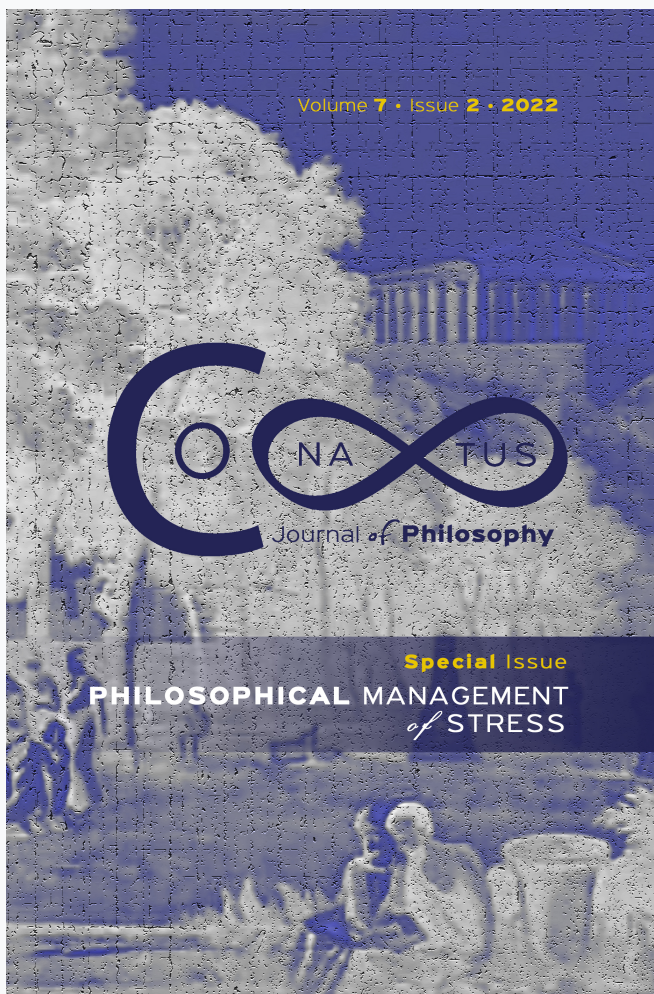


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Pia Valenzuela

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Fredrickson on Flourishing through Positive Emotions and Aristotle's Eudaimonia

Pia Valenzuela

Catholic Institute, Slovenia

E-mail address: pia.valenzuela.v@gmail.com

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0056-4749>

Abstract

Is it possible to be happy without virtues? At least for the kind of enduring human happiness Aristotle bears, virtues are required (NE, I). In addition to virtues, some prosperity is necessary for flourishing, like having friends and minimal external goods. Nowadays, we witness different approaches to happiness – well-being – focusing on mental states – i.e., affective – usually without reference to moral issues, concretely moral dispositions, or virtues. At the crossroads of Philosophy and Psychology, the present article discusses the connection of happiness – well-being – and affective states by presenting Fredrickson's theory of positive emotions, which has been criticised as approaching only hedonic well-being and therefore overlooking its eudaimonic aspects. In her approach, there is no reference to the good life connected to the human good, as in Aristotle's ethics. However, there is instead an understanding of becoming a benevolent, a better person as a necessary human aspiration.

Keywords: *happiness; flourishing; eudaimonic well-being; hedonic well-being; virtues; (positive) emotions; Aristotle; Fredrickson*

I. Introduction

Fredrickson abstains from using the term happiness because of its ambiguous meaning. She prefers instead to speak about human flourishing as being beyond happiness in that it encompasses both feeling good and doing good.¹ This 'doing good' relates only to an individual's healthy physical and psychological functioning but does not include the moral sense of becoming a good person or developing a morally good-virtuous life, at least not at first glance of her research. That is not surprising because, unlike philosophers, most psychologists and social scientists striving to understand

¹ Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity* (New York: Crown, 2009), 17.

well-being through empirical research are not explicitly making ethical claims about the nature of a good life in their studies.²

Fredrickson deals with the role of positivity in human flourishing, meaning by positivity the different positive emotions she identifies. She highlights the contribution of emotional well-being to overall flourishing.

Fredrickson's understanding of hedonic well-being captures individuals' global satisfaction with life alongside their pleasant affect. In contrast, eudaimonic well-being encompasses their sense of purpose and meaning and their resilience and social integration.³

Human flourishing involves hedonic and eudaimonic aspects as well:

the construct includes both feeling good (hedonia) and functioning effectively (eudaimonia) and in this way is the mirror opposite of common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, which encompass negative affect and poor functioning.⁴

However, this comprehension of eudaimonic well-being differs from approaches based directly on Aristotelian eudaimonia.⁵ Aristotle's discussion of eudaimonia covers aspects like feeling good and some external conditions – and principally the well-doing according to the highest potentiality of human being, the life according to human excellences or virtues. These essential aspects of eudaimonia conduct to a fulfilled, good life. Conversely, the failure to either understand human nature or behave according to the best in human nature will lead to failures of human flourishing.⁶

² Veronika Huta, and Alan Waterman, "Eudaimonia and its Distinction from Hedonia: Developing a Classification and Terminology for Understanding Conceptual and Operational Definitions," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 15, no. 6 (2014): 1428.

³ Barbara Fredrickson, "Updated Thinking on Positivity Ratios," *American Psychologist* 68, no. 9 (2013): 816.

⁴ Ibid. Fredrickson adopted Keyes' understanding of flourishing that contrasts not just with pathology but also with languishing and conceptualises and measures human flourishing as a multidimensional combination of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being [Corey Keyes, "The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 43, no. 2 (2002): 207-222].

⁵ Blaine Fowers, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia: On the Virtue of Returning to the Source," in *The Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*, ed. Joar Vittersø, 67-83 (New York: Springer, 2016); Daniel Haybron, "Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being," in *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*, eds. Michael Eid, and Randy Larsen, 17-43 (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008); Daniel Haybron, "The Philosophical Basis of Eudaimonic Psychology," in *The Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*, ed. Joar Vittersø, 27-53 (Switzerland: Springer, 2016); Carol Ryff, and Burton Singer, "Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being," in *The Exploration of Happiness*, ed. Antonella Delle Fave, 97-116 (New York: Springer, 2013).

⁶ Thomas Spalding, James Stedman, Christina Gagné, and Matthew Kostecky, *The Human*

II. Positive emotions and well-being

Fredrickson argues the connection between flourishing and affective states, specifically, positive emotions. Positive emotions like joy, interest, love have unique cognitive attributes that constitute not only epistemic access to well-being but may lead to enhance well-being by building resources.

She based her argumentation on several prospective correlational and longitudinal randomised experiments. Their results show that daily experiences of positive emotions forecast and produce growth in personal resources such as competence (e.g., environmental mastery), meaning (e.g., purpose in life), optimism (e.g., pathways thinking), resilience, self-acceptance, positive relationships, as well as physical health. In other words, feeling good does not simply sit side by side with optimal functioning as an indicator of flourishing; feeling good drives optimal function by building the enduring personal resources upon which people draw to navigate life's journey with greater success.⁷

The novelty in Fredrickson's approach is arguing that experiencing positive emotions and feeling good does not simply indicate the presence of human flourishing. Beyond being one dimension of flourishing, positive emotions also promote its development and maintenance. She refers to many markers of optimal functioning or eudaimonic well-being that can be cast as enduring personal resources helping people cope with the changing circumstances of life.⁸

The essential question is how positive emotions produce or help to enhance flourishing. Let us review Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. According to Fredrickson, positive emotions denote a range of discernible pleasant affective states, including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. This list is not exhaustive; instead, it groups ten representative positive emotions that research suggests people experience frequently. Like all emotions, positive emotions are brief, multisystem activation patterns related to how people appraise their present circumstances. An individual's past experiences and current situation ultimately shape the emotion(s) experienced. When these multisystem activation patterns register that an individual's circumstances are somehow bad for the self, he/she experiences an unpleasant affective state; when it registers good prospects or good fortune, a pleasant affective state. According to Fredrickson, these pleasant states cannot be confused

Person. What Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas Offer Modern Psychology (Cham: Springer, 2019), 16.

⁷ Fredrickson, "Updated Thinking," 816.

⁸ *Ibid.*

with sensory or bodily pleasures which arise from desire or want. Although sensory pleasure and positive emotions often co-occur, unlike sensory pleasures, emotions require appraisals or meaning assessments to be initiated.⁹

Fredrickson's theory explains that positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires. Within the explanation of each positive emotion, Fredrickson includes the appraisal theme, the thought-action tendencies and the resources each of them helps to build.

To start, *love* – the most frequent positive emotion, viewed as an amalgam of distinct positive emotions (e.g., joy, interest, and contentment) – broadens thought-action repertoires by creating momentary perceptions of social connection and self-expansion. Fredrickson's theory adds that positive emotions help build psychological, social, and even physical resources through the broadening effect. Love, for instance, builds a wide range of enduring resources, especially social bonds and community.

Joy, instead, creates the urge to play and be creative, pushing the limits. These urges are evident not only in social and physical behaviour but also in intellectual and artistic behaviour.

Interest, a phenomenologically distinct positive emotion, creates the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process.

Contentment or *serenity* creates the urge to sit back and savour current life circumstances and integrate these circumstances into new views of the self and the world.

Gratitude comes when we appraise the fact of receiving an altruistic gift by which we tend in turn to give creatively. This broadening helps to create social bonds and skills for loving. *Hope* arises when we fear the worst but yearn for the better, and it leads to being inventive and helps build or increase resilience.

We feel *pride* in socially valued achievement, by which we tend to dream big, leading us to further achievements. *Amusement* comes with non-serious social incongruity when we are prone to share laughs, insights, and this broadening led to building friendship and creativity mishap.

Inspiration appears at witnessing human excellence in others. We are inclined then to aspire to human excellence. The outcomes are to gain skills and morality. In the end, *awe* arises when we feel overwhelmed by greatness. We tend to accommodate the new, trying to view and understand the self as part of a larger whole.

These various thought-action tendencies to play, explore, or savour and integrate, represent ways that positive emotions broaden habitual modes of thinking or acting. As said, broadening builds enduring personal resources.¹⁰

⁹ Barbara Fredrickson, "Positive Emotions," in *The Handbook of Positive Psychology*, eds. C. R. Snyder, and Shane J. Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121-122.

¹⁰ Barbara Fredrickson, "The Eudaimonics of Positive Emotions," in *The Handbook of Eudaimonic*

The broadening effects (thought-action repertoire) leading to building resources lead to greater well-being. The increased well-being tends to produce more experiences of positive emotions, which, in turn, lead to new forms of well-being, creating an upward spiral.¹¹

What is this kind of well-being? According to Fredrickson, it includes enhanced health – mental and physical – in the form of psychological and biological resources, survival, and fulfilment. As referenced above, more or less, each positive emotion helps to build resources, principally cognitive and social resources. How can the experiences of (fleeting) positive emotions enhance well-being and promote flourishing? Fredrickson argues that frequent though fleeting affective states produce effects. It is through their broadening effects that positive emotions can help build resources – building effects – that in turn lead to enhanced well-being: expanded perception, more inclusive social categorisations, greater perspective-taking, increased action ideas. These broadening effects contribute to building psychological resources as knowledge, agency, hope, social resources, i.e. support, connectedness, and physical resources, e.g. significant heart rate variability, which means a solid ability to tolerate stress or recover from prior stressful situations.

The effects of positive and negative emotions accumulate and may become emotional habits or, in Fredrickson terms, *attitudes*. A transient emotion – explains Arnold – can gradually become an *emotional attitude* and, in turn, an *emotional habit*, which is an enduring emotional state through residues left by an emotion. According to Arnold, we deal with the long-range or cumulative effects of emotion rather than with emotions themselves in emotional attitudes and habits.¹² This explanation can support Fredrickson's claims about the cumulative effects of positive emotions, which lead to building resources enriching the self and contributing to the overall well-being.¹³ Given that the effects of positive emotions accumulate, they can influence a person's well-being and well-doing.

In this discussion, one might note the relevance of the temporal dimension, as in all human life issues. That is why Fredrickson nuances: at least some positive emotional states are marked by broadened mindsets. As studies demonstrate, broadened mindsets may be advantageous at the

Well-Being, ed. Joar Vittersø, 183-190 (New York: Springer, 2016).

¹¹ Laura Kiken, and Barbara Fredrickson, "Cognitive Aspects of Positive Emotions: A Broader View for Well-Being," in *The Happy Mind: Cognitive Contributions to Well-Being*, eds. Michael Robinson, and Michael Eid, 157-175 (Cham: Springer, 2017), 160.

¹² Magda Arnold, *Emotion and Personality*, Volume 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 199.

¹³ Barbara Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 218-226.

moment – referring to the fleetingness of positive emotions. Moreover, these broadened mindsets create a context for potentially more enduring benefits of positive emotions related to present and future well-being.¹⁴

Fredrickson references prospective, longitudinal studies that link positive emotionality to future personal and social resources. She also evidences the results of a follow-up study on the same participants after 15 months. The participants maintained the resources they had accumulated during the increased positive emotions from meditation training, regardless of whether or not they continued to meditate after the intervention. What is relevant in this study is not so much the way of increasing positive emotions but the lasting resources for well-being or that they were not lost. For Fredrickson, increases in positive emotions over time cause increases in resources for well-being.¹⁵

She points out that consistently – rather than variably – experiencing positive emotions on a daily basis is most beneficial for well-being. It might seem more manageable when life seems unmistakably pleasant. However, as Fredrickson argues, positive emotions also are possible and vital in the wake of unpleasant experiences. She emphasises the benefits of positive emotions in the face of life's difficulties.¹⁶

Positive emotions can accompany or follow negative emotions that arise in the context of difficult or unpleasant experiences. Positive emotions can influence them twofold: they can offset potentially undesirable effects of negative emotions – helping to 'undo' the effects of negative emotional states – and they can help individuals use a range of options for coping.¹⁷

For instance, negative emotions such as fear or anger tend to narrow individuals' thinking to focus on a potential threat and prompt cardiovascular reactivity to ready the body to fight or flee, which helps act quickly in the face of immediate threats. Although, such effects of negative emotions may be harmful to mental and physical health when they are prolonged.¹⁸

Positive emotions that occur amidst or following negative experiences may facilitate recovery and resilience. Fredrickson evidences that resilient individuals may use positive emotions and their ensuing benefits to cope with adversity.¹⁹

¹⁴ Kiken, and Fredrickson, "Cognitive Aspects," 163.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Barbara Fredrickson, and Robert Levenson, "Positive Emotions Speed Recovery from the Cardiovascular Sequelae of Negative Emotions," *Cognition and Emotion* 12, no. 2 (1998): 191-220.

¹⁸ Kiken, and Fredrickson, "Cognitive Aspects," 166.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 166-167; Michael Tugade, and Barbara Fredrickson, "Resilient Individuals Use Positive

If negative emotions are prolonged and frequent might lead to downward spirals of negativity implicated in psychopathologies (depression, anxiety). Positive emotions instead may promote upward spirals of positive emotions and well-being. Metaphorically, the fruit of positive emotions – broadening and building effects – essentially contain seeds for future positive emotions. For this reason, positive emotions and their effects may show reciprocal relations.²⁰

Does it mean that an individual should feel no longer negative emotions and seek only positivity? Not. Fredrickson explicitly advises about this possible misunderstanding. As a response to a situation one appraises, emotions are negative or positive in terms of the feeling (pleasant/unpleasant). There are costs in mental and physical health – and consequently for well-being – whether an individual has a prolonged experience of negative emotions or instead overemphasises positive emotions. Paying continuous attention to feel ‘happy’ in a hedonic sense can backfire, causing frustration and emptiness, leading to less ‘happiness.’²¹ Instead, one should strive for a sustainable pursuit of happiness: a balance between positivity and negativity is necessary.²²

Consequently, Fredrickson suggests that a better strategy for experiencing positive emotions and their more significant benefits for well-being may be to structure life to prioritise situations in which one is likely to experience positive emotions. Additionally, the ability to savour the moment should lead to more positive emotions, but it depends on individual dispositional mindfulness. Mindfulness or other means of generating and regulating positive emotions might help to savour the moment – i.e. to be present writing this work; in the conversation with a friend – to promote positive emotions and their ensuing benefits for well-being.²³

At this point, a question arises: which kind of well-being underlies Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions?

Emotions to Bounce back from Negative Emotional Experiences,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86, no. 2 (2004): 320-333. Under other assumptions, according to Epicurus, we may become prudent and resilient in stressful conditions only by understanding how nature works and how we perceive it empirically. Mark Walker, “Don’t Fear the Reaper: Towards an Epicurean Grief Therapy,” *Philosophical Practice* 13, no. 2 (2018): 2120-2128.

²⁰ Ibid., 168; Eric Garland, Barbara Fredrickson, Ann Kring, et al., “Upward Spirals of Positive Emotions Counter Downward Spirals of Negativity: Insights from The Broaden-And-Build Theory and Affective Neuroscience on the Treatment of Emotion Dysfunctions and Deficits in Psychopathology,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, no. 7 (2010): 854, 857.

²¹ Lahna Catalino, Sara Algoe, and Barbara Fredrickson, “Prioritising Positivity: An Effective Approach to Pursuing Happiness?” *Emotion* 14, no. 6 (2014): 1156.

²² Barbara Fredrickson, “Positive Psychology,” *Coursera*, available at <https://www.coursera.org/learn/positive-psychology>.

²³ Kiken, and Fredrickson, “Cognitive Aspects,” 170.

Positive emotions do feel good in the moment and thus are a defining feature of hedonic well-being. However – Fredrickson explains – positive emotions do much more, and they contribute, additionally, in fundamental ways to a broader sense of well-being in the future.

III. Positive emotions and eudaimonia

Fredrickson observes the tendency to characterise positive emotions as merely representing the pleasures of self-gratification, leading to eudaimonic experiences on a high pedestal while situating hedonic ones as more lowly human motivations. She also notices that

these prevailing representations of hedonia and eudaimonia can divert scholars from investigating other, more complex and dynamic interrelationships between these two forms of well-being, and in turn, the contributions that each holds for physical health.²⁴

Fredrickson argues that positive emotions are related to a broader sense of well-being, by which she understands the eudaimonic aspects of flourishing. In her perspective, eudaimonic well-being encompasses what transcends immediate sensory or emotional gratification, and thus, the experiences of purpose, meaning, contribution, and interconnectedness. In order to explore the relationships between eudaimonia and hedonia, Fredrickson tries to find out how are connected positive emotions and transcendent experiences.

In *The Eudaimonics of Positive Emotions*, Fredrickson clarifies her position: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are not mutually exclusive approaches to happiness, nor do they represent a simple typology or a tradeoff. She argues that existing data suggest that hedonia and eudaimonia are not only positively correlated but that aspects of hedonia predict and even cause increases in eudaimonia prospectively. She refers to King and colleagues' prospective correlational studies of daily life experience together with tightly-controlled laboratory experiments. The studies demonstrate that positive affective states forecast and cause people to be more likely to detect meaning in life.²⁵

Related to the six subdomains of eudaimonic well-being indexed by the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) measure,²⁶ Fredrickson and colleagues observed

²⁴ Fredrickson, "The Eudaimonics of Positive Emotions," 183.

²⁵ Laura King, and Joshua Hicks, "Detecting and Constructing Meaning in Life Events," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 5 (2009): 317-330.

²⁶ Ryff, and Singer, "Know Thyself and Become What You Are," 102: *self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth, autonomy.*

from increments in positive emotions systematic and consequential increases in four eudaimonic subdomains – purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance and positive relations with others – and these facets of eudaimonia, in turn, predicted increases in life satisfaction and decreases in depressive symptoms. Research studies concretely showed that both types of well-being share some common sources (e.g., perceived social connections) and can reciprocally influence one another. The evidence-based prospective and causal connections between positive emotions and facets of eudaimonia led Fredrickson and collaborators to the following conclusions based on findings on the genomic correlates of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being:

- 1) The hedonic experiences of positive emotions, with their documented abilities to expand momentary awareness, might contribute to the subsequent detection of meaning and the emergence of eudaimonic experiences more generally.
- 2) Facets of eudaimonia are related to a health-supportive pattern of gene expression – one marked by reduced expression of proinflammatory genes and increased expression of antiviral and antibody synthesis genes.
- 3) Consequently, hedonia might contribute *indirectly* to a healthy gene expression pattern due to its direct relationship with eudaimonia.²⁷

The above correlation depends on the association between positive emotions and eudaimonic facets of well-being. Fredrickson argues that

many pleasant, uplifted emotional states are likely to broaden people’s awareness, enabling them to see the big picture, connect the dots, or otherwise transcend the self or the moment. Expanded mindsets like these appear to facilitate people’s ability to perceive the many ways they contribute to, and are interconnected with others, or are otherwise called to a higher purpose or meaning [...] Although eudaimonia may be more directly tied to the molecular shifts that support physical health, hedonia may be the more experience-near springboard that leads to increments in eudaimonia.²⁸

She suggests moving beyond ‘either-or’ thinking and proposals of separate paths to well-being. Hedonia and eudaimonia might be seen as dynamically intertwined facets of well-being, each of which plays a vital role in the overall process of human flourishing.²⁹

²⁷ Fredrickson, “The Eudaimonics of Positive Emotions,” 187.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Contemporary well-being researchers, and as stated, also Fredrickson, agree that mental health is one of the relevant well-being factors. We include physical health when speaking of mental health because they are related, and Fredrickson emphasises this holistic perspective. For this reason, she also investigates the neurophysiological basis – the biological underpinnings – of positive emotions and well-being.

Just like malleable risk factors (e.g., pessimism, inflammation) can deter health and well-being by altering affective processes, malleable vantage resources (e.g., purpose in life, cardiac vagal tone) can support health and well-being by amplifying positive emotions experienced in day-to-day living, creating an upward spiral dynamic. As stated, such upward spiral processes offer a systems-level perspective on the dynamic and reciprocal causality among affective, social-psychological, and biological constructs. In this line, Fredrickson poses that positive emotions and purpose – hedonia and eudaimonia –, as theory and evidence suggest, are not merely facets of living well. Instead, they function as active ingredients that help maintain and strengthen biological systems that support upward spirals of well-being.³⁰

Another study investigated whether and how routine activities promote flourishing. It hypothesised that flourishers thrive by experiencing greater positive emotional reactivity to pleasant events and building more resources over time. Results from the tested hypothesis showed that unlike those who were languishing or depressed, people who flourish generally responded with a more considerable ‘boost’ in positive emotions in response to everyday, pleasant events as helping others, social interactions, playing, learning and spiritual activity. A greater positive emotional reactivity, over time, predicted higher levels of mindfulness. These higher levels of mindfulness were positively associated with higher levels of flourishing at the end of the study than initial levels of flourishing. So far, evidence suggests that the most beneficial for well-being are positive emotional reactivity to pleasant everyday events and the regular – daily – experience of positive emotions.³¹

Certain positive emotions – awe, admiration, and elevation – involving an appraisal of something or someone more excellent than the self may be significantly related to facets of eudaimonic well-being. Described as self-transcendent positive emotions, they help promote kind and patient views toward others. Concretely, Fredrickson’s interest in the little-studied emotion of elevation might show the

³⁰ Three distinct biological vantage resources might underpin people’s experiences of positive emotions and purpose: leukocyte gene expression, cardiac vagal tone and oxytocin. Barbara Fredrickson, “The Biological Underpinnings of Positive Emotions and Purpose,” in *The Social Psychology of Living Well*, eds. Roy Baumeister, and Joseph Forgas, 163-180 (New York: Psychology Press, 2018), 165.

³¹ Lahna Catalino, and Barbara Fredrickson, “A Tuesday in the Life of a Flourisher: The Role of Positive Emotional Reactivity in Optimal Mental Health,” *Emotion* 11, no. 4 (2011): 938-950.

inclusion of the morality factor in emotions and well-being research.³² Elevation is related to the appraisal of a moral exemplar, someone or some action worthwhile for being imitated.

A study in which the authors induced awe, compared to induced general happiness, led to an expanded sense of time and more willingness to donate time to help a charity. According to Fredrickson,

these findings provide preliminary evidence of some potentially unique broadening effects from positive emotions marked by a self-transcendent quality.³³

Fredrickson also quotes the results of other research. Working adults were randomly assigned to receive a daily positive emotion induction for eight weeks through a guided meditation focused on generating feelings of love and compassion. After this period, they got happier and reported having better close relationships, greater self-efficacy, psychological well-being and improved physical health.³⁴

The last research Fredrickson has been developing shows her interest in connecting positive emotions with eudaimonic aspects of well-being. From a scientific perspective, she intends to understand those trajectories that build virtues and goodness, leading to more benevolent views of the world.

Among the virtues that seemed most relevant to positivity resonance, she highlights a sense of connection to others – oneness between people – and humility. She notes that humility places us on equal footing with another person, so we do not think “I am better than the other person.” Fredrickson argues that when we experience more positive emotions with others, we feel more humble. So we tend to cluster those experiences of connection and virtue. When we seek to increase those moments of positivity resonance, those virtues will also increase in step.³⁵

In Fredrickson’s theory, the complex interplay between positive emotions (PE) and well-being is mediated by cognitive processes. The broadening effects of PE lead to building resources for well-being; increasing well-being based

³² Jonathan Haidt, “Elevation and the Positive Psychology of Morality,” in *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, eds. Corey Keyes, and Jonathan Haidt, 275-289 (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003). Quoted in Fredrickson, *Positivity*, 39; 237.

³³ Kiken, and Fredrickson, “Cognitive Aspects,” 162.

³⁴ Michael Cohn, and Barbara Fredrickson, “Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions,” in *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*, ed. Shane Lopez, 105-110 (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 108.

³⁵ Fredrickson’s Project (1 Sept. 2018 - 31 Aug. 2020), “Understanding Everyday Love: Do Increases in Positivity Resonance Increase Virtuous Behavior?” *Templeton World*, accessed August 29, 2020, <https://www.templetonworldcharity.org/projects-database/understanding-everyday-love-do-increases-positivity-resonance-increase-virtuous/>, where is the video *Positivity Resonance: Building Virtue*, presenting the findings of the project.

on positive emotions depends on awareness, mindfulness of an individual in her/his ability to savour the moment.

In sum, the two fundamental tenets in Fredrickson's theory have been explained. First, positive emotions do not simply mark well-being but play a role in creating it. That is to say, positive emotion might occur after a job well done and might also help get the job done. In other words, positive emotions are both the aftermath and the antecedent of well-being. These reciprocal relations between positive emotions and their benefits may result in upward spirals of well-being. Second, positive emotions are related to hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of flourishing.

IV. About Aristotle's eudaimonia

This section offers a brief review of Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* – commonly translated as happiness – with direct references to *Nicomachean Ethics* and other works to purify the contested term.³⁶ First of all, Aristotle speaks about *eudaimonia* as understood in his time by ordinary and more educated or specialised people:

for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness and identify *living well and faring well* with being happy; but about what happiness is, they differ, and the many do not give the same [20] account as the wise.³⁷

We find different *eudaimonia* (happiness) accounts among the 'wise' in ancient times and contemporary well-being researchers. That said, as Haybron poses, *eudaimonia* meant the same thing for Epicurus and Aristotle: a life that is good for the person leading it. However, they had a substantive ethical disagreement about what sort of life is best for human beings.³⁸

The ethical disagreement leads Aristotle and every moral philosopher to note and try to elucidate the analogical sense of goodness:

Further, since things are said to be good in as many ways as they are said to be (for things are called good both in the category of [25] substance, as God and reason, and in quality, e.g. the virtues, and in quantity, e.g. that which is moderate,

³⁶ My attempt here is less ambitious than Fowers' project (Fowers, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia"), but it has the same intention: reviewing the original sense of Aristotle's eudaimonia.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 4, 1095a 15-20 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Haybron, "Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being," 28; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 5, 1095b 15-20.

[...] and the like), clearly the good cannot be something universally present in all cases and single.³⁹

The pluriform sense of goodness obeys the various goods we tend as humans. Aristotle describes the natural teleology underlying human action.⁴⁰ People aim at things like accomplishments, honours, pleasures, etc. Nevertheless, Aristotle notes that we want these things generally for the sake of something higher or the sake of happiness. In other words, they are not complete ends or, better said, they are parts of the whole of which a happy life may consist. Then happiness is the complete end we look for.⁴¹

As quoted, eudaimonia has to do with *living and doing well*. What does this mean for human beings? Functioning well as humans at best. In this point, Aristotle associates eudaimonia with human *ergon*:

Now if the function of man is an activity of the soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle, and if we say a so-and-so and a good so-and-so have a function which is the same in kind [...] If any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if [15] this is the case, human good turns out to be the activity of the soul in conformity with excellence, and if there is more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete. But we must add 'in a complete life.' For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.⁴²

The paragraph contains condensed the core ideas on eudaimonia: 1) it has to do with the human good; 2) which consists in the activity of the human soul according to reason; 3) that means well-performed activities according to excellences; 4) it supposes the human temporal condition, and concretely an overarching life story. The following text adds some specific characteristics to eudaimonia:

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 6, 1095a 25-28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 7, 1097a 15-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 7, 1097b 1-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I, 7, 1098a 8-18. In Juan Andrés Mercado, "Origin of the Metaphysics of the Living: From Plato to *De anima* 2.5," *Acta Philosophica* 22, no. 1 (2013): 45, there is an interesting consideration about the 'perfect activity' (*teleia energeia*) in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.

The characteristics that are looked for in happiness also seem, all of the excellence, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom, [25] others with these, or one of these, accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure; while others also include external prosperity.⁴³

Aristotle refers to the intellectual and moral excellences or excellences of character which correspond to the two parts of the human soul.⁴⁴ The excellences for doing well in our lives pertain to our composite nature – body and soul. Aristotle bears in mind that a happy life is one of both theoretical wisdom and moral goodness, including, in turn, practical wisdom:

Again, the function of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom and moral excellence, for excellence makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it.⁴⁵

If happiness is an activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; this will be the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which [15] is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper excellence will be complete happiness. That this activity is contemplative, we have already said.⁴⁶

Though the precedent paragraphs seem to be contradictory – there is a long debate on that –⁴⁷ they might be seen as complementary, taking into account Aristotle's insistence on human composite nature.⁴⁸

Aristotle also considers some external conditions for eudaimonia. A kind of external prosperity is needed for humans to flourish:

Yet evidently, as we said, it needs the external goods as well, for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8, 1098b 22-26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 12, 1144a 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 12, 1144a 5-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 7, 1177a 10-18.

⁴⁷ Richard Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," *Philosophical Review* 88, no. 2 (1979): 167-197; Terence Irwin, "Conceptions of Happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields, 495-528 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012).

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 8, 1178a 20.

equipment [...] As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition; for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune, though others identify it with excellence.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding, it does not mean that Aristotle is basing happiness on fortune neither on external conditions:

while a single man may suffer many turns of fortune's wheel [...] Success or failure in life does not depend on these, but human life, as we said, also needs these, while excellent activities or their opposites determine happiness or the reverse.⁵⁰

Furthermore, he adds that “for the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances.”⁵¹ Clearly, for Aristotle, *eudaimonia* depends on one's excellences or, better said of one's acts performed excellently: “it is even more necessary that his acts should be of a certain character.”⁵²

Therefore, Aristotle adopts a more moderate position regarding external goods influencing one's happiness:

Still, we must not think that the man who is to be happy will need many things or great things, merely because he cannot be blessed without external goods; for self-sufficiency and action do not depend on excess, and we can do noble acts without ruling earth and sea; for even with moderate advantages one can act excellently.⁵³

A typical discussed issue on Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* is the role pleasure (*hedonia*) plays in it. As known, he deals specifically with that in *NE* VII and X, though is also referenced in other works:

we have defined and declared happiness to be an exercise of excellence in a complete life, and excellence has to do with pleasure and pain; it is indispensable to speak about pleasure since happiness is not apart from pleasure.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 8, 1098b 30-1099a 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 10, 1100b 1-10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 10, 1101a 1.

⁵² Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1215a 2.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1179a 1-5.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, 1204a 30.

Aristotle defends that a noble and virtuous life is in itself pleasant. Moreover, a sign of being a good person is to rejoice in good actions and with all that is noble. Here morality and pleasure come together within Aristotle's eudaimonia:

excellent actions are such so that these are pleasant for such men and their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need for pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm but has its [15] pleasure in itself [...]. If this is so, excellent actions must be in themselves pleasant. But they are also *good* and *noble*, and have each of these attributes in the highest degree since the good man judges well about these attributes [...]. Happiness then is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing.⁵⁵

Besides this kind of rejoicing, Aristotle discusses the connection of happiness with the more common delight: amusement.⁵⁶ Contemporarily, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi distinguish between pleasure and enjoyment.⁵⁷ Vittersø criticises this division, explaining that “they are not the only scholars to ignore the concept of interest when looking for an experiential and functional contrast to pleasure.”⁵⁸ Mercado notes, following Aristotle, that we can feel pleasure while, e.g. playing the flute depending on the command of the basic skills of a particular discipline. For Aristotle, pleasure consists in the perfection of activity, something that “completes the activity [...] as an end which supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age.”⁵⁹ Then it is something intimately linked to the activity but at the same time irreducible to it.⁶⁰

Lastly, Aristotle's emphasis on eudaimonia as living well – meaning acting and doing well, also morally – suggests that one can assess whether a life has been happy only when it ends:

For to do well and to live well is held to be identical with being happy, but each of these – living and doing – is employment, an activity [...]

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8, 1099a 5-25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 6, 1176a 30-1177a 1.

⁵⁷ Martin Seligman, and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 12.

⁵⁸ Joar Vittersø, “The Feeling of Excellent Functioning: Hedonic and Eudaimonic Emotions,” in *The Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*, ed. Joar Vittersø, 253-276 (New York: Springer, 2016), 265.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 4, 1174b32-33.

⁶⁰ Juan Andrés Mercado, “Harmonising Reason and Emotions: Common Paths from Plato to Contemporary Trends in Psychology,” in *Desire and Human Flourishing. Perspectives from Positive Psychology*, ed. Magda Bosch, 89-105 (New York: Springer, 2020), 92; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 5, 1175b 1ff.

we cannot ascribe happiness to the existence of a single day, or to a child, or to each of the ages of life [...] Never to call a man happy when living, but only when his life is ended. For nothing incomplete is happy, not being whole.⁶¹

The temporal condition delimits the progression of one's life and simultaneously allows us to evaluate our life with perspective.

The implications of this idea may well connect with life narratives' accounts.⁶² In telling the story of human life, Malo argues that personal truth – the realisation of one's identity according to a life project/goals – has a central role. Personal truth is not a set of theoretical truths or a series of norms of behaviour, but it is the narration of a life with meaning.⁶³ Aristotle would probably agree with that.

V. Concluding remarks

After reviewing Aristotle's account of eudaimonia and Fredrickson's theory of positive emotions, it follows a few reflections, analysing how Fredrickson's and Aristotle's views can fit as partly combinable.

We are before two levels and kinds of explanations, the empirical-psychological and the philosophical, even if with some overlappings. Fredrickson's focus is on the physiological and psychological contributions of positive emotions for flourishing. Aristotle offers a philosophical and theoretical argumentation of happiness based on his conception of human nature framed in his ethical writings.

At first sight, these epistemological and methodological differences appear to make it impossible to combine or even compare both views. However, as said, some overlappings seem to dissolve a bit the boundaries between the perspectives.

One of the overlappings is the same Aristotle's interdisciplinary work. The atmosphere of the Lyceum seems to have been more scientific, in modern understanding, than philosophical. The sciences of observation were encouraged, and the inductive method was practised. According to Aristotle, the composition of living beings affords an extraordinary pleasure to anyone with a philosophical disposition capable of understanding causes. In all natural things, there is something to move wonder. In addition to

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1219b 1-7.

⁶² Robert Gahl, "MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing: Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology," *Acta Philosophica* 28, no. 2 (2019): 279-296.

⁶³ Antonio Malo Pé, *Los senderos perdidos en el bosque. Diálogos en torno a la verdad personal* (Madrid: Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias, 2007), 9.

Philosophy, Aristotle's interest in biology and natural sciences to grasp the principles of health and disease – in part inherited by his physicians' ancestors –⁶⁴ would lead him probably if he would live nowadays to engage in empirical neurophysiological research when studying happiness.

Empirical findings concerning coping, positive relationships, self-acceptance, broadened thinking could be of interest for philosophers analysing the components of well-being and vice-versa. The philosophical conceptualisation about emotions, eudaimonia, hedonia could be helpful for psychologists in the conceptual framework of flourishing.

Fredrickson is not directly a well-being researcher, but her account of positive emotions has led her to the contemporary discussion on eudaimonia/hedonia. We cannot tag her as having a strict hedonist approach to well-being; either she deals with the philosophical discussion on the topic. Her approach is rather entirely psychological – bio-neuropsychological –, and thus, primarily empirical. However, her views are holistic, and even if not philosophically-based, contribute to considering human flourishing from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Fredrickson's insights on positive emotions – supported by many contemporary researchers –⁶⁵ might be well complemented with Arnold's – who shared most of the Aristotelian views – considerations about emotion and meaningful life. As Fredrickson, Arnold also speaks about positive emotions.⁶⁶ Furthermore, she lists some of them: interest (desire to know), the union with others, love, joy, sympathy and empathy, the love of beauty, the joy of doing and making, mirth and laughter, religious emotions, happiness.⁶⁷ Positive emotions may help deal with our goal, which gives meaning to life and conduces to flourishing or maturity of one's personality.

Interestingly, Arnold's reflections – with a philosophical background, as said – support Fredrickson's findings on the build effect of positive emotions. In the long run, thanks to the cumulative feature of emotions, they might become emotional attitudes and habits, and as such, more stable dispositions, even virtues.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ William Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 20; 41-42, referencing Aristotle's *On the Parts of Animals*, 645a 5-17. About the current debate on Aristotle's naturalism: Sophia Connell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Timothy Kearns, and Oswald Schmitz, "Flourishing: Outlines of an Aristotelian Natural Philosophy of Living Things," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2021): 335-351.

⁶⁵ For example, Alice Isen, Martin Seligman, and Ed Diener.

⁶⁶ Arnold, *Emotion and Personality*, Volume 1, 195-196.

⁶⁷ Arnold, *Emotion and Personality*, Volume 2, 321-330.

⁶⁸ Arnold, *Emotion and Personality*, Volume 1, 190-191.

As all emotions – stemmed from appraisals – positive emotions are intentional – object-referenced – and say something about what we value, so they are also subject-referenced. That emotions are intentional and have a cognitive component is present already in Aristotle.⁶⁹

For example, joy at human love or when listening to a symphony can make life meaningful, and joy itself has meaning in its content or intention. Then, positive emotions can make life meaningful when they aim at objective values: feeling joy at human love and listening to a symphony. Therefore, the meaning of life must be in value, which is the realm of objectively real goals. Like Fredrickson's theory of positive emotions put with values, some hedonic approaches can be reconciled partly with eudaimonic approaches.

As exposed, for Fredrickson, positive emotions cannot be just identified with pleasure, and Aristotle's remarks about pleasure and a good-virtuous life make them reconcilable and indispensable aspects of well-being. The boundaries between hedonia and eudaimonia are not rigid but liquid, with more overlappings than commonly discussed.

Regarding Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia as feeling and doing well, one might argue that it matches Fredrickson's remarks partly. However, as soon as we consider what eudaimonia means for each, we doubt this similarity. As explained, Fredrickson understands eudaimonia as having a purpose in life. For Aristotle, eudaimonia is a life well-lived, both intellectually, morally and with some good external things. Although Aristotle is ambivalent in his explanations, sometimes he favours understanding eudaimonia as the theoretical contemplative intellectual life and others as the practical virtuous life. As Abbà notes, if there is ambiguity in the Aristotelian conception of eudaimonia, this fact perhaps reflects the very problem of possible happiness for nature as complex as a human.⁷⁰

For Fredrickson's part, in contrast to Aristotle's eudaimonia, she does not deal openly with ethical aspects of flourishing, just like most authors in psychology maintain neutral-value accounts,⁷¹ a position criticised by Fowers.⁷² Also, Gulliford points out this situation, posing that modern psychotherapeutic psychologies should be viewed as disciplines that blend psychological insights with ethical and metaphysical assumptions.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1370a 18-19; 1378a 20-21; Kristján Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9-14.

⁷⁰ Giuseppe Abbà, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù. Saggio di filosofia morale* (Roma: LAS, 1995), 18, 23.

⁷¹ Todd Kashdan, Robert Biswas-Diener, and Laura King, "Reconsidering Happiness: The Costs of Distinguishing between Hedonics and Eudaimonia," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 3, no. 4 (2008): 220.

⁷² Fowers, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," 70.

Psychologists cannot avoid making assumptions about human nature and ethics while inhabiting the worldviews implicit within these psychologies.⁷³

Csikszentmihalyi indicates that Aristotle believed that happiness resulted from the 'virtuous activity of the soul.' He agrees with this aetiology to the extent that the proximal cause of happiness must also be a psychological state. External conditions like health, wealth, love or good fortune can help bring it about, but only if mediated by an appropriate subjective evaluation that labels the external conditions conducive to happiness.⁷⁴

The above refers to the tension between the subjective and objective aspects of happiness. Some authors like Fowers do not deny that well-being has a subjective dimension but rather emphasise transcending subjectivity (i.e., physical health, purposeful activity, observable joy). This aspect is well considered by Fredrickson, too.

However, it is not easy to differentiate subjective and extra subjective dimensions of happiness, and it seems they cannot be cleanly and fully separated. For Aristotle, eudaimonia is mainly activity, and the activity cannot be conceived as either a subjective state or a purely objective event because, in Aristotle's understanding, the activity includes intentions and observable actions in one inextricable whole.⁷⁵

Haybron highlights the interdependence of subjective and objective aspects by explaining that what is good for an individual depends partly on what human beings are characteristically like. It does not mean that all people should live the same way. There is much room for individual differences, though certain things – being a social species – seem essential for well-being, regardless of who the individual is. This consideration supports Fredrickson's assumption of human nature and her remarks on relatedness, social interactions as occasions to experience positive emotions and opportunities for personal growth.

Subjective well-being (with life-satisfaction measures) does not identify with the hedonic well-being perspective (related only to pleasure/pain or suffering). Subjective well-being refers to various mental states: judgment-like states as life satisfaction and affective states like pleasure and emotional well-being. Interestingly, there is a particularly close link between life satisfaction and subjective perceptions of meaning in life, and the latter is a classic eudaimonic metric.⁷⁶

These considerations go beyond the experimental psychology domain. Fredrickson's work on positive emotions related to human flourishing

⁷³ Liz Gulliford, "Virtue in Positive Psychology," *Acta Philosophica* 29, no. 1 (2020): 94.

⁷⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi* (New York: Springer, 2015), 72.

⁷⁵ Fowers, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," 82.

⁷⁶ Haybron, "The Philosophical Basis of Eudaimonic Psychology," 41-50.

could profit from philosophical insights. In that way, at the crossroads of psychology and philosophy, moral psychology could be developed, getting insights from both disciplines. Some efforts in this line exist already.⁷⁷

Towards the end, regarding the initial question about the plausibility of happiness without morals, or if the wicked may flourish, opinions are divided. However, even if intuitions divide on this question, many people find it implausible that someone could profit from a life of immorality.⁷⁸ At least for the deep and enduring happiness Aristotle bears in mind moral and intellectual virtues are required.

Regarding Fredrickson's account, we cannot argue the same. She could say probably that a wicked person is not happy even if he/she is physically healthy because of the negative emotions experienced sooner or later. Albeit not considered by Fredrickson, negative emotions like shame, repentance could help redirect one's life on the rails of virtue. Moreover, positive emotions like love and joy are mainly present in a good-virtuous life since it is enjoyable. Though a relevant one, this is only one side of happiness. Fredrickson and contemporary (positive) psychology's contribution is to highlight what has been omitted in happiness discourse in general, the subjective evaluation – as Csikszentmihalyi noted – with its psychological components, affective, cognitive and psychological health. True, not only the mentally healthy individual can be happy, but mainly everyone who interprets a life situation – and the whole life – in terms of value or good.

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⁷⁷ For instance, Paul Wong has proposed a new model for Positive Psychology in "Positive Psychology 2.0: Towards a Balanced Interactive Model of the Good Life," *Canadian Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2011): 69-81.

⁷⁸ Haybron, "Philosophical Basis," 35.

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