

**The socio-cultural landscape, individual resources and
optimal functioning:
A metatheoretical analysis**

By

Silje Maria Falch Olaisen

**Master of Philosophy in Psychology
Institute of Psychology
University of Oslo, Norway**

May 2008

Abstract

Recent conceptualisation of happiness and optimal functioning maintain that it entail the realisation of social human qualities – the virtues. This thesis describes and discusses some of the positions that positive psychology has been concerned with regarding these virtuous qualities, but also regarding the relationship between the individual and the society. Positive psychology maintains, firstly, that there is a virtuous human nature. Secondly that the individual cannot adapt to any circumstances and still be happy, the social conditions may foster virtuous character development and optimal functioning or diminish it. Thirdly, that being virtuous entails using one's resources to realise not only one's own happiness but also the happiness of other people and the community or society. Finally, positive psychology argue that this relationship between the individual and the society is fragile and that social conditions may crush the very aspects in human nature that make the human being strive towards optimal functioning, and towards being the best he or she can be.

Keywords: eudaimonic well-being; happiness; optimal functioning; positive psychology; virtue.

Foreword

During Easter last year I wrote what can be considered the conceptual basis for my masters thesis. The inspiration came as I thought about the wonderful life I have. I do not struggle financially; I have a supporting and loving family who like all families have their issues; I live in a country in which I am allowed to do a wonderful degree, using my mind to do something interesting. Thus, I am privileged to have the opportunity to explore my individuality. The question arose, why am I not happy? I mean I am not unhappy. I go about my days and feel pretty good about my life. I have good friends, I can enjoy things and I do have fun in my life. Yet, every day when I wake up I am not filled with gratitude, and natural joy that a new day lay ahead of me. Why is that? When I have all the freedom and autonomy in the world to do what ever I like. I am not restricted by social roles; I have hope for the future. What is missing? Thus started my research into the concept of virtue.

The form that this master's thesis is written in is somewhat untraditional in the discipline of psychology, both because of its length and because it is a theoretical thesis. And as always when one is breaking with tradition there is a certain amount of negativity and resistance, and surly enough from beginning to end I have encountered obstacles resulting from this fact. However, the learning curve for me this year has been extraordinary. Both because I had no idea what it entailed to write a metatheoretical discussion when I first started, and because I feel that the topic is truly important. Also I see the world a little differently now. The university, as an entity can to some extent be regarded for the student in the same way as the role society plays for the individual, often forcing the individual onto existing paths and to comply with ways of doing things. Thus we are not as individuals encouraged to trusts ourselves and to be all that we can be, to reach the highest potential. The student can similarly met with distrust and a feeling of having to fit in.

Notwithstanding, personally this thesis has given me the feeling that what truly matter in life is striving towards the realisation of the qualities within us that make us able to reach out to other people. Practising them and being aware of what it entail to include these qualities in one's life, e.g. what it really entails to feel gratitude, really feel it and not just think it. That when you do that, when you practice your virtues, individuality alone will not be so important if you cannot use it for greater good. The virtues as I understand it make us open to use this individuality to benefit other people, practising virtuousness thus helps us as individual to orient towards the realisation of other peoples well-being in addition to our own.

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Hilde Eileen Nafstad, and also Rolv Mikkell Blakar. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with me and then giving me room to find my own way, thank you for truly caring and for being open enough to talk about your own experiences. Thanks to my family, whom I know is always there in the background supporting me; having my back if I need it. I love you. In particular, I would like to thank my mother who has been my “sparring partner”, listening and giving me advice along the way. Encouraging me to listen to my feelings, and to trust my self, regardless of what other people think. Dad, I wish you were still here. Thanks to everyone I have talked to along the way who have contributed with greater or lesser importance, either consciously on their own part or not. I remember and I am grateful. Last of all I would like to thank all the people in the world who work every day to change things for the better, those that work for other people in addition to themselves, and who dare, and who try to make a difference. There are people out there who risk their life for what they believe in, to go against convention, and to make the world better. If only more people would search within themselves to find such strengths and use them for greater good. Finally, I would like to thank the power within me that have given me the strength to see this through and for fighting for what I thought was important, and for what I think is important for the furthering of our understanding of human development. Though it has been a tough year, I am grateful for the experience and wisdom it has given me.

Table of contents

Abstract	1
Foreword	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of contents	4
About metatheory	5
Introduction	7
The concepts of happiness and optimal functioning.....	7
Positive psychology.....	8
Life-plan perspective on happiness.....	9
Fostering resources	12
Nature and nurture.....	12
Good versus bad.....	13
Fostering character strengths and virtues.....	14
Residing within a cultural setting.....	16
Setting it all into context.....	17
Materialistic versus idealistic values.....	18
Individualistic versus collectivistic values.....	19
Finding the relevant options	21
The freedom of choice.....	21
Having too much choice.....	22
Practical wisdom.....	23
Being a virtuous being	25
Reframing: Finding the balance.....	25
Three domains in search for happiness.....	27
The fragile relationship.....	27
Concluding remarks	28
References	30

About metatheory

A central task for metatheory is to evaluate the existing assumptions and underlying worldviews of a particular discipline, and further to develop alternative perspectives (Slife, Yanchar and Reber, 2005). This thesis is preoccupied with metatheory, investigating the underlying assumptions that are present in theory (Slife and Williams, 1995; Nafstad, 2005a). Assumptions should, as Slife and Williams (1995) argue, be continually examined “to see whether they are reasonable or make sense in light of our experience” (p.17). To evaluate assumptions in this way is a task that has been neglected for the most part of psychology, and consequences are that a few taken-for-granted assumptions are dominant in the accumulated knowledgebase on psychological functioning (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997; Rozin, 2007; Slife and Williams, 1995; Slife, Yanchar and Reber, 2005; Wrightsman, 1992).

Psychology holds a unique position, as psychology’s knowledgebase has implications for how we understand others, and ourselves as human beings. The taken for granted and hidden ideas thus influence our worldview; the way we act and what we assume human beings are like (Slife and Williams, 1995). This knowledge about human functioning, psychology’s values, assumptions and norms, is according to Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) evenly reflected in the modern society. As Prilleltensky (1989) state, “There is little doubt that psychology has left its imprint on 20th century society” (p. 795). Research, therapy and self-help books, to mention a few, represent channels through which information from psychology is transmitted into society (Mayer, 2007). The problem arises when perspectives are left out or are underrepresented (Nafstad, 2004). Often, as has been the case in psychology, one perspective governs and domineers a discipline, imposing a one-sided view.

For psychology this has implications for the understanding of human psychological functioning that thus is imposed on society. A central theme in this thesis is the views psychology holds concerning self-realisation, and how these views are reflected in the modern society. A question of current interest is concerned with what self-realisation and optimal functioning entail, in relation to the individual life-path. The answer about optimal functioning is of course dependent on the starting point one takes when the issue is addressed in the research literature. Based on mainstream psychology, I will argue, it is difficult today to give an adequate answer to this question about optimal human functioning. The reason is that psychology has mainly been concerned with human suffering and malfunction (Seligman and

Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Rather than focusing on the positive dispositional resources, mainstream psychology is focused on limiting and controlling unwanted human qualities.

It is precisely this knowledgebase with main focus on malfunction that imbued the modern society, reinforcing a society that is preoccupied with individualistic and materialistic values (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997; Kasser and Kanner, 2003). A clear tendency is that this dominating focus on individualism and materialism in the modern society further rubs off onto the individual level (Kasser and Kanner, 2003; Nafstad, 2007; Seligman, 2002). Thus, as I will argue, the self-realising individual in the modern society may be dominated by these individualistic and materialistic values.

In this thesis I am concerned with the position of self-realisation and about human self-realisation or optimal functioning in today's society. What tracks in the socio-cultural landscape are created not by the individual but by leading tendencies in the society? This thesis is about the assumptions that there is a human core, acute continually striving for more optimal functioning. I will analyse this assumption and then I will address the very important question about today's society, and the imprint of a modern society on a human trying to better him - or her self as a social being.

Introduction

The concepts of happiness and optimal functioning

What does happiness entail? The meaning of the phenomena has been the subject of discussions throughout history, both in philosophy and psychology. Happiness, according to Aristotle, was the main ingredient in a good life. In Aristotle's opinion the notion of happiness had been greatly confined, commonly associated, and in Aristotle's view reduced, to hedonic enjoyment (Barnes, 2000). According to Aristotle there was not the closest resemblance between the feeling that result from satisfying a need, and that which result from meaningful encounter with and realisation of one's own inner potential (Barnes, 2000).

In psychology, it was the humanistic tradition that was particularly interested in human potential (Linley and Joseph, 2006). With Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in the breach, optimal functioning was put on the agenda in psychology. Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1963) both argued for the possibility of optimal human functioning; one with the emphasis on self-actualisation and need satisfaction, and the other with emphasis on setting the stage for growth and positive development with unconditional love. They both thus argued for the potential that lie in human beings.

Optimal functioning and happiness are indicator words for current trends in psychology. The interest for this subject has been recharged. Once again the window to human flourishing has been opened. With it comes the promise that happiness can be attained through meaningful existence. What this entail more exactly, is one of the objectives of positive psychology. The human being is a social entity and qualities of social character are important for individual happiness and positive development. It is therefore important that positive psychology is concerned with how this social aspect is embedded in human nature and how it affects happiness. To understand happiness positive psychology must turn to look at how these social human qualities contribute to optimal functioning. The notion of the virtuous being, and its significance for happiness is an invitation to do exactly that. To analyse this proposition of optimal functioning, meaningful existence and happiness, I will rely on positive psychology. Let me first give a short presentation of this new field within psychology.

Positive psychology

Positive psychology made a u-turn in today's psychology announcing their new agenda to focus on human strength and potential. According to Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000), the founders of positive psychology, psychological functioning entails more than suffering. Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) further argue that optimal functioning has been neglected in the field of psychology. According to Rozin (2007) "there is a massive amount of work bringing non-functional individuals to a level of modest function but virtually none about bringing people functioning adequately to a more optimal level of function" (p. 757). The aim for positive psychology is to explore and expand the understanding of the very aspects that make life worth living. One of the most central concepts in positive psychology, relevant for this thesis, is virtue; the notion that within the social human being lie the potential for excellence.

The concept of virtue stems from the Greek word *areté*, and is often translated precisely as excellence. The concept of *areté* was a central concept in Aristotelian philosophy in which positive psychology is rooted deeply (Jørgensen and Nafstad, 2005). In particular, this is true for the understanding and implication of virtues. Aristotle described virtue as, "a habitual disposition connected with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, a mean which is determined by reason, by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it" (Trans. Hughes, 2001, p. 111). How positive psychology has conceptualised this concept is something that this thesis will be concerned with.

Aristotle was of the opinion that the contemporary notion of happiness was both limited, and at the same time limiting the potential of the human being. "The many, the most vulgar, would seem to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure" (Trans. Irwin, 1985, p. 7). Aristotle frowned upon this conceptualisation of happiness. By setting pleasure as the highest feeling, Aristotle argued, the positive human potential was underestimated (Barnes, 2000). He maintained that the highest form of happiness did not stem from enjoyment and pleasure, but rather as a result of virtuous action (Barnes, 2000). Aristotle argued that in order to experience this type of happiness, the individual would have to realise his most excellent human qualities and thus become a virtuous being (Barnes, 2000). The process of reaching the highest happiness was referred to as *Eudaimonia*. Aristotle and positive psychology thus connect excellence with happiness. Happiness results from meaningful encounter with and realisation of one's own inner potential.

This argumentation can be found in current positive psychology's analysis about happiness. Waterman (1993), for example, states that happiness is a result of eudaimonic well-being; the realisation of one's self or inner potential. Attaining eudaimonic well-being or happiness is thus a result of living in accordance with one's inner dispositions. According to Waterman (1993) the dispositions are "the potentialities that are shared by all human beings by virtue of our common species hood and those unique potentials that distinguish each individual from all others" (p. 679). The positive psychologists Deci and Ryan (2008) are among those today concerned with the expansion of our common understanding of what happiness entail. Deci and Ryan (2008) agree with Waterman (1993) and state concerning eudaimonic well-being that: "Well-being is not so much an outcome or an end as it is the process of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature" (p. 2). Deci and Ryan (2008) further maintains that happiness is the result of living in accordance with one's virtuous potential. Happiness can therefore be understood as the result of self-realisation.

This conceptualisation clearly contradicts the common definition of happiness in psychology, associated with the presence of positive affect and absence of negative affect in addition to life satisfaction, namely subjective well-being. Subjective well-being, has often been likened to hedoni; the notion of making life pleasant (Deci and Ryan, 2001). Some positive psychologists claim that these two represent two different routes to happiness (Gallagher and Lopez, 2007; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park and Seligman, 2007), one with emphasis on growth and meaning and the other with emphasis on feeling good. However several researchers now argue that the concept of happiness is multifarious and that the common understanding fails to capture the complexity of happiness. Pleasure and enjoyment is accordingly only partially involved in the process of becoming a happy individual (Ryff and Singer, 2008; Vittersø, 2005).

Life plan perspective on happiness

Positive psychology, and the eudaimonic approach, is arguing that happiness has a complex nature. Perspectives concerned with happiness and what a happy life entail are therefore not always in agreement. As we've seen, the eudaimonic approach, maintain that happiness is a process and the result of realising one's potentialities. Happiness according to the eudaimonic approach therefore includes factors that are not tantamount to merely feeling happy, as activities that bring growth and meaning may be associated with challenge and

effort (Waterman, 1993). The eudaimonic approach further contends that happiness entails several factors, or ingredients coming together, and that feeling happy therefore is not the only important factor. As Ryan and Deci (2000) put it, “Specifying psychological needs as essential nutriment implies that individuals cannot thrive without satisfying all of them, any more that people can thrive with water but not food” (p. 78). The positive psychologist Chekola (2007) agrees with this conceptualisation. Such factors, he suggest might be autonomy, rationality, health and serendipitous goods. According to Martin (2007) Aristotle had similar views on happiness; arguing that happiness requires some external goods (e.g. wealth, power, health, friendship and longevity), however, that virtues had a very central role.

There are additionally two other aspects that, according to Ryff and Singer (1998), make the common understanding of happiness limited. The first is related to the time perspective, and the second one has to do with the continuity of the feeling of happiness. Both these are captured in the Norwegian term – *livslykke*. The direct translation of the word into English would be life-happiness. Though it might be natural to assume, this word does not imply a lifetime of happiness, but rather happiness seen according to a lifetime perspective. This distinction is important as it captures the aspect, that some positive psychologists now argue for, that a happy life entails more than continuously feeling happy, in addition to the perspective of a long period of time, even as long as the life-span. However Chekola (2007) maintains, happiness can be understood in terms of one’s life as a whole. What Chekola (2007) is trying to do is thus to reformulate the position on and the understanding of happiness in current psychology. I find this position interesting.

Chekola (2007, p. 53) argue that happiness is a “big” concept that can be described:

- a. “As having to do with one’s life as a whole”
- b. “As being relatively long-lasting (when we talk about happiness of a life it is not just for a moment or a day; it is for a significant period)”
- c. “As making one’s life worthwhile (it is a final value)”
- d. “As being something all people desire”

Similarly to the eudaimonic approach, Chekola (2007) also view happiness as a process, and this makes the foundation of the life plan perspective. Happiness in the, life-plan perspective is “the realisation or ongoing satisfaction of global ends of the person (a life plan)

along with a disposition to have certain feelings and attitudes” (Chekola, 2007, p. 56). Chekola (2007) argue that a person’s life can be organised and structured according to a life plan. This life-plan accordingly reviles what ends a person is striving towards the realisation of. This perspective thus goes beyond the moment and captures the desires, plans and values that drive an individual in terms of the future. Chekola (2007) refer to these as major or global desires and maintains that these form the individual life plan. The life-plan perspective, thus argue that happiness is the realization of such a life plan.

Chekola (2007) further argue that a life plan is “comprised of a set of global desires (ends) of a person. Typically these will include desires and values about the kind of person one wants to be, life goals (which may include a career), desires and values concerning relationships with others, etc.” (p. 63). Global desires (e.g. “occupational goals, desires to have certain personal relationship, desires to be a certain kind of person, important work related goals or goal related to hobbies, etc.” (2007, p. 64). Global desires and values are quite permanent, comprehensive and frustrations concerning these desires bring serious dissatisfaction (Chekola, 2007).

The direction that a life takes is thus the ends of the final values towards which the individual is striving to realise. However, the choices that make the individual able to realize these personal desires are in the context of community. Chekola (2007) argues, “We do not construct life plans out of nothing. We construct them out of ideals formed by observing people around us in society and in history. In addition, we may adopt roles we are expected to fulfil as elements of our life plans that we adopt from the society” (p. 71). Ryan and Deci (2000) agree with this, and further contend that the social conditions may either facilitate or diminish the individual’s psychological development towards happiness and optimal functioning. In the realisation of a life plan the individual is thus influenced by it surroundings and might be lead to strive towards ends that may or may not be in accordance with what it entail to function optimally as a human being. Therefore the individual might think that the end will bring something that it simply doesn’t. The eudaimonic approach maintains, as Ryan and Deci (2001) state, “Not all desires – not all outcomes that a person might value – would yield well-being when achieved. Even though they are pleasure producing, some outcomes are not good for people and would not promote wellness” (p. 145-146). The eudaimonic approach therefore contends that any fulfilled life-plan will not bring happiness.

To sum up positive psychology argues for the necessity of conceptualising happiness as the ongoing realisation of a life-plan. The life-plan must, positive psychology argue, consist of values and desires that capture the complexity of happiness as a multidimensional concept.

Making choices that either leads to a life lacking something that is wanted, or including something that is unwanted, might lead the individual in a direction that was not intended. Thus a life might not be a strait path forward. A life that is diverse and multifarious possibly leaves greater potential for development and is more likely to eventually lead to the psychological feeling of living a meaningful life (Seligman, 2002).

In this thesis, I address the role of the society in the process of self-realisation, and the individual's quest to finding happiness. I will use the construct of virtue to examine the contribution of self-realisation to a path that is meaningful for the individual. This subject will be tied to practical wisdom and life choices, more specifically to the individual's ability to make choices that correspond with a life-path that is meaningful for the individual. I then discuss my approach to happiness as encompassing both individualistic and collectivistic values. Even though it is typical for the individualistic culture to be solely oriented towards the individual, I will argue that it is of value to the individual to find balance between individual and collective influences, in its realisation. My main focus is thus on the perspective of the importance of the interrelationship between the individual and the environment, in the realisation of a life-path that is optimal both for the individual and for the community. I will undertake this analysis using positive psychology as my main platform.

1) Fostering resources

Nature and nurture

The eudaimonic route to happiness is founded on the assumption that there is a human nature. According to this perspective human beings are born with dispositions. Deci and Ryan (2008) state that the eudaimonic approach "ascribes content to human nature", and further that this approach works to uncover that content and to understand the conditions that facilitate versus diminish it" (p. 3). As this show, Deci and Ryan (2008), maintain that there are

conditions under which the individual will function optimally, and that it is a goal, for positive psychology, to find out exactly what these conditions are. The next two sections will look at what positive psychology means by the content of human nature, and how this content can be stimulated, and further lead to individual growth and development.

Good versus bad

A person's life can be seen, from beginning to end, as a path. Hundeide (2005) described it as a track across the socio-cultural landscape, and I will look at what that entail more exactly at a later point. Firstly, the life-path embarked upon by the individual, which continuously evolve, takes form and is marked by the formation of character.

According to Peterson, Park and Seligman (2004) character is comprised of a family of traits, and is manifest in thoughts, feelings and actions. In the same way as Deci and Ryan (2008), Seligman (2002) argues that character is formed on the basis of dispositions. Positive psychology and the eudaimonic approach therefore, maintain that biology set the stage for character development (Park, 2004). According to Seligman (2002) "character comes in two forms, both equally fundamental – bad character, and good or virtuous (angelic) character" (p. 125). Happiness is possible when character formation happens in accordance with predisposed virtuous qualities.

"To be virtuous is to display, by acts of will, all or at least most of the six ubiquitous virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence" (Seligman, 2002, p. 137). Accordingly, good character is not just something that happens to the individual. The individual has the possibility to act virtuously, but virtuous character is not a given. Human nature can be described as the core that contain virtuous dispositions, amongst other things. When these are realised, good character is displayed. When they are not, good character is either incomplete or totally absent.

These qualities – the virtues – represent the best human qualities. Positive psychology has selected them on the basis of several criteria, such as ubiquity. These virtues can be described as core characteristics that, according to Seligman (2002), "capture the notion of good character" (p. 133). However, the virtues are somewhat abstract, and thus not very tangible, Seligman (2002) argues. Therefore positive psychology has divided these six human core characteristics into 24 smaller units or character strengths. Gratitude, for example,

together with hope, humour, spirituality and appreciation of beauty make up the virtue of transcendence, the ability to extend outside oneself as a human being.

Another concept for positive psychology is thus character strengths. The virtues are displayed through the realisation of these character strengths. Therefore, character strengths are described as components of, and as routes to the virtues (Park, 2004; Seligman, 2002). As Park (2004) puts it “Character strengths are the psychological ingredients – the processes and mechanisms – that define the virtues” (p. 46). Therefore, when the individual realises the character strength of gratitude, the ability to extend outside oneself as a human being is displayed. The character strengths in this way this represent a route to expressing the virtue.

Often it is not as clear as good versus bad character. According to Park (2004) character has degrees of good and bad. Therefore, an individual can sometimes display character strengths in some situations, whereas at other times not. And further display some character strengths whereas others seem to be absent. An individual’s life-path will nevertheless bear the impression of the degree that virtuous character is present. Happiness, to conclude, can in this way be seen as an indicative of how in touch the individual is with his or her predisposed virtuous human nature. Park (2004) further specifies that there are several factors that may encourage the unfolding of good character and virtuousness.

Positive psychology investigates, as Jørgensen and Nafstad (2004) contend, the psychological properties of the human being as a moral agent. Positive psychology, and the eudaimonic approach in particular then, moreover assert that human flourishing and the development of good character is dependent on certain influential factors (Park, 2004). What are the factors that positive psychology argues that influence and encourage good character development in human beings, more precisely what contributes to the fostering of character strengths and virtues?

Fostering character strengths and virtues

The bioecological model introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1994), captures the complicated interaction between individuals and their surroundings as a life-path evolve. Social constructs of varying proximity and influential power describe how the surrounding imparts its influence on the individual, and further that the individual also impregnate the environment with its energy. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) “the influence of genetics

and environment on human development are never wholly separated but an ever evolving amalgam” (p. 21). As Brofenbrenner (1994) further explain for nature and nurture “both the proposing and disposing are jointly determined. It is no more correct to say that one factor solely proposes than the other” (p. 21). Brofenbrenner and Evans (2000) propose that healthy development in human beings is dependent on reciprocal social interaction. In mainstream psychology the interaction and interrelationship between individual and environment thus, is essential for healthy psychosocial development (Rutter, 2002). Positive psychology seems to agree with this understanding. Let us go back to what is the position of positive psychology, the assumption of humans having to be in touch with their virtuous nature. According to Seligman (2002) good character formation can be encouraged through a stimulating environment. A central question then is in what way is the environment important?

Park (2004) states: “Character strengths can be cultivated through good parenting, schooling and socialisation, and...becomes instantiated through habitual action” (p. 43). Additionally, Park (2004) maintains that having friends who exhibit good character behaviours such as pro-social traits might have a positive impact on good character development. Park (2004) also argues that good character is encouraged through engagement in moral, prosocial and virtuous acts. There are, it seems, certain fundamental processes involved in the forming of good character. Moral models, moral stimulation and instructions facilitate and a necessary.

The environment, for positive psychology, does accordingly, play a central role for character formation.

However, the most interesting, the implication of this approach for the human being is that an individual cannot adapt to any environment, and still be happy. There are circumstances under which individual potential is better fostered. What the individual need from the environment, at differing points in his or her life-path, will naturally vary. As Seligman (2002) proposes the child need abundance of love, warmth and affection, whereas for the adult, virtuous behaviour, as mentioned earlier, is a result of an act of will and choice. But can individuals be relied upon to make the virtuous choices? Does the individual have the sole responsibility for choosing a virtuous life-path? Or may some of this responsibility fall on a higher level, on society? The next section will identify which context, which social constructs in various forms, positive psychology argues, influence the individual in its search

for a happy life, and in the forming of a virtuous life-path. What is it in the, socio-cultural landscape, that has implications for the fostering of character strengths and virtues?

Residing within a cultural setting

The Brofenbrenner model (1979), mentioned above, puts the individual in centre and describes different interaction levels of social character. Let me first use this model.

The micro-system is the immediate cultural setting in a person's life, and it includes entities such as family, school, church, peers etc. (Brofenbrenner, 1979), this system is referred to by the positive psychologist Park (2004) as particularly important for character formation. The exo-system includes more distant social settings that the person might not even be a part of, but which nonetheless have an effect on the social development, i.e. extended family, mass media or friends of family (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The meso-system is an intermediate system that allows the entities on the exo-system to reach the individual through entities on the micro system (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Finally we have the macro-system which are the attitudes and ideologies in society (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

As described here the socialisation process starts in the most immediate circle (i.e. family), expands to community and then finally the society at large. Aristotle similarly argued that the individual must work its way through different social-constructs to realise his or her potential best-inclined virtues (Skirbekk and Gilje, 1996). One of the main points of the model is to demonstrate that it is not the level of proximity that determines influential power, but rather that there is a learning curve. This is also positive psychology's position.

Positive psychology is also concerned with the macro level, and how culture and society influence individuals and institutions (Nafstad, 2005b).

At a conference in Italy for positive psychology, Nafstad, Carlquist, Aasen and Blakar (2004) opened with the statement: "because individuals and institutions are always embedded in cultures and societies, macro level factors exogenous to individuals and institutions are of decisive importance with regard to the positive development..." (p. 1). Macro level deals with costumes, values and laws of the culture, all of which for positive psychology represent social systems that impart their influence on the developing individual.

Nafstad (2005) also argue that one can make inferences about what goes on, on the individual level, by looking at macro level factors, in particular, as we shall see, the collective values. Values, trends and norms in society that create strong currents might lead the individual onto paths that either facilitate or diminish the chances of optimal functioning and happiness. Back to the question of the individual's choice of life courses, some tracks in the socio-cultural landscape are created not by the individual, but by leading tendencies in the society. According to, for example, Carleheden (2007) the cultural context can therefore somehow confine the individual, and limit the conduct of life. It might, therefore, not be as easy to 'make one's own fortune' as some would have it. Virtue must be valued as a good by society and by individuals in order to be pursued. According to the positive psychologist Park (2004) "society as a whole can contribute significantly to character development by setting a moral atmosphere where moral behaviours are rewarded and stories of morally good deeds are frequently shared" (p. 46).

This, as I see it, implicitly suggest that:

- It may be difficult to find happiness in a society where the conditions are not favourable
- It is possible to make conditions in society favourable for fostering happiness.

Positive psychology accordingly, to sum up, argues that the society must create an atmosphere in which people are inclined to strive towards the realisation of character strengths and virtues. What is it exactly, in the socio-cultural landscape that is so important for the virtues? What is it that helps people live a more virtuous life? To answer this question I will first analyse the macro level and then ask about the situation of the virtuous individual in today's society. This discussion will be mostly of the Norwegian society.

Setting it all into context

According to the Norwegian researcher Hellevik (1996) two dimensions that are frequently used to measure value orientations: modernity versus traditional, and materialistic versus idealistic (Hellevik, 1996). The Norwegian society has according to Hellevik (1996) gone from having a traditionally oriented culture towards a modern value platform. The traditional society has been ascribed values like moderation, security and not standing out

from the crowd, as opposed to the modern ideology where individual freedom, equal rights, possibilities for self-realisation and the development of individual distinctiveness, is important (Hellevik, 1996).

Values are defined as fundamental goals to which an individual strives towards the realization of, and the means that are found appropriate to make use of in terms of achieving these goals (Hellevik, 1996). Values can thus be seen as rules of conduct, giving the person direction, these create what Sagiv, Roccas and Hazan (2005) refer to as value pathways. “A person’s values tell us what kinds of things he or she consider most important to obtain or accomplish in life” (Hellevik, 2002, p. 263). Sagiv, Roccas and Hazan (2005) have described values as, “social-cognitive representations of motivational goals”. Sagiv, Roccas and Hazan (2005) further state that there is a link between the values that individuals hold and well-being. Therefore, some, but not all value pathways may lead to happiness. An important question is accordingly whether the values pathways in the modern society are represent values that lead towards optimal functioning and happiness?

In the modern society two central value systems, in particularly, create so called tracks in the socio-cultural landscape: namely materialism and individualism. I will now look what these entail in more detail.

Materialistic versus idealistic values

Hellevik (2002) argue moreover that the dimension that is most relevant for happiness is the materialistic versus idealistic. One value system then is modern materialism, where the satisfaction of materialistic needs through consumption is the main concern. In addition we have modern idealism, within which people are more concerned with religion and spirituality, culture and outdoor activities. They are more willing to contribute to society and display higher levels of empathy with others. “Materialist more often than idealists give priority to own needs over those of poor countries, are less willing to contribute to good causes, or to restrict own consumption out of concern for the environment” (Hellevik, 2002, p. 265).

Recent tendencies reveal that the Norwegian people have been increasingly concerned with pleasure, consumption and things, until about two years ago (O. Hellevik, personal communication, April 21, 2008). Thus, the Norwegian society can be described to have a modern materialistic value orientation. Since the 80ties people have become more and more

materialistic (O. Hellevik, personal communication, April 21, 2008). This implies that people are striving towards the realisation of materialistic goals, and that the three factors pleasure, consumption and things are considered some of the highest goods in society. This trend has not, according to Hellevik, made people happier or more content. Poll's from Norway show that values linked to idealism (e.g. having values such as caring for others) is associated with higher levels of happiness and satisfaction relative to materialistic values (Barstad, Ellingsen and Hellevik, 2004; Tønder, Barstad and Ellingsen, 1999). New trends show a slight moment towards idealism followed by an increase in happiness (O. Hellevik, personal communication, April 21, 2008).

Similar findings have been described elsewhere in the west (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002). According to Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) materialism has been found to have negative consequences both for society and the individual. Using individual resources to pursue materialistic goals, believing that wealth and goods can provide happiness will, according to most life quality studies be completely unsatisfying for the individual (Polak and McCullough, 2006). It might even lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction (Polak and McCullough, 2006). The trends research in Norway, as demonstrated, support this conclusion (Hellevik, 2002). In a rich western culture like Norway, people are at their peak in terms of possessing the means to satisfy their materialistic needs; polls show, however, that it has not necessarily improved their feeling of well-being (Hellevik, 1999). In fact, according to Hellevik's (2002), conclusions, it appears to somewhat have had an adverse effect.

Individualistic versus collectivistic values

Individualism is concerned with the individual. As a system of values and attitudes, in its pure form, it represents one extreme, or pole, on a dimension often used to describe the independence of individuals, freedom of choice and individuals' needs (Schimmack, Oishi, Radhakrishnan, Dzokoto and Ahadiet, 2002). Several researchers have investigated the relationship between culture and self (Ahuvia, 2002; Biswas-Diener, Vittersø and Diener, 2005; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). What these researchers maintain is that different cultures hold different construal of the self. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), in individualistic cultures, the self is believed to be the centre of thought, action and motivation, the self, further is bounded and separate from other such selves. In countries with this cultural frame, which in particular apply to North America and Europe, "there is a strong belief in the

independence and autonomy of the self (Uchida, Norasakkunkit and Kitayama, 2004). Individuality, autonomy, rationality and freedom (Welsh, 2002), are thus the critical values.

On the other side of the scale we have collectivism. One of the major values of collectivism is that it is important to lead one's life so that it can benefit the community (Uchida et al., 2004). Duties, other peoples needs and to accept one's destiny are central collectivistic values (Schimmack et al., 2002). Norms stand strong in this type of society, which clearly indicate that one should not break such norms in order to maximize personal gain (Suh, Diener, Oishi and Triandis, 2002). Easter wisdom talks about giving up individuality in order to become part of something larger than yourself. This is also linked to religious beliefs; there is promise that living for the good of others will give you good karma (Rinpoche, 1996), i.e. "what goes around comes around" (Uchida et al., 2004). Dedicating one's life to the needs of the family, the community and the larger society is therefore at the centre of the choices a person makes (Kitayama and Markus, 1991). In these societies there are pre made answers, determined by appropriateness. The person's character (or ego) is intertwined with that of the group (Kitayama and Markus, 1991; Uchida et al., 2004).

The modern society is predominantly materialistic (Kasser and Kanner, 2003) and individualistic (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997) in its value orientation, which, as described, may lead the individual to adopt these values in search for a happy life. Shall we conclude that today's dominant values do not appreciate virtues such as modesty, gratitude etc. The individual however is not merely a puppet, whose actions are solely confined by the manipulating hands of society, prompted and controlled. Humans have options and choices. Though, the individual may be somehow restricted by the environment, the environment may as far as the modern society goes, also offer the possibility of choice. The individual may, as argued by Seligman (2002) have a choice to choose a virtuous life-path. What responsibility does the individual have for making a life-path that gives happiness?

2) Finding the relevant options

The freedom of choice

Two words that often have been associated with happiness in the modern society are autonomy and freedom (Brülde, 2007; Chekola, 2007; Veenhoven, 1991). The freedom to make choices that result in a life specifically “tailored” for the individual is thus highly valued in the western culture. The previous section looked at how “strong currents” in the socio-cultural landscape may lead the individual in terms of value-orientations. Nonetheless, the individual in the modern society have a vast variety of options and opportunities to choose amongst. Freedom and autonomy gives the individual the chance to find an authentic life-path.

In the same way as the society has shifted from a traditional to a modern cultural frame, so have the modern society continued to develop (Carleheden, 2007). The changes have for the individual led to an increasing release from previous roles bound up with social expectations. Previously set social roles such as restrictions following being female, or parents expectations for their children, are not so conspicuous in the modern society. Further, an enormous expansion in electrical equipment has made the world “smaller” and amongst other things given access to opportunities that was previously restricted by area (Hundeide, 2005).

Cultural changes, economical growth together with globalization has opened up to more possibilities, and more individual choices.

Hundeide (2005) argues, “Within this new multiplicity of alternatives and contrasts, a new reflectivity arises; because what was previously taken for granted as the ‘natural’ alternative is now becoming open for choice among different alternatives” (p. 244-245). Further Hundeide (2005) maintains, “This new openness and freedom with multiple lifestyle alternatives creates, on the one hand, an increased awareness and reflectivity; on the other, enforces the need for life-planning and a new feeling of individual responsibility for mastering one’s life” (p. 245).

We can argue that freedom of choices is a central part of today's society: People can make choices that lead to a virtuous and happy life. Positive psychology claims that building strengths and virtues and using them in daily life involve making the right choices. Seligman (2002) states, "Building strength and virtue is not about learning, training, or conditioning, but about discovery, creation, and ownership" (p. 136). People can choose. Deci and Ryan (2008) agree that virtue is a matter of making the right choices. Further, Deci and Ryan (2008) maintain, that eudaimonia result from choosing to act virtuously. According to Deci and Ryan (2008) this entails "being volitionally virtuous – rather than being drawn into excesses such as accumulating material possessions" (p. 7). My question then is: Is virtuousness, an obvious choice for the individual in the modern society dominantly materialistic, affluent and multifarious? One can critically argue that positive psychology ignore this important question, taking for granted that modern humans having free choice of living, they can find a way of realising their virtuous human core.

Having too much choice

The modern society can be coined no less than affluent in terms of possibilities, and the individual has a range of choices to make; from life style to the type of ham they want on their bread every morning. According to Brülde (2007) however, research demonstrate that some option is associated with an enhanced feeling. This quickly changes, however, if the individual is left with too many alternatives to choose between (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000; Iyengar, Wells and Schwartz, 2006).

The positive psychologist Schwartz (2004) has argued that the modern individual continually experiences the "tyranny of choice". Schwartz (2004) further argues, "It seems that as society grows wealthier and people become free to do whatever they want, they get less happy. In an era of ever greater personal autonomy, choice and control, what could account for this...?" (p. 70). Some positive psychologists, among them Schwartz (2004) are now trying to critically discuss the taken for granted value of human choice.

The problem with having as much choice as in the modern society is finding out what one wants, and partly, Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyobomirsky, White and Lehman (2002) further argues that the problem seems to be related to maximisation. A growing trend is this tendency to try to maximise the benefits by critically making objectively good choices. Aiming to maximise one's benefits imply a calculation process, which with more option will

demand more mental capacity (Simon, 1955). Therefore, as the number of options exceeds the more strain is put on the mental processes.

The problems linked to this type of situation are many. Maximising doesn't always leave the individual with a feeling of making the best choice. Further, it is associated with more pondering, less satisfaction even when good choices are made, more frustration when bad choices are made and a tendency to experience less satisfaction in life in general (Schwartz, 2004). High expectations, remorse, adaptation (the good feeling from making a good choice diminish quickly) and awareness around what else the person is missing out on are, according to Schwartz (2004), some of the reasons why more options often equals more frustration with maximising. Schwartz (2004) maintains it has a negative effect on happiness.

To sum up, though the individual is given freedom to choose, making the right choice is today difficult. The conflicting values in the society coupled with the problem of choosing a life-path may lead the individual onto paths that don't necessarily lead to happiness, but rather the opposite.

With this analysis of society's values and the notion of enhanced freedom to choose how one wishes to live, as my background, the important question then arises: why would the individual today choose to be virtuous? When concern with consumption, pleasure and things, when maximising own experience, and focusing on how one can make one's own life better, and better without much concern for other people, seem to be part of the highest valued goods in the modern society? To find the highest happiness, enduring happiness, as suggested by the eudaimonic approach, the individual must want to and know how to apply virtues in their everyday life. Is there something in our core nature, as positive psychology sees it that can help the individual to make choices that will create a more virtuous life-path?

Practical wisdom

Aristotle argued that in order to fully become a virtuous being the individual needed practical wisdom (Hughes, 2001). "Practical wisdom and the fullness of virtue go hand in hand. Each presupposes the presence of the other" (Hughes, 2001, p. 76). Aristotle described practical wisdom as a combination of understanding and experience, and as the ability to read the situation based on previous experience (Hughes, 2001). "To possess practical wisdom is, in Aristotle's view, to be good at thinking about what one should do" and further "to be good

at thinking about how to live a fulfilled and worthwhile life as a whole” (Hughes, 2001, p. 84).

In accordance with Aristotle’s position, the positive psychologists Schwartz and Sharp (2006) also argue for the relevance of the concept of practical wisdom. To choose a virtuous life-path, for example in the modern materialistic society, people need to rely on practical wisdom. Schwartz and Sharp (2006) describe practical wisdom as a master virtue, or executive decision maker, that gives the how, when and where of being virtuous. In addition Schwartz and Sharp (2006) argue that practical wisdom give the individual the ability to know what a situation require and the means necessary to respond in the appropriate manner. To be virtuous therefore is not merely possessing human virtuous qualities, the individual must know how to and additionally want to apply these virtuous qualities practically. As Schwartz and Sharp (2006) state: “Someone with practical wisdom not only knows the right thing to do but wants to do it” (p. 385). However, Schwartz and Sharp (2006) suggest that there is less and less room in society both to nurture and display practical wisdom. Good choices are for many difficult to realise in our society of maximisation, as our ability to display practical wisdom is not a strong virtue.

In order to find happiness, the individual must, as I have been continuously concerned with throughout this thesis, realise his or her virtuous human core, and become a virtuous being. A person must be able to identify the most relevant possibilities that the community or society, in which he or she embedded, has to offer. The modern society can in terms of possibilities be described as affluent. Practical wisdom can not only be used as a function that make the individual able to deal with situations that arises, but also, it is the ability to combine the character strengths and virtues with the possibilities that crosses the individuals path. A person must be able to limit these options in order to find a meaningful life-path, finding accordance between the options and inner strengths, and using them in the realisation of a life-plan. But what is it that positive psychology argues, about the virtues that make them so significant for human happiness?

3) Being a virtuous being

Reframing: Finding the balance

Seligman (2002) maintain that the individual must realise a meaningful life-path in order to experience eudaimonic well-being. Realising the virtuous core – the social human qualities – positive psychology claims orients the individual towards other people and makes the individual able to reach out in various ways to other human beings. By realising the virtues the individual thus get a sense of being part of something larger, a collective that extends outside the individual. Let me use the character strength of gratitude as an example. Gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality and appreciation of beauty, are as mentioned, routes to expressing the virtue of transcendence. Transcendence is described as the ability to “forge connections to the larger universe, and thereby provide meaning” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 519). A common thread is precisely that all these five character strengths enable the individual to reach outside him or herself. Gratitude is, for example, “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 554). Statements like “It is important to appreciate each day that you are alive” or “I could not have gotten where I am today without the help of many people” are typical for this character strength (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 554).

Meaningful existence thus become possible by using character strengths to live a virtuous life, one that benefits both the individual and other people, not only working towards the realisation of one’s own well-being, but to the realisation of other peoples well-being, and the well-being of the community and larger society. The positive psychologist Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) accordingly equate a meaningful life with doing something for the greater good e.g. “I have a responsibility to make the world a greater place” (p. 31). Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) maintain that eudaimonia presupposes developing what is best within and “then use these skills and talents in the service of greater goods – including in particular the welfare of other people or humankind writ large” (p. 26).

Waterman, Schwartz and Conti (2008) agree with this statement and further argue that eudaimonic well-being is strongest when “one is moving toward self-realization in terms of the developing one’s unique individual potentials and furthering one’s purpose in living” (p.

42). Meaning can accordingly be found in engaging in activities that make use of potentials that are unique to an individual in addition to the virtues (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008). Accordingly, the feeling that the virtues open up to, of being part of something larger, connected to other people, the community, society and the larger universe makes the individual inclined to use his or her individuality – the individual resources – for the well-being of others. The individual must therefore both realise its own well-being, in addition to the well-being of other people and the community, to find a meaningful path.

Aristotle argued that precisely by reaching out in this way, by realising the inner potentialities in the spirit of community could the individual find the highest happiness (Skirbekk and Gilje, 1996). Positive psychology also agrees with this position. As Seligman (2002) state: “The well-being that using your signature strengths engenders is anchored in authenticity. But just as well-being needs to be anchored in strengths and virtues, these in turn must be anchored in something larger” (p. 14). This idea can be found in people who have a calling.

A calling “must fit with the individual’s abilities and leads to an enactment of the individual’s purpose for personal fulfilment” (Hall and Chandler, 2005 p. 162). Seligman (2002) state, “A calling (or vocation) is a passionate commitment to work for its own sake. Individuals with a calling see their work as contributing to the greater good” (p. 168). According to Seligman (2002) the individual that has a calling think the work is fulfilling in its own right without regard for the money or advancement. Seligman (2002) further argue that “any job can become a calling, and any calling can become a job. ‘A physician who views the work as a Job and is simply interested in making a good income does not have a Calling, while a garbage collector who sees the work as making the world cleaner, healthier place have a Calling’” (p. 168). Such people have a great sense of meaningfulness in their life (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz, 1997).

Self-awareness around character strengths, intentions, goals and values, and the implementation of these in everyday life in a virtuous manner, impose a reframing, finding a balance between individual and collective influences in one’s realisation. In finding a life-path that is both good for the individual and for the community or society therefore, lie both individualistic and collectivistic values. Is there, however, room in the modern society with its main emphasis on materialism and individualism for this collective aspect?

Tree domains in search for happiness

The modern society with its prevailing individualistic and materialistic value orientation tends to put little emphasis on the collective aspects. According to Biswas-Diener, Vittersø and Diener (2005) different cultures emphasises different domains of psychological functioning, namely self-, social- and material domains. When the individual in the modern society self-realises it is often linked to the self- and material-domains. Though social relations are quite important in the modern society, they are constructed in accordance with the fundamental assumption about the independence of each self; they are based on choice of each self to enter such relations (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). It is not that the modern society neglect the importance of the social domain altogether, however, the individualistic idea seem to neglect the aspects that are linked to being part of and having responsibilities that extends outside the single individual. Positive psychology agrees with this position.

As Nafstad (2005) contend: “Today’s globalized ideology with its one-sided focus on marked, consumption and the individuals self-interest lead to less well-being for the individual. It will alienate the individual from the social systems and community that we all are part of and fundamentally dependent on” (p. 907). Nafstad (2005) is arguing that there must be a balance in the value orientation, between the concern for the individual and the community. Positive psychology is thus arguing that the modern society is neglecting the social aspects of human functioning and thus stands in the way of the individual’s happiness. Positive psychology argue that the individual in the modern society will not find the highest happiness, if it is only realising its materialistic and self domains. The individual is lead to believe that focusing on self and materialistic matters will make life good and make them happy. Being individualistically and materialistically oriented, however, does not make people happy. To conclude positive psychology argues for the necessity of conceptualising the human being as a genuinely social being. Our true nature consists of realising one’s own, but also the others and society’s well-being.

The fragile relationship

The individual has, as positive psychology and the eudaimonic approach sees it, the possibility to find and realise its potentialities, its resources, and use these as foundation as the life-path of the individual evolves. The individual that orients his or her life accordingly will

thus be striving not only towards happiness but also towards optimal functioning. Positive psychology, believes as we have seen, that within human nature is the inclination to strive to become better and to make one's life as good as possible. However, it is difficult to realise one's virtuous nature.

This relationship is according to some positive psychologist fragile. The potential that lay in human nature is according to Ryan and Deci (2000) apparent and visible in the proactive and engaged individual. However, as Ryan and Deci (2000) further contend, the socio-contextual conditions can oppress these natural processes. Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that "the human spirit can be diminished or crushed and the individuals can sometimes reject growth and responsibility. Regardless of social strata or cultural origin, examples of both children and adults who are apathetic, alienated, and irresponsible are abundant" (p. 68). Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 68) also state:

Such non-optimal functioning can be observed...among the millions who, for hours a day, sit passively before their televisions, stare blankly from the back of their classrooms, or wait listlessly for the weekend as they go about their jobs. The persistent, proactive, and positive tendencies of human nature are clearly not invariantly apparent.

The individual may therefore, even though the potential is there, inherently present, by and by not necessarily have the drive to make use of these resources. This entail that the individual may know and be aware of their resources, they might know what to strive for but they don't manage to stand up against the social context diminish and crush the very qualities in them that make the individual strive towards happiness and optimal functioning. The individual may as a result refrain from engaging in the meaningful but continuous battle to improve their conditions, and from striving towards optimal functioning and happiness.

Concluding remarks

In this thesis I have argued in favour of the position of the virtuous disposition in human nature, and humans always want to strive to become better social beings. Positive psychology is arguing that social systems in the individual's environment will impose their influence in various forms and degrees. Through this process the individual's virtuous horizon is gradually widened. Positive psychology argues that it is this process that forms the first

basis for character formation. Being virtuous entail realising one's virtuous dispositions, positive psychology argue that these qualities represent the social human aspect, and that the importance of these have been neglected in the field of psychology. Nonetheless, positive psychology argues, that these social human qualities are essential for the individuals optimal functioning. To become a virtuous being the individual must both want to and know who to use the virtues. Practical wisdom is according to some positive psychologists a master virtue that gives the individual the ability to know what a situation requires.

As I have argued to become virtuous the individual must realise his or her best-inclined human qualities in the spirit of community. More precisely, this entail, that the individual can realise both types of potentialities mentioned by Waterman (1993), i.e. those that are unique to the individual that is fostered by individualism and those that are shared by all human beings that is fostered by collectivism. However, the individual must in order to find true happiness thus use his or her resources not only to realise a good life-path, but also to realise well-being for other people, the community and the society. The relationship between the individual and the modern society, as presented, is fragile. Though the individual might know what it entail to strive towards optimal functioning and happiness, the social condition in which the individual is embedded can diminish the very qualities in human nature that make the individual want to become the best he or she can be.

References

- Ahuvia, A. C. (2002). Individualism/collectivism and cultures of happiness: A theoretical conjecture on the relationship between consumption, culture and subjective well-being at the national level. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 23-36.
- Barnes, J. (Ed.). (2000). *The complete works of Aristotle* (Vols. 1-2). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Barstad, A., Ellingsen, D., & Hellevik, O. (2004). Sosiale indikatorer 1980-2004. (Social indicators 1980-2004: Richer, so what). *Samfunnsspeilet*, 4. Retrieved January 30, 2008, from <http://www.ssb.no/ssp/utg/200404/02>
- Biswas-Diener, R., Vittersø, J., & Diener, E. (2005). Most people are pretty happy, but there is cultural variation: The Inughuit, the Amish and the Maasai. *Journal of Happiness studies*, 6, 205-226.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. *Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Nature–nurture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological Review*, 101, 568-586.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. *Social Development*, 9, 115-125.
- Brülde, B. (2007). Happiness theories of the good life. *Journal of Happiness studies*, 8, 15-49.
- Burroughs, J. E., & Rindfleisch, A. (2002). Materialism and well-being: A confliction values perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 348-370.
- Carleheden, M. (2007). Asketism, organisation och autenticitet: Om den strukturella omvaldningen av modern livsföring i väst. (Conduct of Life. Studies of A Sociological Concept). In B. Isenberg, C-H. Heidegren, & M. Carleheden (Eds.), *Livsföring: Ett sociologiskt grundbegrepp*. (pp. 89-119). Stockholm: Liber.
- Chekola, M. (2007). Happiness, rationality, autonomy and the good life. *Journal of Happiness studies*, 8, 51-78.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 1-11.
- Fox, D., & Prilleltensky, I. (1997). Introducing critical psychology: Values, assumptions, and the status quo. In D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*. (pp. 3-21). London: Sage publications.

- Gallagher, M. W., & Lopez, S. J. (2007). Curiosity and well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*, 236-248.
- Hall, D. T., & Chandler, D. E. (2005). Psychological success: When the career is a calling. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 155-176.
- Heejung, K., & Aimee, D. (2003). Choice and self-expression: A cultural analysis of variety-seeking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 373-382.
- Hellevik, O. (1996). *Nordmenn og det gode liv*. (Norwegians and the good life). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS.
- Hellevik, O. (1999). Hvorfor blir vi ikke lykkeligere? (Why are we not getting happier?). *Samfunnsspeilet, 4*. Retrieved January 18, 2008, from <http://www.ssb.no/samfunnsspeilet/utg/9904/4.shtml>
- Hellevik, O. (2002). Economy, Values and Happiness in Norway. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 4*, 243-283.
- Hundeide, K. (2005). Socio-cultural tracks of development, opportunity situations and access skills. *Culture & Psychology, 11*, 241-261.
- Hughes, G. J. (2001). *Aristotle on ethics*. London: Routledge Philosophy Guidebook.
- Irwin, T. (1985). *Aristotle: Nicomachean ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When choice is demotivating: Can one desire too much of a good thing? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*, 995-1006.
- Iyengar, S. S., Wells, R. E., & Schwartz, B. (2006). Doing better but feeling worse. *Psychological Science, 17*, 143-151.
- Jørgensen, I. S., & Nafstad, H. E. (2005). Positive psychology: Historical, philosophical, and epistemological perspectives. In A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in Practice*. (pp. 15-34). New York: Wiley.
- Kasser, T., & Kanner, A. D. (2003). Where is the psychology of consumer culture? In T. Kasser & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*. (pp.3-7). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2006). *Positive therapy: a meta-theory for positive psychological practice*. London: Routledge.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*, 224-253.
- Martin, M. W. (2007). Happiness and virtue in positive psychology. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 37*, 89-103.

- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being* (2nd ed.). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Mayer, L. C. (2007). Psykologer som leverandører av livsidealer? Refleksjoner rundt spørsmålet ”hva er et godt liv?” og fagpsykologiens begreper om svar i nyere tid. (Psychology as deliverer of ideals for living. Reflections around the question “what is a good life?” and psychology’s concepts as answers in modern time). Unpublished master thesis, University of Oslo, Norway.
- Nafstad, H. E. (2004). Individet – ikke bare egoistisk men også altruistisk. (The individual – not only selfish but also altruistic). In H. E. Nafstad (Ed.), *Det omsorgsfulle mennesket: Et psykologisk alternativ*. (pp. 55-82). Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Nafstad, H. E., Carlquist, E., Aasen, I. S., & Blakar, R. M. (2004). Ideological shifts in society and assumptions in psychology: A challenge for positive psychology. Paper presented at 2nd European Conference on Positive Psychology, Verbana Pallanza, Italy, 5-8 July.
- Nafstad, H. E. (2005a). Assumptions and values in the production of knowledge: Towards an area ethics of psychology and the social sciences. In S. Robinson & C. Katulushi (Eds), *Values in higher education*. (pp. 150-158). Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff: Aureus Publishing.
- Nafstad, H. E. (2005b). Forholdet mellom individualisme og fellesskap: En utfordring for positiv psykologi. (The relationship between individualism and community: A challenge for positive psychology). *Tidsskrift for Norsk Psykolog Forening*, 42, 903-908.
- Nafstad, H. E. (2007). Critical thinking about psychology: The issue of á priori key assumptions. *Impuls*, 61, 44-51.
- Park, N. (2004). Character strengths and positive youth development. *The Annals of the American Academy for Political and Social Science*, 591, 40-54.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 6, 25-41.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23, 603-619.

- Peterson, C., Ruch, W., Beermann, U., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2007). Strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*, 149-156.
- Polak, E. L., & McCullough, M. E. (2006). Is gratitude an alternative to materialism? *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7*, 343-360.
- Prilleltensky, I. (1989). Psychology and the status quo. *American Psychologist, 44*, 795-802.
- Rinpoche, S. (1996). *Den Tibetanske Boken om Livet og Døden*. (The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying). Oslo: Grøndahl og Dreyers Forlag AS.
- Rogers, C. R. (1963). The concept of the fully functioning person. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice, 1*, 17-26.
- Rozin, P. (2007). Exploring the landscape of modern academic psychology: Finding and filling the holes. *American Psychologist, 62*, 751-766.
- Rutter, M. (2002). Nature, Nurture, and Development: From Evangelism through Science toward Policy and Practice. *Child Development, 73*, 1-21.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Reviews of Psychology, 52*, 141-166.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry, 9*, 1-28.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*, 13-39.
- Sagiv, L., Roccas, S., & Hazan, O. (2005). Value pathways to well-being: Healthy values, valued goal attainment, and environmental congruence. In A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in Practice*. (pp. 68-85). New York: Wiley.
- Schimmack, U., Oishi, S., Radhakrishnan, P., Dzokoto, V., & Ahadi, S. (2002). Culture, personality, and Subjective well-being: Integrating process models of life satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 582-593.
- Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyobomirsky, S., White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Maximizing versus satisficing: Happiness is a matter of choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*, 1178-1197.
- Schwartz, B. (2004). The tyranny of choice. *Scientific American, 290*, 70-76.
- Schwartz, B., & Sharp, K. E. (2006). Practical wisdom: Aristotle meets positive psychology. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7*, 377-395.

- Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: The Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikzentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 5-14.
- Simon, H. A. (1955). A behavioral model of rational choice. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *69*, 99-118.
- Skirbekk, G., & Gilje, N. (1996). *Filosofihistorie 1*. (History in philosophy 1). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's behind the research? Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. California: Sage publications.
- Slife, B. D., Yanchar, S. C., & Reber, J. S. (2005). Introduction: Thinking critically about critical thinking. In B. D. Slife, J. S. Reber & F. C. Richardson (Eds.), *Critical thinking about psychology: Hidden assumptions and Plausible Alternatives*. (pp. 3-14). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Suh, E., Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Triandis, H. C. (2002). The shifting basis of life satisfaction judgements across cultures: Emotions versus norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*, 482-493.
- Tønder, J-K., Barstad, A., & Ellingsen, D. (1999). Verdier, statistikk og det gode liv. (Values, statistics and the good life). *Samfunnsspeilet*, *4*. Retrieved January 22, 2008, from <http://www.ssb.no/ssp/utg/9904/1.shtml>
- Uchida, Y., Norasakkunkit, V., & Kitayama, S. (2004). Cultural constructions of happiness: Theory and empirical evidence. *Journal of Happiness studies*, *5*, 223-239.
- Veenhoven, R. (1991). Is happiness relative? *Social Indicators Research*, *24*, 1-34.
- Vittersø, J. (2005). Lykken er mangfoldig. (Happiness is multifarious). *Tidsskrift for Norsk Psykolog Forening*, *42*, 913-916.
- Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaemonia) and hedonic enjoyment, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *64*, 678-691.
- Waterman, A. S., Schwartz, S. J., & Conti, R. (2008). The implication of two conceptions of happiness (hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonia) for the understanding of intrinsic motivation, *Journal Happiness Studies*, *9*, 41-79.
- Welsh, H. (2003). Freedom and rationality as predictors of cross-national happiness patterns: The role of income as a mediating variable. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *4*, 295-321.
- Wrightsmann, L. S. (1992). *Assumptions about human nature: Implications for research and practitioners* (2nd ed.). California, Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C., Rozin, P., & Schwartz B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 21-33.