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Positive psychology is a recent branch of [psychology](#) whose purpose was summed up in 2000 by [Martin Seligman](#) and [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#): "We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities". Positive psychologists seek "to find and nurture genius and talent", and "to make normal life more fulfilling", not simply to treat [mental illness](#). This approach has created a lot of interest around the subject, and in 2006 a course at [Harvard University](#) entitled "Positive Psychology" became the most popular course that semester.

Several [humanistic](#) psychologists—such as [Abraham Maslow](#), [Carl Rogers](#), and [Erich Fromm](#)—developed theories and practices that involved human happiness. Recently the theories of human flourishing developed by these humanistic psychologists have found empirical support from studies by positive psychologists. Positive psychology has also moved ahead in a number of new directions.

Current [researchers](#) in positive psychology include [Martin Seligman](#), [Ed Diener](#), [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#), [Christopher Peterson](#), [Carol Dweck](#), [Barbara Fredrickson](#), [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#), [Kennon Sheldon](#), [Jonathan Haidt](#), [Shelley Taylor](#), [C. R. Snyder](#), [Robert Biswas-Diener](#), Donald Clifton, [Albert Bandura](#), Charles S. Carver, Michael F. Scheier, and Ilona Boniwell.

Positive psychology began as a new area of psychology in 1998 when [Martin Seligman](#), considered the father of the modern positive psychology movement, chose it as the theme for his term as president of the [American Psychological Association](#), though the term originates with [Maslow](#), in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*, and there have been indications that psychologists since the 1950s have been increasingly focused on promoting mental health rather than merely treating illness. Seligman pointed out that for the half century clinical psychology "has been consumed by a single topic only - mental illness", echoing Maslow's comments. He urged psychologists to continue the earlier missions of psychology of nurturing talent and improving normal life.

The first positive psychology summit took place in 1999. The First International Conference on Positive Psychology took place in 2002. In June 2009, the First World Congress on Positive Psychology took place.

Historical roots

Positive psychology finds its roots in the [humanistic psychology](#) of the 20th century, which focused heavily on happiness and fulfillment. Earlier influences on positive psychology came primarily from philosophical and religious sources, as scientific psychology did not take its modern form until the late 19th century.

[Judaism](#) promotes a [Divine command theory](#) of happiness: happiness and rewards follow from following the commands of the divine.

The ancient Greeks had many schools of thought. [Socrates](#) advocated [self-knowledge](#) as the path to happiness. [Plato's allegory of the cave](#) influenced western thinkers who believe that happiness is found by finding deeper meaning. Aristotle believed that happiness, or [eudaimonia](#) is constituted by rational activity in accordance with [virtue](#) over a complete life. The [Epicureans](#) believed in reaching happiness through the enjoyment of simple pleasures. The [Stoics](#) believed they could remain happy by being objective and [reasonable](#).

[Christianity](#) continued to follow the Divine command theory of happiness. In the [Middle Ages](#), Christianity taught that true happiness would not be found until the [afterlife](#). The [seven deadly sins](#) are about earthly self-indulgence and narcissism. On the other hand, the [Four Cardinal Virtues](#) and [Three Theological Virtues](#) were supposed to keep one from sin.

During the [Renaissance](#) and [Age of Enlightenment](#), [individualism](#) came to be valued. Simultaneously, [creative](#) individuals gained prestige, as they were now considered to be artists, not just craftsmen. [Utilitarian](#) philosophers such as [John Stuart Mill](#) believed that moral actions are those actions that maximize [happiness](#) for the most number of people. Thus, an [empirical science](#) of happiness should be used to determine which actions are moral. [Thomas Jefferson](#) and other proponents of [democracy](#) believed that "[Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness](#)" are inalienable rights, and that it justifies the overthrow of the government.

The [Romantics](#) valued individual emotional expression and sought their emotional "true selves," which were unhindered by social norms. At the same time, love and intimacy became the main motivations for people to get [married](#).

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