid, or Seville. Other sites such as Sicily, Ceylon, Brittany, Crete, Germany, Denmark, or Egypt are also mentioned. There is a certain global consciousness in *Don Quixote*, which, adapted to its time and circumstances, is part of a cosmopolitan tradition. This breadth of horizons has generated different ways of approaching the novel.

And on the other hand, there is the impulse or the energy that these journeys have generated in many authors. The real places that drive the creation of fictional places. Or the routes that the characters in the novel have traveled, and that travelers want to follow.

Among the travelers who arrived in Spain following the *Don Quixote* route we find writers such as Théophile Gautier, August Jaccaci, and Waldo Frank. The first of them wrote a book entitled *Voyage en Espagne* (Paris, 1843). In this book the author approaches Spain with the spirit of nineteenth century French Romanticism. The second is entitled *On the Trail of Don Quijote* (London, 1897) and is a much more Cervantine journey. Here Jaccaci proves to be a great reader of Cervantes' novel. Jaccaci follows the same route as *Don Quixote* and is a good example of a traveling reader who recreates the novel with a travel story. Another famous writer who traveled these roads was Waldo Frank with *Virgin Spain: Scenes from the Spiritual Drama of Great People* (New York, 1926).

Jaccaci's work later influenced Hispanic authors. This is the case of Azorín with his *Ruta de Don Quijote* (Azorín, 1905). There the Spanish author proposed a new way of reading the novel by Cervantes. In it the reader goes through the places related to *Don Quixote*. Most are small towns. This attention to the smaller populations is a new way of traveling. It is in some way opposed to the European *Grand Tour*. It is also interesting that a journalist like Azorín cares about these humble places to portray the flow of existence there. Other writers who were inspired by Jaccaci were the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, who published an article entitled "En tierra de don Quijote" (Darío, 1905). In that sense, the work of the North American author was the initiator of the quixotic literary routes (García Naranjo, 2010).

A new type of traveler is developed, the literary traveler, as Felisa Ferraz (Ferraz Gracia, 2020) has well pointed out. It is very interesting to observe how fiction can generate social phenomena such as the literary journey. In some ways this type of journey is also a path for the encounter with oneself and for human flourishing. The idea of following the same paths as the characters in novels and stories is fascinating. Some readers even confuse fact and fiction. An attempt has been made, for example, to discover the place that the narrator of *Don Quixote* did not remember. And on the route of *Don Quixote*, several towns are crossed that could be the protagonist's

homeland. The *Lonely Planet* guidebook recommends, for example, five essential places on the Don Quixote route: Puerto Lapice, Argamasilla de Alba, Campo de Criptana, El Toboso, Ruidera, and the Montesinos' Cave.

## 4 The Liberal Travel

We come to an interesting crossroads. From the twentieth century on, the phenomenon of travel favored liberality over formal approaches. As we saw above, with the advent of the industrial revolution, the possibilities of travel also increased. Since the end of the twentieth century, thanks to large infrastructures and modern means of transportation, traveling has become democratized and an experience that can be linked to leisure, pleasure, and well-being. And this is evidenced by the phenomenon of tourism and the studies around it. A definition may help us to delimit the concept. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, tourism is: "The act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while making use of the commercial provision of services"<sup>1</sup> (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2015).

There are several elements that stand out in this travel modality compared to preceding ones. The first is the relationship between temporality and recreation. This definition of "spending time" in search of recreation opens a path for solving the classic paradox between leisure and business. From a philosophical standpoint, for example, travel is an area where more work could be conducted. There is a connection between the reflective leisure of philosophers and their journeys, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau explained in his *Confessions*:

I am unable to reflect when I am not walking: the moment I stop, I think no more, and as soon as I am again in motion my head resumes its workings (Rousseau, 1903, pág. 205).

On this topic and more, we have access to quite interesting works such as *The meaning of travel* by Emily Thomas which devotes passages to authors such as Confucius, Michel de Montaigne, Descartes, Bertrand Russell, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Henry David Thoreau, or Albert Camus.

Travel as a form of knowledge will be a pattern that many thinkers, writers, and artists will follow. "A journey to strange countries," wrote Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset "is a spiritual artifice that enables a rebirth of our personality; therefore, a new childhood, a new youth, a renewed maturity, a new life with its complete cycle" (Ortega y Gasset, 2020). This idea is closely linked to the concept of human flourishing. In recent decades, philosophy has also reflected on the importance of narrativity in human development. Some authors who have participated in

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<sup>1</sup>Tourism. (2015). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.

this debate are Edmund Pincoffs (Pincoffs, 1971), Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1981), and Stanley Hauerwas (Hauerwas, 1975).

Tourism as an activity linked to recreation or happiness is also a singular event. Being removed from the realm of obligation, free action in pursuit of pleasure also seems to be the object of a certain level of judgment. According to Anscombe, connecting with that which is necessary is one of the formulas of moral rebirth (Anscombe, 1958). In this line, considering the leisure trip as a necessity may seem preposterous from a merely pragmatic perspective, but it fits into this new formula proposed by Anscombe. And it is an interesting way of connecting the human flourishing with some aspects of contemporary travel.

Another key facet of contemporary travel is that it has been markedly global since its inception. It is true that tourism is such a broad phenomenon that we need to be careful when analyzing it, since its consequences are not always positive. Besides, we here are not referring to mass tourism alone, but also to those individual trips that are possible thanks to a complex and functional travel system. And also, as we will see below, journeys that can be described and which combine a narrative side and human expansion. The tourist trip is a democratization of the *Grand Tour*. Mass travel can also transform destinations to an extent such that the influx of visitors has a detrimental impact on them. This has happened in landmarks such as Venice, Machu Picchu, or Taj Mahal.

In the midst of the twenty-first century, traveling has become an experience within the reach of more than half of the world's population. "Millennials" view it as an enriching activity that adds to their vital experiences and consider it a top aspiration, even more so than saving, according to a report by Bank of America (Bank of America, 2017). In a technologically and linguistically connected world, the best way of learning is traveling. There are many ways to travel, and tourism has become tremendously diversified. A study of the experiences linked to voluntary travel, of its possibilities and its impact on the lives of human beings, would be highly connected to the aforementioned eudaimonic notions.

## 5 The Narrative Description and Its Value for the Journey

According to Ferrater Mora's dictionary of philosophy, happiness has different definitions (Ferrater, 2005). Aristotle links it to practical wisdom or the exercise of virtue. This definition is very close to the idea of the liberal, narrative journey that we are considering. Going back to some of Hauerwas' tenets, narrativity can be a key to coherence between existence and experience. In that sense, the account of a journey is a way of becoming aware of one's own self and a description of his/her place in the cosmos. And if the world is also an alien one, then the description takes on a special significance. Chancing upon new territories and on other inhabitants enriches us because it enables us to acquire new perspectives that can offer epistemological,

psychological, and social novelties. A world where communication systems enable different ways of traveling, results in many experiences worthy of narration. Here, the trip is open to the possibility of becoming a shared experience, thanks precisely to their texts. These stories will inspire many travelers to set off on these routes and who will write about them again. Other travelers will become readers of the former, weaving in the process a network of interconnected travels and stories, similarly to a river system with its sources, tributaries, and main rivers.

The study of travel from literature has already spawned a literary genre, with works spanning a broad array of fields. A touchstone is Percy G. Adams' book *Travel literature and the evolution of the novel*. From travel guides to blogs such as *Humans of New York*, travel-related publications have taken many different shapes.

Travel writing as a genre is a narrative form that encompasses two descriptive spheres: Its very definition poses a problem that was already present in the reflective genesis of literature. It is a peculiar genre that has roamed across different areas without finding its place in the theory. It has spanned links across a wide variety of fields of knowledge, including social science, botany, cartography, or economics. But these links have lacked philological interest, at least as far as their characterization is concerned. Currently, John Lerner and Luis Albuquerque's works can be considered some of the most pivotal for the genre. Tzvetan Todorov and Paul Fussell are two other seminal authors.

The attempt to synthesize an "elusive genre," borrowing from Luis Albuquerque's, does not only contribute to sort out a tenuous typology, but also evidences the need to keep thinking about two fundamental dimensions of human existence: the dimension of the personal circumstance of imagination.

These considerations will not only help heighten the appreciation for a genre of relevance for literary history, but also develop formulas and tools to maximize the value and enjoyment extracted from it. When traveling, the individual is exposed to a multiple encounter experience. On the other hand, it offers an intergenerational experience. And will become increasingly so in the future.

Following this line of work, we can set forth several notes. Travel writing can be a way of approaching eudaimonia and an interdisciplinary meeting point. From this perspective, it is possible to enrich studies by focusing on tourism and globalization, but also on relationships with technology. It is also possible, from this perspective, to open new ways of developing new narratives that deepen in the encounter with oneself, with other cultures and that define new values in an ethics of human flourishing.

Although the relationship between literature and travel goes a long way back, it was during the second part of the twentieth century when it became an important condition for many writers, as Peter Hulme notes in *Traveling to Write (1940–2000)*. I will also mention here some more contemporary authors who have also written about their journeys: DH Lawrence, Graham Greene, George Orwell, Hillaire Belloc, John Steinbeck, Paul Theroux, Salman Rushdie, or Cees Nooteboom.

This bond became an important part of contemporary travel and later spread to other media such as radio, television, and—today—Internet platforms. Blogs, for example, broadened the spectrum of this narrative to many other social spheres and allowed many to share their experiences with a public forum.

The journey linked to freedom, and ultimately well-being has been addressed from multiple points of view in recent times. One of the areas of work has been, for example, the studies on tourism. This is attested by repositories such as the UNWTO Library. However, due to its descriptive—and therefore, reflective—nature, most of the work has focused on the genre of travel literature. This point of view integrates many intersections, including the travel guide. But perhaps another confluence is possible from ethics and the pursuit of *Eudaimonia* by many travelers.

## 6 The Liberal Journey and the 2020 Pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis has confirmed that liberal travel depends largely on scientific, social, and technological progress. And this something that has become increasingly clear in the current scenario. This is the first time in contemporary history that the global transportation system has been compromised in such a way. Traveling during these months of crisis has only been possible if justified, i.e., if prompted by some sort of obligation or necessity. The contagion threat has narrowed the possibilities of travel down to what they were centuries ago. The liberal journey is hindered by a world where hazards expose us to situations similar to those that others faced in eras long-gone.

This crisis has also laid bare the relationships between travel and the economic and social system of today's world. The tourism industry accounts for 7% of international trade. According to the World Tourism Organization's forecasts at the time of this writing, international travel is expected to contract by 60 to 80% as a result of the pandemic (Pololikashvili, 2020). When any of the building blocks of the social system falter, so does the liberal journey, and the impact of the tourism industry's crisis ripples across many other sectors of trade and the economy.

But the crisis also has an impact beyond the financial world. It also—and perhaps this is something that should not be overlooked—affects the many people's inner lives. Travel, considered as an experience of rebirth, has been greatly limited during this crisis. The right to travel because one wishes to, to travel in pursuit of *eudaimonia*, is faced with many hurdles. This reality resulted in a feeling of frustration among travelers, among those who have been forced to cancel trips they had planned or who simply are witnessing how their countries, regions, or cities lock down. Thus, a new form of claustrophobia, so to speak, has emerged, likely as a result of the limitations of freedoms, and linked precisely to these experiences that yield an external and internal discovery. All this confirms that the liberal journey has become one of the contemporary formulas for well-being and that confinement is a great disturbance.

## 7 Some Ideas to Conclude

It is curious that in the philosophical tradition the concept of happiness, understood as the ultimate goal of the action or the end that it pursued, was addressed by ethics. However, ethics' main area of focus since modernity has been the analysis of certain aspects of the improvement of human action: codes of moral order and their consequences. The study of the concept of happiness in its different versions has rather shifted towards the field of psychology, economics, and the social sciences. In the middle of the twentieth century, several authors drew attention to how ethics was focusing mainly on deontology and regulations. We can mention, for example, the works of (Anscombe, 1958), (Gustafson, 1968), (Murdoch, 1970), (Pincoffs, 1971), (Lawrence, 1975), (Foot, 1978), (Stocker, 1976), (MacIntyre, 1981), (Taylor, 1985) and (Hauerwas, 2001) are some of the thinkers who have engaged in a very productive exchange.

On the other hand, authors such as Felicia Huppert, Timoty So, and Martin Seligman have approached the Human Flourishing proposal from a psychological perspective (Seligman, 2011). Seligman also warned about the dangers of a coercive theory that defines happiness as a type of monistic satisfaction and proposes to enrich by means of the theory of Well-Being, interweaving the concepts of flourishing and that of eudaimonia. Travel writing fits here because it helps to learn, develop positive human relationships, foster a vital purpose, and promote new skills making us more resilient.

The bridge that spans between the aforementioned philosophical authors and the new psychological theories merits completion. The journey recounted in a textual way can be a part of this structure, contributed by philology.

The virtues of Travel Writing are not limited to their value works of literature. They are an invitation to think. The possibilities of the journey are multiplied in the questions that lie in its inception. What is beyond our borders? Is it possible that there are others like us? What are the customs in distant lands? These issues, too, drive journeys that are yet to be made, but are present in the imagination of science fiction authors. These considerations will foster not only the appreciation for a genre of relevance for literary history, but also the development of formulas and tools to maximize the value and enjoyment extracted from it. When traveling, the individual is exposed to a multiple encounter experience. On the other hand, traveling is an intergenerational experience, and it will be increasingly so.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we can also arrive at several conclusions: the liberal and narrative journey depends on our preventive capacities, scientific development, and global agreements. But above all, on the respect for freedoms and rights. Many people see the traveling experience as a need linked to eudaimonia, and being deprived of it is having an impact on their psychological and moral lives. The contemporary travel system is still fragile and the consumption of narrative travel in light of recent events is a confirmation of our need for well-being.

If philosophical leisure allowed using time to acquire new knowledge, this knowledge also expanded towards the achievement of aesthetics and pleasure. The



former enabled scientific development and, thus, the establishment of progress in many societies. A progress that allows human beings to enjoy freedoms that used to be out of reach, one of them being contemporary travel.

Following this line of work, we can set forth several notes. Travel Writing can be a way of approaching *eudaimonia* and point where different disciplines meet. From this perspective, it is possible to enrich studies by focusing on tourism and globalization, but also on well-being and its relationships with technology. It is also possible to allocate resources to the development of new narratives that deepen the encounter with oneself, with people from different cultures, and contribute to the human flourishing.

My recommendations can perhaps be understood as reading proposals. Reading about travel can enrich our perspective on the world. Not only those descriptions that come from the wonderful fantasy of many authors. Also the reading of non-fictional travel stories, which provide objective data and suggestive comparisons.

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# Antoni Gaudí in Human Flourishing



Josep Maria Tarragona i Clarasó

**Abstract** The great architect Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (1852–1926) is one of the shining lights of humanity on its path to social and individual perfection.

Through his works, his life, and his teaching to his disciples and collaborators, we can easily describe a real form of human flourishing. Millions of people from every corner of the world are interested in the works of Gaudí and the positive impact it has on humanity.

In this chapter, first we discuss human flourishing in the life and the teachings to his disciples of Gaudí, how Antoni Gaudí achieved his own flourishing; secondly, we indagate about how his art works are contributing to the flourishing of millions of human beings and, finally, we illustrate our opinions with three examples of Gaudí's works which demonstrate to others ways to flourish themselves.

**Keywords** Gaudí · Sagrada Família · Human flourishing · Park Güell · La Pedrera

## 1 Introduction. Why Antoni Gaudí?

Great artists are precisely those who are most aware of man's longing to flourish, and how this can be achieved. Antoni Gaudí dedicated his life to architecture, the mother of plastic arts. His process for designing and building La Sagrada Família was similar to that of medieval architects. Not only did he design the project, but he also had his workshop on-site, was in charge of the procurement of materials, selected and managed the workers involved and directly managed all operations.

Gaudí was also a conscientious citizen of his home country, Spain, and played an active role in social, intellectual, political and religious circles. And in looking at his works, his life and his teachings to disciples and collaborators, we can clearly see an authentic form of human flourishing. Millions of people from every corner of the world are interested in Gaudí's work and the positive impact it has had on humanity.

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His example is a light for humankind on its path to social and our individual improvement.

In this paper, first we discuss Gaudí's own flourishing by examining his life and the teachings he imparted to his disciples. Second, we explore how his work contributes to millions of people's flourishing. And lastly, we offer our opinions of ways to flourish based on Gaudí example.

However, before delving into these three realms, we must understand the concept of *human flourishing*. The myriad of philosophical schools, moral systems, spiritual trends and religions gather humanity's experience of living a happy life. The concept of *human flourishing* goes back to the Ancient Greeks, to the concept of *eudaimonia*. We can look at the four schools that deal with the concept.

Plato considers *eudaimonia* to be achieved through virtue, giving the individual a harmonious and coherent soul. All factors related to *eudaimonia* are within the soul. Aristotle tells us that to lead an *eudaimonic* life, in addition to personal virtue, five external goods are needed: health, wealth, physical beauty, good friends and good children. Epicurus' school of thought is more pragmatic. It identifies the purpose of human life to be achieving maximum pleasure and the absence of pain. And the Stoics, within their moral philosophy, practise restraint, converting virtue into the greatest good.

All the teachings within these Greek schools of thought have their foundations in Socrates. They all believe in the existence of a world beyond the material one. And call it what you like, my reader: spirits, demons, gods, souls, angels, etc., but Socrates demonstrates that the individual soul, the spiritual part of man, survives beyond death and is itself immortal.

This is the framework within which Westerners tend to situate themselves. Around the world, we find other philosophies, spiritualities, religions, paths of wisdom that also tell us of the existence of a world beyond and of souls that survive death.

Jesus of Nazareth, four centuries after Socrates, five after Buddha, Confucius and Laozi, 12 after the oldest Vedas, 14 after Moses and a lot more centuries still after the wisdom and religions which were orally passed on within Africa and America, expounds on what these philosophers, moralists and religious leaders were so eager to seek. According to him, happiness has eight components, which happy individuals live so deeply and so closely that together they constitute their very personalities. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Mt. 5, 1–12) (THE BIBLE, n.d.).

Finally, with science's progress, we can count on the many happiness-related contributions from the field of psychology. For example, while there are no pills for happiness, we do know what dopamine is, and what the neurological foundations of our emotions and attitudes are in the brain.

Human flourishing cannot be understood from positive psychology alone. Mathew T. Lee—also an author for this book—states that “Determining whether a person is flourishing therefore requires a holistic appraisal of the most important ends of human life. There will always be some disagreement about the ends that are

most important, but it is clear which domains most people would include” (Lee, 2021).

In this chapter, we consider five areas that allow for credible quantitative measuring: Happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships. As VanderWeele explains, “Each of these is nearly universally desired, and each constitutes an end in and of itself” (VanderWeele, 2021).

It is difficult to imagine a flourishing human that does not possess these five domains in their life. Yet, the total development of a human being, one’s full realization, transcends to a different world, full of *Beauty*. It is a world where Beauty is absolute, and where the relative beauty of the things of this world is but a mere reflection of it, a small participation in it. In that world, Beauty transcends individuality and materiality; that is, the identifying traits of a truly human life, of a life at its fullest, are community with others (over individualism), and spiritual life (over materialism). As Gaudí once said: “Man without religion is a spiritually lacking man, a mutilated man” (Bergós, 1954, p. 50).

## 2 The Architect Behind La Sagrada Familia

Antoni Gaudí i Cornet was born in Baix Camp (Catalonia) on June 25, 1852. He was a sickly child, which prevented him from going to school and forced him to spend long periods of time in his family’s farmhouse in the small village of Riudoms. There he observed and learned the light of the Mediterranean and nature’s shapes, which he would always consider his great teacher. Helping his father in his boilermaking workshop, he learned the virtues of hard work and how surface volume can be transformed, which greatly developed his spatial imagination.

He eventually studied at the Piarist Fathers of Reus School. During the Glorious Revolution of 1868, he moved to Barcelona to pursue a degree in architecture, his life’s passion. He was a bad student, but he spent a lot of time contemplating photographs of oriental buildings and he frequently listened in on philosophy, aesthetics and history classes. He also attended concerts (classical and contemporary), plays, poetry readings and intellectual gatherings. Gaudí also visited and studied all of the monuments and landscapes of Catalonia. And eventually would become one of the most influential figures of the Catalan renaissance, also known as *La Renaixença*. In 1878, Gaudí finished his studies. The director of his university’s School of Architecture commented to the other members of the faculty: “Today we have given an architecture degree to a madman or a genius” (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 63).

Initially, to make a living, he worked as a draftsman for engineers and architects including Josep Fontserè, who was the landscape architect behind Barcelona’s Ciutadela Park; Francisco del Villar, who restored Montserrat; and Joan Martorell, architect of Sagrado Corazon church and the Visitandines, among other noteworthy churches.

Eventually, he became a successful professional and frequented the best restaurants, enjoyed the best liquors, as well as the best Havana cigars. That's why, when he was working on La Sagrada Família, on his feast day, (the feast of Saint Anthony), his workers gifted him a case of cigars (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 127).

Gaudí was conscious from a very young age that he was an artistic genius, and that his ideas were not a repetition or a mere continuity of other architects' work up to that time. The only thing that he feared was that no other architect had put these ideas into practice before, and that he would be the first. He had studied and learned the geometric laws throughout nature—the Creator's masterpiece—and he was trying to create art with similar principles. His aim was not to copy Creation, but to cooperate with its Creator. He affirmed that originality consists of returning to the origin.

In 1878 he met prominent businessman Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi. Güell i Bacigalupi had a great artistic sensibility and understood Gaudí and became one of his best friends and primary clients: the Güell Pavilions (1884–1887), the Palau Güell (1886–1888), the Cellar Güell (1895–1897), the refuge of El Catllaràs (1905) and two of Gaudí's most creative works from the later chapters of his career: Park Güell (1900–1914) and the church of factory town Colònia Güell (1908–1917).

After the death of his brother Francesc, his sister Rosa and his mother, Gaudí took care of his niece Roseta, (whose father had abandoned her and her mother previously) and his elderly father Francesc.

As a young man he lived very close to the workers behind his projects and wanted to thoroughly understand their problems, specifically the poor living conditions. At the time of the International Workingmen's Association—with the socialist trend of Marx and the anarchist trend of Bakunin—, Gaudí was an architect of the Cooperative Mataronense (1874–1885), which supported merging capital and work into one element: worker cooperatives. The Cooperative Mataronense was Catalonia's first factory and one of its first cooperatives in the world.

In 1883, at the age of 31, Gaudí was commissioned to continue the work of La Sagrada Família, which had already begun. He moved his office on-site and deeply appreciated the religious and artistic motivation behind the temple. Throughout 43 years, until his death, Gaudí dedicated his time to developing this grand basilica, with his ideas on structure, form and symbolism working in perfect synchrony with the shapes he took from nature.

Gaudí was friends with several clergymen who had innovative ideas concerning social and liturgical reforms: poet Fr. Jacinto Verdager; Bishop Joan Baptista Grau from Astorga, who had entrusted him with designing and building the Episcopal Palace (1887–1893); Fr. Enric d'Ossó, founder of the congregation of St. Teresa of Jesus, who had also entrusted him to build the Central School (1888–1889); Bishop Pere Campins from Majorca, who had entrusted him to reform the cathedral (1903–1914) and Bishop Josep Torras i Bages from the town of Vic.

Simultaneous with his work on La Sagrada Família, Gaudí designed other buildings, not only for Güell and the Church, but for clients. These works include El Capricho (1883–1885), Vicens House (1883–1888), Calvet House (1898–1899), Batlló House (1904–1906), Bellesguard (1900–1909) and La Pedrera (1906–1911).

In 1894, his religious life progressively intensified. During Lent that year, at the age of 42, his fasting almost killed him. In 1906, he moved to live near Park Güell, situated at the top of the Gràcia neighbourhood. Every morning he walked down from his house to Saint John's parish in Gràcia to take part in the Eucharist. From there, he continued on to La Sagrada Família. Every evening after work Gaudí went to the Oratory of St. Philip Neri to pray and to meet with his spiritual director, Fr. Lluís Maria de Valls. With the conviction that without sacrifice improvement is impossible, he submitted himself to a life of penance and voluntary poverty.

Gaudí had expressed his desire to die in the Christian charity's hospital Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, like the poor of his time. God granted him this desire. On Monday June 7, 1926, he was knocked down by a tram. The people who found him didn't realize that he was Gaudí. Because of his haggard appearance, they mistook him for a beggar and took him to the hospital. Three days later, on June 10, surrounded by his friends, he pronounced his last words: "Amen. My God! My God!" (Tarragona, 2018).

Droves on people took to the street on the day of his funeral and accompanied his body from the hospital down to the crypt of La Sagrada Família, where he is buried to this day (Tarragona, 2018).

### 3 Happiness and Life Satisfaction

One afternoon when Gaudí was with Joan Matamala, they caught the tram to return home together. A couple sat behind them and the husband, turning his head towards his wife, mused:

Do you see that gentleman in the hat, right in front of us? He's the man behind La Sagrada Família. They say he's crazy.

The wife leaned forward nosily throughout the entire trip trying to catch a better look at the crazy man, who continued unperturbed reading his newspaper.

When they got off the tram, Gaudí said to his companion:

Did you hear that? I'm a madman! What do you think?

You shouldn't pay too much notice... People say so many stupid things!

"What can one do? Praise the Lord!" he replied (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 351)

Fullness, for many artists, consists of partaking in Glory. Leonardo da Vinci cried when he finished *The Last Supper* because he felt he hadn't been able to translate Christ's glory. Rafael, though he didn't cry, was distraught by the time he finished *The Transfiguration*, because the Jesus he had painted didn't match up to what he had hoped it would be (Puig-Boada, 1981, p. 226).

Gaudí said: "To portray something correctly, we must first love this something; technique comes second" (Puig-Boada, 1981, p. 170). The work of man, especially in the case of an artist, is the *verbum cordis* of Thomas Aquinas, "uttered, but not

vocalized”, an action that engages the whole person, so that the fruit of his labour is like a son or daughter (Aquinas, T.: *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, responsio) (Aquinas, (1254-1257). In every detail, in every design, Gaudí repeatedly poured himself, and with the physical pain this meticulous and painstaking work caused.

But this process was a sort of ascension, a ladder with its rungs. Because he followed St. Ignatius of Loyola’s formula of continually striving to improve himself, that man must always work to better himself (Puig-Boada, 1981, p. 171).

This path is fraught with mistakes, which are the consequences of self-confidence. To make fewer mistakes, systematic repetition is key. Things need to be done and redone to spot and avoid previous errors. “Patience achieves everything”, explains St. Teresa of Ávila (Teresa of Ávila, sixteenth century; , 1979).

Gaudí was often pleased with the results of his work. As Clarasó once said, nothing helps your well-being like being totally dedicated, fully committed to one’s work. And that our maximum well-being is achieved when our interior actions coincide with our external actions (Clarasó, 1957). This was the main source of happiness in Gaudí’s life. For example, in 1909 he designed the Temporary Schools for street children. Though the building materials were very humble (bricks, wooden planks, etc.), the result was a masterpiece. It cost some 8000 pesetas, which he personally covered out of pocket. The architect personally designed the windows, the furniture—including the 150 ingenious desks, which only cost 500 pesetas—and the bathrooms. He showed it off with great satisfaction to his architect colleagues and the school would later impress Le Corbusier on his visit to Barcelona in 1928 (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 262).

During the last years of Gaudí’s life, some students from the School of Architecture went to offer their help at La Sagrada Família. Gaudí expressed how much it encouraged him to see so many young faces and got them all involved in some way. He confessed to them that he worried about not having anyone to say hello to around town, since all his friends would scuttle off around the corner when they’d see him to avoid being asked for donations for his projects (Tarragona, 2019a, p.300). “Everything that we can do for the good of La Sagrada Família”, he affirmed, “we must take upon ourselves as a sacrifice, because sacrifice is the only fruitful route” (Martinell, 1999, p. 39). Antoni Gaudí would explain to the young architects that joined his team: “No person can be fruitful without sacrifice”.

Gaudí also said that there is no one who is not useful to society; everyone is good at something. The question lies in knowing what everyone can do. Perfection in society is achieved when everyone contributes to the best of their abilities (Puig-Boada, 1981, p. 169).

He believed that life is about loving and to love is to sacrifice. “Flourishing is the fruit of individual sacrifice for the good of the community. And when all the members of the community sacrifice for the good of the whole, flourishing is at its maximum” (Torras i Bages, 1916).

On the Feast of St. Joseph in 1926, the first bell tower, copiously lit with magnesium lamps, could be spotted from a big area of Barcelona. It was the tallest building in Catalonia at the time, measuring 102.60 m.



They had already withdrawn the scaffolding and the finished belfry could be seen perfectly, with its iron and cement frame made using the novel technique using reinforced concrete, and clad in Venetian mosaic *trencadís*.<sup>1</sup> It is a magnificent abstract sculpture measuring nearly 17 metres high, with the abstract symbols of a bishop, successor of the apostles: his crozier, a ring, the mitre and the pectoral cross. The ring is oriented towards the cross of where the tower to Jesus Christ now stands. A ray of light would gleam from this cross to the ring and another from this ring to the outside ground of the basilica, as a symbol of the materialization of the words of Jesus Christ to the apostles: You are the light of the world. The doctrine of Jesus Christ reaches, through the bishops of the Catholic Church, the entire world.

Gaudí firmly believed that man without religion is a spiritually lacking creature. He experienced his most positive emotions, his brain at its best, his deepest growth as a human within the framework of his own religious practice. The progress of his religious life also helped hone and safeguard his creativity from birth, along with his resilience and kind temperament (Tarragona, 2009).

#### 4 Mental and Physical Health

Though Gaudí had previously enjoyed the best food and drink money could buy, it was precisely because of his work on La Sagrada Família that his relationship with life's pleasures changed. After reading the books of St. Teresa of Ávila looking for inspiration for the design of the basilica's Façade of the Nativity during Lent in 1894 he overdid his fasting to the point of near starvation. Neither his father nor his niece nor his friend, Dr. Pere Santaló, were able to convince him to eat. They called Gaudí's friend Josep Torras i Bages, an intellectual priest, who was skilled at forming convincing arguments:

My good friend, Antoni, although sacrifice is always the most heroic and meritorious act for achieving eternal life, it does not mean it is necessary to torment oneself in this way. Life is short and flies by very quickly! Therefore, a man should not abandon it by his own will, but by that of God. And with greater reason in your case, as your mission on this earth is clear, to carry out your work which was so desired by God for the spiritual nourishment of Christians (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 162–163).

His devoutness intensified with the years and on until the end of his life. He shared Socrates' belief that the body is only a temporary vessel for the soul and that human flourishing needs to prevent the body from sullyng the soul, and therefore less capable of having a fulfilling life (Plato, 385–370 BC, 1962).

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<sup>1</sup>Trencadís is a Catalan term that literally means “chopped” and is the name for this artistic method that was popularized in twentieth century Catalan modernism by Gaudí and Josep Maria Jujol. It is a mosaic-like effect, achieved by cementing together random shards and pieces of broken chinaware piece by piece like a jigsaw. Sometimes other materials are used, like glass, buttons or shells.

He decided to not use undershirts or long johns. He explained that the body is designed to put up with the cold of winter and heat of summer. When he sat on stone benches, as he liked to do, he explained that the cold of the stone did not hurt him at all. In the coldest days of winter, he would put newspaper pages between his skin and clothing, as German soldiers used to do in the trenches (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 187).

By then, the man who once was dressed by the finest tailors, ate at the most fashionable restaurants, and who took horse-drawn carriages to his construction sites to avoid dirtying his boots which shined at night during his visits to the Liceu now dressed like a popper. He only ever used one of two suits, he rarely ate out and he travelled on foot or by the public tram.

A number of unresolved problems accumulated in Gaudí's life and ultimately, at 58, his psychological health paid the toll. His dispute with Milà, the husband of Roser Segimon who owned La Pedrera,<sup>2</sup> together with Roseta's illness, the lack of funds for La Sagrada Família and the commercial failure of Park Güell all led to a decline in Gaudí's health.

For the first time in his life, he needed a holiday. Torras i Bages, who at the time was Bishop of Vic, settled him into the Rocafiguera family's home, one of the most sumptuous Baroque mansions in Vic, so that he could rest. Mrs. Concepció Vila, widow of Rocafiguera, was delighted to accept the task the bishop had asked of her to try to get an extremely frail Gaudí to gain a few kilos. She put him in the guest wing, with a sitting room and bedroom, and decorated with elegant curtains and sumptuous decor. The architect opted to sleep on the floor (Tarragona, 2021).

Antoni Gaudí returned to Barcelona a short time after. But in May 1911, he fell ill. Only those closest to him were aware of his suffering and could accurately understand what he was going through: the loss of his father, Roseta's increasingly compromised health, the non-completion of La Pedrera, the exasperatingly slow progress of La Sagrada Família. . . Dr. Pere Santaló, one of the few who knew about everything Gaudí was dealing with, diagnosed him with Malta fever.

The only possibility for a cure was bed rest at a high altitude, so Santaló chose the nearby village of Puigcerdà, where the architect could be completely isolated for a time.

Roseta remained in the hands of the maid and nuns who took care of her. The two friends settled into the Hotel Europa. Santaló prohibited visits and he gave any reports on the state of his patient on his visits into Barcelona.

Such was the severity of his condition, that on the first day of Gaudí's stay at the hotel, he heard one of the male nurses mutter, as he helped him into the bath: "He's a

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<sup>2</sup>La Pedrera, also known as Casa Mila (1906–1912) is a building designed by the architect Antoni Gaudí and commissioned by Pere Milà and Roser Segimon. Casa Mila (1906–1912) is Antoni Gaudí's most iconic work of civic architecture due to both its constructional and functional innovations, as well as its ornamental and decorative solutions. It is a total work of art. People would call it "La Pedrera" (i.e. stone quarry) because it resembles an open quarry in appearance, the building features forms drawn from nature. It was Gaudí's last work of civic architecture and represented a break with the conventions of his day.

corpse!”). For this reason, he called for a notary and wrote his last will and testament on June 9, 1911 in Puigcerda.

Unperturbed by any bodily concerns during his long hours of prayerful meditation, he became more fervent in his conversation with the Creator. His nurse was a Spanish Camillus monk, from the same town as St. John of the Cross, whose works he would read to Gaudí (Tarragona, 2019b, p. 276–278).

The saint’s poetry, which the monk read so well”, Antoni Gaudí would comment later “not only consoled me, but tempered my spirit to continue meditating on the Passion façade.<sup>3</sup> [...] As the convalescence was long, I had a lot of time to study and meditate on that façade (Puig-Boada, 1981, p. 200).

During this time of illness, Gaudí had decided to devote himself solely to La Sagrada Familia, preparing its plans for completion after his death, wholly convinced that, in addition to its artistic contribution, its purpose was spiritual and apostolic.

## 5 Meaning and Purpose

Gaudí rehearsed for his magnum opus in his creation of Colònia Güell. Because of the rustic appearance of the materials used and their shapes, which bear no comparison with any architectural style whatsoever, it seems more like a geological formation than a human creation. In this sense, it is a landmark in art history: a manifestation of ongoing Creation that did not emerge fully complete from the hands of the Creator, but, as St. Thomas Aquinas would have said, through “a state of journeying” (*statu viae*) towards the ultimate perfection. Antoni Gaudí was as architect who didn’t depart from Creation’s beauty or copy it, but rather continued it, in collaboration with the Creator (Tarragona, 2009).

When Monsignor Ragonesi, the papal nuncio of Benedict XV, visited La Sagrada Familia, he offered words of flattery and asked about the effort involved in its construction: “What a magnificent task you have achieved! What a feat of intelligence! Because this is something completely new, like nothing ever before seen... and it all came from inside your head”, the priest told him.

Gaudí replied: “If anywhere, it comes from higher up. Not from me at all. I studied history closely, the world’s great works and the masterpieces of our forefathers”.

The nuncio, addressing Gaudí, then exclaimed:

This is an exceedingly beautiful poem sculpted into stone; you are a great poet.

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<sup>3</sup>This refers to one of the façades of Sagrada Familia, that represents the passion and the death of Jesus. Gaudí decided that the three entries of the Passion one are dedicated to the three Theological Christian virtues. Gaudí conceived this façade with the idea of transmitting the fear and cruelty of Jesus’ sacrifice. To achieve this he was willing to use various geometric shapes with edges or even to sacrifice the construction, breaking arches or cutting columns, to generate a more gloomy effect.

“How could anybody feel anything less than a poet with the Church by his side?” replied Gaudí.

Then, displaying that characteristic Mediterranean smile with which cultivated Italians express their intense delight in brilliant works of art, the nuncio said to Gaudí:

“You are truly the Dante of Architecture. That is how I would describe you” (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 302–304).

The pinnacle tower of Jesus Christ would be 170 metres high. In other words, the highest point of La Sagrada Familia would be somewhat lower than the mountain of Montjuïc, the lowest of those that surround Barcelona. It was an act of humility by the human architect before God, the architect of the universe.

The aesthetic enjoyment contemplation of this beautiful masterpiece lifts our human consciousness, which is anchored within the world, up. Simultaneously, each of his works of art, inspired by nature, is a piece of Glory: visible signs of the invisible God. Human consciousness receives from them the light of the one who is Beauty Himself. As Pope Benedict once said of Gaudí, he helps us to overcome “the division between human consciousness and Christian consciousness, between living in this temporal world and being open to eternal life, between the beauty of things and God as beauty” (Ratzinger, 2010).

## 6 Character and Virtue

Gaudí placed a mosaic on the lintel of the entrance to the crypt of the church of Colònia Güell. The *trencadís* (or broken tile mosaic) was made in 1914. At its centre there is a rhombus made to look like light. Following the shape’s vertexes, one finds three more rhombi. The spaces inside them have depictions of herbs, flowers, shrubs and trees, as all nature receives the light.

In this mosaic, the artist depicts his view of virtue, which is rooted in Aristotle and Christian tradition. Gaudí was guided by the search for beauty, frequently leading him to reject materialistic values (Tarragona, 2019b Dec 3).

Once a visitor he was showing around La Sagrada Familia said to him, amazed and wanting to complement the architect:

Mr. Gaudí, you should take advantage of your intelligence... You could become an extremely rich man!

“If I had wanted to be a rich man”, he answered dryly, “I would have devoted myself to business” (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 309).

Upon finishing La Pedrera, he filed a lawsuit against its owners, the Milà i Segimon family, to collect his fees. The courts ruled in his favour and the owners had to mortgage the house in order to pay the architect the 105,000 pesetas they were sentenced to pay. This money was rightly his. And it wasn’t an amount that had been

set from profits based on investments or speculation; he had earned it by the sweat of his brow over the years he devoted to the design and direction of its construction.

However, Antoni Gaudí hadn't sued for the money for himself. He wanted to donate it to the Church. And with a grace and class, he chose not to allocate it to his beloved Cathedral of the Poor, which so critically needed financial support at that time. Nor did he use it to cancel debts with suppliers or to pay the wages of the staff so as to ensure that construction wouldn't be interrupted. Instead, he handed over the entire amount to the Jesuit priest Ignasi Casanovas, so that he could freely use it for good works (Tarragona, 2019a, p. 312).

## 7 Conclusions

Art is indeed a way to achieve human flourishing, and it has the power to move us aesthetically and religiously. Aesthetic emotion is one of the most positive emotions an individual can experience. The enjoyment of art is only possible in humans. While the majority of our emotions can be found in animals with developed mammalian brains, no other creature can relish art as we do.

Referring to religious emotion through art, Gaudí's work shows that God is the true measure of man; that the secret of authentic originality lies in returning to the origin, which is God. The artist, in opening himself up to God, experiences the maximum positive experience of being a contributor in Creation, of the triumph of the spirit over physical matter. This personal encounter with Truth and Beauty itself can be the most positive experience in one's life. The radiance of the Truth that Gaudí has made present in material shapes and designs, with the same originality with which God created our world, enlightens the human consciousness and opens it up to being able to know Truth itself.

Furthermore, Gaudí's life and words offer much wisdom, beyond flourishing, of the human struggle towards perfection. Below we've tried to summarize this wisdom in the following points.

### 7.1 *Human Flourishing Is Progressive*

Human flourishing is a long process with different stages that build off one another. One must always ascend step by step. Following St. Ignatius of Loyola's formula is a sure means for achieving flourishing, that is, that man must always work to better himself (Loyola, Ignatius of, 1548).

This path is fraught with mistakes, which are consequences of self-confidence. In order to make fewer mistakes, it must be repeated systematically. Repetition is paramount in this journey. Things need to be redone to avoid the previous detected errors. Patience achieves everything, as St. Teresa of Ávila put it.

## ***7.2 Human Flourishing Requires Community***

Flourishing in each person occurs simultaneously as the flourishing of society, in their own community (in a person's work, family, neighbourhood ...) and as a whole. Everyone is useful to society; everyone is good at something. The question lies in knowing what each one can contribute. Perfection in society is achieved when everyone contributes to the best of their abilities.

The work of each person is what contributes to the flourishing of the society as whole. Therefore, work which leads to one's flourishing is not done within an individualistic, competitive framework, but rather in cooperation and with solidarity. The main motivation for doing things and doing them well is to work for the prosperity of the community. St. Ignatius of Loyola said to "achieve excellence and share it".

Working solely for material remuneration doesn't lead to human flourishing. It is a grave mistake to do one's job solely for the income it provides. You cannot do fruitful things for compensation alone.

## ***7.3 Practicing Religion Is an Ideal Framework for Flourishing***

Gaudí taught that a person without religion is a person who is spiritually lacking, a mutilated individual.

Gaudí experienced his most positive emotions, his brain at its best, his most intense engagement with society, his deepest growth as a human being within the framework of his own religious practice. The progress of his religious life also helped maintain and enhance his innate creativity and resilience, as well as his kind temperament.

## ***7.4 Everybody Has the Ability to Flourish***

While the sciences are for those who have cultivated their intelligence, art is for everybody, which is why it can enhance everyone's flourishing. However, when basic needs are not met, this appreciation for art is more difficult. Furthermore, the appreciation of art and its consequent positive effect on our flourishing depends largely on a person's education level. This is why people who control and manage capital accumulation must take responsibility for helping others out of poverty and ensuring that everyone is able to access their right to education.

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# Conclusion: What We Have Learnt From Multidisciplinary Views on Human Flourishing



María José Bosch

**Abstract** Wellbeing and flourishing are two interconnected concepts. Usually both are studied from just one discipline. In this book we combine research from academics look to combine the evidence on how flourishing has an impact and is influenced by health, art, entrepreneurship, and work life, among other factors. These influences and impact can be categorized in three groups. First, the interconnection with the self that is how we construction the image of ourselves impacts how we interpret and perceive different stimuli or experiences, and this has an impact on our flourishing. Second, the interconnection with others impacts the relationship we build with them, and this relationship impacts our flourishing. Finally, the interconnection with the environment shows us that being aware of the impact that our behaviors and traditions the environment can foster behaviors and changes that look to promote flourishing.

**Keywords** Interconnection · Self · Others · Environment

## 1 Introduction

Our lifestyle has changed throughout the last decades. Globalization has impacted many aspects of our lives, leading, for example, to an increase in the number of hours we spend working, as many people collaborate from different countries and time zones. Another change is connectivity. Though it has helped us in many ways, it has also made us dependent on the instantaneity of communications. While these are only a few of the changes we've seen in more recent years, they are changes which, in general, have impacted not only our private lives, but also how we work. In addition to these changes, we should also consider the impact of Covid-19. The pandemic has forced us to change how we work, live, and travel, among many other aspects of our lives. No one is indifferent to its effects. All of these changes are present across different cultures, age groups, etc. Therefore, it is especially relevant

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that we understand how we can live happy lives in this tumultuous and changing context. Or, in other words, how can we promote flourishing within our families, organizations, and societies to foster our wellbeing?

We could attempt to answer these questions from different fields of study and by examining a range of theories, but it would give us an incomplete answer. Rather, in this book we combine research from academics across several disciplines to understand how to move forward towards a healthier and more sustainable society specifically through flourishing. We hope that after reading the previous chapters, you have a deeper knowledge of this concept.

In this last chapter, we are going to lay out and examine the main findings. Doing so will help us to implement and promote flourishing within our families, organizations, societies, and personal lives. Oftentimes, the ever-increasing rhythm of our lives hinders the opportunity to be conscious of the time and energy we are exerting, and if they are aligned with our purpose.

Throughout the previous chapters of this book, the concept of flourishing has been examined in detail. In doing so, we offer information which is oftentimes scattered across different disciplines and countries. Academics also tend to work in silos, and thus an important contribution of this book is that it gathers different academics' research, offering an interdisciplinary work, where we combine relevant content from the realms of art, medicine, psychology, and business.

One of the main learning points of the book is the light it sheds on the relationship that exists between wellbeing and flourishing. Also, we have learned that flourishing has an impact and is influenced by health, art, entrepreneurship, and work life, among other factors. The different chapters provide information and evidence about how flourishing affects our day-to-day life from different points of view, and how we can promote it.

As an ever-changing society, it is important to move forward and be aware that if we only focus on maximizing certain aspects of our lives, organizations, and societies, it may be harder to find sustainable solutions. What's more, if we approach problems from just one discipline, any solutions found run the risk of being incomplete. Consequently, works such as this one are important to highlight the relevance of interdisciplinary research.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The former organizes what we have explored throughout this book into three dimensions. The latter part proposes actions to move forward and suggests studies that could be carried out to continue understanding human flourishing.

## **2 Learning from This Book**

Although human flourishing is a novel concept, it is related to the state of wellbeing and valued across cultures (Pawelski, 2021). It has many benefits, as we have seen, and in this last chapter we are going to group them into three dimensions:

interconnection with the self, interconnection with others, and interconnection with the environment.

One of the main consequences of human flourishing is its impact on health. Frequently, as explained in chapter “Health and Flourishing: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis”, health is seen as the absence of diseases or pain. But if we focus not only on reducing pain, but also on improving wellbeing and life, we can foster actions that promote human flourishing and aim to generate positive outcomes in different areas of life. Related to this positive approach to health, we can understand it within a wellbeing ecosystem, where we can promote flourishing from different angles, like within our personal lives, our relationships, and our contexts.

If we are to continue looking for the loftiest feats achievable through human actions, as Ryff explained in Chapter “In Pursuit of Eudaimonia: Past Advances and Future Directions”, we should strive throughout our lives to promote the best version of ourselves from within. There is evidence that a person can try to do so on their own. But even if a person dedicates significant time to their personal growth, we do not live like islands, isolated from others. Rather, we live in society and are interconnected and influenced, and impact one another. Nonetheless, despite forming part of a society, we each are part of a specific context. For example, living in a city is very different than living in a town. Also, living in a developing country is very different from living in a developed one, etc. All these differences also impact our flourishing.

We can summarize this reality by stating that our flourishing is influenced by the ecosystem in which we find ourselves. Therefore, we should try to understand this ecosystem as much as we can and comprehend how we can expand its positive impacts. In doing so, we can contribute to important progress in the knowledge on human flourishing.

To categorize the learnings presented in this book about the interconnections within the ecosystems of human flourishing, we propose three sections. The first ecosystem is that of the interconnection with oneself, that is, how each person can influence their own flourishing. The second one pertains to the interconnection with others, i.e., how we influence each other, and how we can promote flourishing in families, organizations, and societies. Finally, the third realm is our interconnection with our context, that is, our surroundings, like the room or the city where we live, or the moment in history that we are living in, affects the human flourishing of a person or a society.

### **3 Interconnection with the Self**

How we see ourselves is extremely relevant to promote flourishing. The construction of this image and how it impacts our self-esteem is affected by how we interpret and perceive different stimuli or experiences. These perceptions are unique to each person. Our perception of ourselves affects how we approach our daily lives and

how we make decisions. It can also have an impact on our health and our relationships and how we relate to the environment.

Our interpretations are influenced by different factors. One of these factors, personality traits, is explored by Waugh in chapter “An Affective Neuroscience Perspective on Psychological Flourishing; How the Brain Believes that Things are Going Well”. These traits are correlated with our wellbeing. He describes personality traits as trait-relevant behaviors and proposes that there may be areas of the brain which influence a person to believe that he/she is flourishing. This implies that there are multiple ways to flourish, and that this interpretation is very important. The brain may believe itself to be flourishing in its positive interpretation of life events. How we evaluate these events is related to our life circumstances, whether, for example, we have had people in our lives that haven't taken care of us, how we see ourselves, etc.

Having a purpose in one's life also affects the brain's interpretation of different events. We can understand purpose as “the feeling that there is meaning in one's present and past life” (p. 707) (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Alternatively, “purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121) (Damon et al., 2003). Purpose therefore serves as a compass in our lives and helps us make choices and take one path over another. The personal evaluation of those decisions has consequences for our personal flourishing. This impact purpose plays is crucial, as it not only affects our wellbeing but also our health. Higher wellbeing, like personal growth, positive relationships, and purpose in life, among others, is related to different positive health indicators, as presented in chapter “Health and Flourishing: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis” written by Lee and Mayor. Therefore, our flourishing is dependent on having a positive view of our purpose in life and our capacity to materialize that purpose.

Emotions are another aspect that influence one's self and one's relationship with flourishing. People's emotions affect their environment, as they are spread to others. Consider happiness. If we are happy, we can spread our happiness and help make those around us happy. This interconnection between people's feelings exists with positive and negative emotions alike. We have also learned that being aware of this relationship is important, as how we feel is related to our health. When we understand the interconnection between our emotions and flourishing, we learn about our emotions, understand them, identify them, and differentiate them, which not only affects our feelings and health, but also the feelings and health of others.

If we deepen this effect of emotions, we can understand the changes that happen with a person that is going through intense suffering or loss. In Lee and Mayor's chapter, they explain that when someone experiences an intense emotion, the way it is experienced can transform the person and even have the effect of “changing the way they see the world.” These experiences with intense emotions can also change our purpose and whether we perceive that we are flourishing or not.

In another interesting chapter, Lee and Contreras (chapter “Flourishing with Moral Emotions Through Conversational Agent”) explore how artificial agents can be used to bolster moral emotions like compassion, which is linked to human

flourishing. According to the authors, two critical components for flourishing have been overlooked: the promotion of moral emotions, and the use of conversation agents (like chatbots) to increase such emotions. This chapter reviews different chatbots, like Vincent, that have been created for fostering compassion, self-compassion, and gratitude.

Some of these emotions can be understood in more depth in Rodríguez-Prat and Monforte-Royo's chapter on palliative care. The authors explain that how we perceive suffering is important, as it influences our flourishing. More specifically, how we perceive and relate to death affects us. Chapter "Human Flourishing Until the End: The Core Values of Palliative Care" explains that if we reduce human beings only to their productive capacity and utility, the final stage of a person's life can be perceived as a burden, versus simply another normal stage in life. How do we treat others when they are in pain? This is an important thing to learn from this book, as it explains the interconnection between people in our society, but specifically, in this section, how we feel about ourselves. Do we consider ourselves a burden? Or are we relieved that we have others that can care for us? This will not only affect our self-esteem, but also our health. Having a safety net has important consequences for our mental and physical health.

Although not all positive evaluations are related to flourishing, flourishing requires a positive evaluation of one's life. As Waugh states at the end of his chapter, a good life depends on how the brain believes a life is good. Furthermore, how we see others and whether we forgive them, support them, or take care of them will also influence our (and their) flourishing.

In this line, Toussaint and his colleagues examine the connections between forgiveness and human flourishing in chapter "Forgiveness in Human Flourishing". According to the authors, we should consider forgiveness as a character virtue. At the same time, their model conceptualizes forgiveness, which is always experienced internally, as a possible contributor to flourish in at least three dimensions: mental health, physical health, and happiness.

## **4 Interconnection with Others**

Although the previous section focused on the interconnection with the self, it shows that people do not live isolated, like islands, but rather in societies and communities, where they interact with each other regularly. The relationship we build with others is also important to promote flourishing in ourselves.

How we consider and see others impacts the relationship we build with them. Rodríguez-Prat and Monforte-Royo use an example to reflect this reality. They show that how a person see a sick person has an important impact on their outcome. It also affects the perceived dignity of the patient. In their chapter, they are very specific in outlining the impact on human flourishing depending on whether a sick person is treated as an object or as person. This differentiation is also explained in the chapter by Balda, where he describes Balenciana's life and creativity. How this artist saw his

clients had an important impact on his work. As Balda explains in chapter “Balenciaga and the Importance of Creativity in Human Flourishing”, Balenciaga wanted to exalt the person in their entirety, and not just their bodies. In doing so, he made his clients happier. How he saw their clients impacted their emotions, and as reviewed above, this has an impact on human flourishing.

In a similar vein, Grau-Grau examines the relationship between quality ties and human flourishing in chapter “Fatherhood Involvement as a Source of Human Flourishing”. More specifically, he argued that fatherhood involvement, throughout the generation of paternal generativity and relational flourishing, contributes to human flourishing. It is necessary to put more efforts in measuring the quality of our relationships, which seems to be one of the clearest predictors of our life satisfaction.

Understanding that we have an impact on others, and that likewise they impact us, helps build the ecosystem that we have been examining throughout the book and in this chapter. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand which variables help this ecosystem and which ones worsen it. One of the variables that has a positive impact is kindness. The kindness shown by one person to another not only impacts their dyad relationship but also their support network, and consequently, this has an impact on flourishing. When we have stronger support networks, we know that we are not alone. Knowing that other people care about us is very important throughout the different stages of life. In the beginning, babies are not capable of surviving alone; they need others to help them. As described in this book, as we get older our wellbeing declines. One of the aspects that produces this negative effect on wellbeing is that many institutions have not adapted to our longer life expectancy. We can counter that, considering that positive relationships at work and with families and friends have a positive impact on wellbeing.

It is important to highlight the interaction between different dimensions in our lives and how they impact on one another. We saw in this book that work-life balance also influences our flourishing. Greater involvement in different roles promotes higher wellbeing; more specifically, parenting enhances adult wellbeing, as Barraza, Las Heras, and Rofcanin explain in chapter “Work, Family and Human Flourishing”. This relationship is positive when work and family are well integrated. Therefore, in organizations it is important to facilitate this integration. We saw in depth that this interconnection is so strong that there is a positive spillover between work and family. Aware of this positive relationship between these two realms, we should foster it in organizations, as the outcomes benefit employees, their families, and the organizations themselves.

Social ties are play an important role in the work-life balance equation. We need other people. As explained in the book, people with fewer social ties face more threats to their physical health. When we have a better work-life balance, we can develop better social ties with our colleagues and family, as we spend more time with them. Developing these ties is so important that it even affects our health.

The positive and negative spillovers that exist between the members of an environment are reciprocal. Promoting a positive social exchange among members

can induce greater flourishing for the entire community. For example, what is healthy for the individual is also healthy for the ecosystem, as Lee and Mayor note.

## 5 Interconnection with the Environment

The interconnection with the environment is another very important aspect of flourishing. People are related to one another, but they are also affected by the environment in which they live.

When we talk about the environment, we usually highlight the natural aspect of it. We all live on the same planet and our actions can have an impact on the earth. This is also related to flourishing. The number of people living on earth affects how much food we produce, and how much we contaminate it. But actions like changing people's diets can have an impact on the environment too. Being aware of the impact that our behaviors and traditions have on the earth can foster new ways of doing things.

The term "environment" goes beyond ecological conditions; it includes sociological ones as well. For example, social inequality also has an impact on flourishing. As explained in the book, higher income groups have better indicators on objective and subjective measures. Additionally, this also has an impact on the opportunities that people have to achieve their potential. Leveling the playing field when it comes to inequalities helps societies develop the talents of its members. Promoting art, for example, is one way to offset any worsening inequality, as it has a positive impact not only on our health but also on our wellbeing.

Art has been present throughout most of humankind's history. It can take different forms, such as painting, sculpture, furniture, and clothing. Art's impact can be limited or broad-reaching. For example, we saw that Balenciana not only impacted his clients, but also the fashions of his time. An even broader impact was seen by architect Antoni Gaudí. As explained in chapter "Antoni Gaudí in Human Flourishing", he impacted both his clients and the entire city of Barcelona. Likewise, the people who worked with him understood that when you love what you do, you can do amazing things. Both artists are examples of individuals who were deeply connected and involved with their work, and both immensely enjoyed their work.

Another impact on flourishing revealed in this book is how history can change how we perceive an event and how these perceptions can change through time. For example, we saw in Pérez-Martínez's chapter how traveling has evolved over time. From being done strictly on a military exploration basis to what is largely seen as a wellbeing experience today, traveling has changed tremendously throughout the years. Changes in the environment, such as the incorporation of modern transportation, have given us the opportunity to be able to travel to every corner of the world. Nonetheless, wellbeing linked to traveling is not only dependent on moving from one place to another, as we can flourish through literature and by "traveling" through books. Novels, traveling books, etc. can take us to different corners of the world and stimulate our wellbeing and flourishing.

Being aware of how the environment can affect our flourishing encourages us to consider it when creating public policies and developing our cities, towns, and countries.

## 6 A Roadmap Towards Flourishing

In recent years, we have seen how the world and our way of living can change dramatically from one day to another. Therefore, being conscious of the fact that we are partially responsible of our own flourishing is important in order to promote a higher level of wellbeing. Also, we cannot deny the interconnection between ourselves and the people around us, especially with those that are close to us such as our families, colleagues, and neighbors. Or the impact the environment has on us, and vice versa.

We need to also consider the role of governments and institutions in order to foster a change. For example, Strong in Chapter “Human Flourishing Through Behavior Change” highlights that a forgotten part of flourishing is that of enacting change. Normally, we think about human flourishing as a state of being, or a place of which we have arrived or need to arrive. According to him, the act of change itself needs to be seen as a core facet of what it means to flourish.

In the same vein, Aknin in chapter “Revising Policy to Reflect Our Better Nature” outlines that the ultimate purpose of a government should be to help people to thrive, and not merely survive. Not only alleviating tensions and stress, but also amplifying positive experiences. Two of her suggestions for revising policies are allowing and enticing desirable behavior through opportunities for social connection, and offering prosocial rewards, such as the funds or time to help a personally meaningful cause.

One interesting thing we have learned from this interdisciplinary book is the concept of an ecosystem. We all are interconnected and influence each other. Therefore, promoting flourishing and wellbeing not only depends on ourselves, but on the relationships we build with others and the environment. Understanding this interconnection allows us to make changes in society, organizations, and families, as we can foster flourishing among all respective members. Flourishing, as we have seen throughout this book, has a positive impact on our health, particularly our mental health and self-esteem, which is fundamental in a post-pandemic era.

Additionally, knowing that loving what we do can impact our own and others’ flourishing, as in the cases of Balenciaga and Gaudí, should grab our attention. Specifically, it can help to improve the quality of our work. Dedication and not fearing mistakes are important aspects that we should promote in our jobs. Imagine all of the flourishing that we could foster by investing time in people’s self-confidence and helping them discover what they love to do. The impact would be considerable. This work could be carried out within schools and organizations.

Another important thing we have learned from this book is the broader concept of wellbeing and flourishing. Concepts such as success, the taboo of death, aging,

kindness, caring and happiness, among many other concepts that we have reviewed, show us that being well, and flourishing depend more on how we define these concepts and how we include them in our lives, than on how they are defined, as their definitions have changed over time. For example, seeing people not only in terms of their productive capacity and utility helps us redefine success and value knowledge. Also, it is important to bring back the caring rituals which were once commonplace. How we accompany the dying may change how we see death, as Rodríguez-Prat and Monforte-Royo demonstrated in their chapter.

Organizations and families can change our perspective of aging. We can change how we see older people and how we include them in society. For example, we can promote job opportunities with schedules that take into account the age of the employees. Also, we can train them in new technologies or in new competencies that are important nowadays. We can see them and treat them with the respect that comes with having experienced and seen more than us, experience that can have an important impact on within organizations and societies.

In an increasingly individualistic society, another concept that we can change to promote human flourishing is caring. As the UN warned in 2018, we have a global care crisis. Human beings are social, but in recent history, we have not promoted caring, and we have even seen caring as a burden on our professional careers. We should work to change this tendency and shift towards creating cultures of care. Organizations can lead this change by boosting family friendly cultures (Thompson et al., 2004) and family friendly supervisor behaviors (Allen, 2001), so workers can have better work-life balance, turning caring into a positive aspect of society, as work and family research has proven that there is a positive spillover between work and family enrichment.

All of these learnings can facilitate and promote societies, organizations, families, and individuals' flourishing. The positive consequences of such would be much greater than any costs associated with incorporating these learnings. If we make all of these changes in our daily lives to promote flourishing, we can foster an important change in our ecosystems, and as we know, all living creatures are affected by their ecosystems. For this reason, it is important to give flourishing the weight it deserves, as in doing so, the impact will be positive for all of us.

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