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Practical Wisdom and the Pursuit of the Good in the Good Life

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Practical Wisdom and the Pursuit of the Good in the Good Life

Abstract

Positive psychology can help individuals do the right thing. Doing the right thing is embedded in Aristotle's definition of human flourishing (eudaimonia), which entails both being good and feeling good. This paper does not attempt to provide a formal definition of what is good, but argues that discussing goodness in abstraction is important for any examination of the good life. Acting well is not always easy and we often fail to do what is right despite our best intentions. This is why we need practical wisdom (phronesis). Practical wisdom is defined as a master virtue that allows one to be morally perceptive, to deliberate between courses of action, and to make a reasoned choice that is aligned with worthwhile ends. It guides individuals towards human excellence by exerting our strengths in moderation to establish good habits, which ultimately forms a good character. Practical wisdom is needed to help individuals deliberate between internal and external goods and to find balance between conflicting aims. This paper argues that practical wisdom is necessary for any individual or professional to become the best that he/she can be and to truly flourish. Additionally, practical wisdom has the potential to bolster other constructs in positive psychology, including resilience, and is ripe for future research endeavors. By adopting practical wisdom as a master virtue, positive psychology can fulfill its original aims of making the lives of all people better and of building flourishing communities.

Keywords

Practical Wisdom, Phronesis, Eudaimonia, Flourishing, Virtue, Virtue Ethics, Positive Psychology, Character Strengths

Disciplines

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Practical Wisdom and the Pursuit of the Good in the Good Life

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University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Dan Tomasulo

August 1, 2015

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Capstone Project
Master of Applied Positive Psychology
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Positive psychology can help individuals do the right thing. Doing the right thing is embedded in Aristotle's definition of human flourishing (eudaimonia), which entails both being good and feeling good. This paper does not attempt to provide a formal definition of what is good, but argues that discussing goodness in abstraction is important for any examination of the good life. Acting well is not always easy and we often fail to do what is right despite our best intentions. This is why we need practical wisdom (phronesis). Practical wisdom is defined as a master virtue that allows one to be morally perceptive, to deliberate between courses of action, and to make a reasoned choice that is aligned with worthwhile ends. It guides individuals towards human excellence by exerting our strengths in moderation to establish good habits, which ultimately forms a good character. Practical wisdom is needed to help individuals deliberate between internal and external goods and to find balance between conflicting aims. This paper argues that practical wisdom is necessary for any individual or professional to become the best that he/she can be and to truly flourish. Additionally, practical wisdom has the potential to bolster other constructs in positive psychology, including resilience, and is ripe for future research endeavors. By adopting practical wisdom as a master virtue, positive psychology can fulfill its original aims of making the lives of all people better and of building flourishing communities.

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“Positive psychology should study doing the right thing. All too often this is not the focus of research. Rather, studies look at what makes people happy, healthy, or wealthy. Sometimes the right thing produces none of these wonderful outcomes. But the right thing remains the right thing.”

– Christopher Peterson, *Pursuing the Good Life*

I. Introduction

We don't need a complex psychological theory or empirical research to tell us that navigating through life can be complicated. As much as we might want to act appropriately, it's not always easy to do the right thing. That is why we have old adages like “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Many of us strive to be good, or at least work towards becoming better versions of ourselves, but are unsure of how to translate this abstract goal into our daily actions and decisions. We adopt rules and principles to abide by and set goals to work towards, yet still get caught in moral dilemmas about how to act in a particular circumstance or context. Intuitively, we understand that these rules and formulas are good starting points but ultimately fall short when it comes to the specific actions that a situation calls for (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). In these scenarios, we are not talking about discerning between right and wrong, although that is certainly important. Rather, the difficulty lies in deciding how to act rightly given two good aims to pursue. Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) describe the following example: imagine you are at a friend's wedding and your friend is wearing an unflattering dress. She asks you how she looks. In this particular situation, is it right to respond with honesty or kindness? Both options are considered strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), yet each will produce greatly different outcomes. To begin figuring out how to respond, we need to ask ourselves what it means to be a “good friend.” Does a good friend always tell the truth, or are good friends supposed to boost

one another's confidence? To make such decisions, Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) appeal to the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom entails the ability to accurately perceive the situation at hand, to have the appropriate emotional state, to deliberate about the possible actions, and to use reasoned choice to select and do the right thing (Fowers, 2005). Put simply, practical wisdom is having the moral skill and the moral will to do what is right (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Even though the term "practical wisdom" may sound archaic and somewhat irrelevant to contemporary life and modern scientific theory, this capstone will argue that practical wisdom is integral to both the field of positive psychology and to individuals seeking excellence, goodness, and optimal functioning in all areas of life (Vallerand, 2013). By incorporating practical wisdom along with its constituent virtue ethics framework, positive psychology will help individuals find balance between feeling good and doing good.

Scope of the Paper

This paper is about practical wisdom and doing the right thing. It talks about things that are good for a human being: excellence in functioning, habits, character, virtue, strengths, and pursuing worthwhile ends. It is about decision making, personal and professional development, and aligning one's goals into a comprehensive narrative of one's life as a whole, all in relation to the construct of practical wisdom. It seeks to raise questions about what it means to live a life most worth living and become a good person/professional by examining ideas from both ancient philosophy and modern science. This paper aims to examine the good life through Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia and present a case for practical wisdom as an integral concept for positive psychology to promote growth and development in individuals and professionals.

While this paper will describe thoughts, actions, and/or pursuits that are labeled as "good" and "right," it will not attempt to provide formal definitions of these concepts. Defining

such concepts is better suited for scholars in the fields of moral philosophy and religion (Sternberg, 1998). This paper acknowledges that what is considered good and right has been perennially debated and varies depending on culture and historical period (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Bloom, 2013). Additionally this paper recognizes that multiple valid ideals of the good life exist and that no person is able to fully describe and embody all that is good (Yearley, 1993). On the other hand, the conceptual notion of goodness is essential to the psychological study of happiness and human flourishing, given that the folk definition of happiness is correlated with moral goodness (Tiberius, 2013). Each depiction of goodness is an abstract intellectual construction that acts as a target for which one can aim (Yearley, 1993). This allows us to try to do the right thing by deriving particular action from general descriptions of the good and strive for human excellence according to our individual natures. Practical wisdom is the overarching construct that enables us to appropriately translate an abstract good into concrete actions. Through discussing what is good in abstraction, psychological literature examines the good life and human flourishing in a way that is evaluative and amenable to empirical evidence, yet not prescriptive (Kristjánsson, 2013). This paper will not suggest a way that individuals ought to live, but will rather explore what is good and right by outlining the role of practical wisdom in individual pursuits of worthwhile ends that lead to the good life.

“Goodness” in Empirical Psychology

Psychologists Paul Rozin and Jennifer Stellar recently explored the notion of goodness in empirical research, and fittingly illustrate the important role this construct has in positive psychology while demonstrating the scope of its appropriate use. In their study, Rozin and Stellar (2009) tested whether posthumous events impact the judgments individuals make about the goodness and happiness of a life. Participants were told two hypothetical stories which included

a posthumous event that changed the valence of the ending. Story A described a man named Alex who spent his life working hard developing cures for terminal diseases. He discovered a drug when he was 35 and was praised for his discovery until his death at age 75. After his death, it came to light that the drug caused birth defects and produced more harm than good. Story B was about a man named Jose who was a political activist. When Jose was 35, he was imprisoned as a traitor to his country. After his death at age 75, he became recognized as a forward-thinking politician and was remembered as a hero and a martyr. The researchers collected two sets of data on the overall goodness of Alex's and Jose's lives up to death and posthumously. The scale used ranged from 0 to 100. In story A, the mean goodness of Alex's life dropped from 87.4 to 55.4 after adding that the drugs caused more harm than good. In story B, the goodness of Jose's life increased from 20.2 to 41.1 after adding that he was later recognized as a forward-thinking politician and was seen as a hero and martyr.

The results of this study confirmed the researchers' hypothesis that posthumous events shift the evaluative judgments of the goodness and happiness of life. I argue that the results also reveal greater insight into *why* the posthumous events shifted perception. The results appear to suggest that many participants share a belief that one life outcome resulted in more goodness than the other and had a criteria for such evaluation. To rate the overall goodness of Story A's and Story B's lives, I hypothesize that one must first ask what the proper function is of a pharmacological researcher and a political activist. If the function of a pharmaceutical researcher is to promote health and wellness, developing a drug that causes birth defects fails to fulfill the proper goals of the profession. As a result, a pharmaceutical researcher who causes harm can be said to possess less goodness than a researcher who successfully does what is right by promoting health and wellness. Similarly, if the function of a political activist is to instill change and initiate

reform, one's ability to do so fulfills the proper end of activism and increases the amount of goodness attributed to the activist.

It is interesting to note that while the overall goodness of the political activist's life doubled following the posthumous event according to the data, it was still rated lower than the life of the pharmaceutical researcher. Extrapolating from this finding can suggest that some professions are perceived to contain more inherent goodness than others and that the means through which one achieves beneficial outcomes matters in terms of overall goodness. Further data and exploration is needed to substantiate such claims, but I suggest that one possible explanation for this result is that political activists can be associated with violent, manipulative, and/or exploitive means to reform, which subsequently undermines the overall goodness of the professionals' lives. This implies that the good life entails selecting appropriate means to achieve worthwhile ends and that the kind of person/professional one is directly impacts the perceived goodness of a life.

This research by Rozin and Stellar (2009) suggests that goodness in psychological research entails fulfilling proper ends of a profession and using the appropriate means to do so. In addition, psychological research demonstrates that endings of lives and/or experiences greatly impact perceptions of overall goodness. For a modern example, consider the later years of Bill Cosby's career. Throughout most of his life, Cosby was a beloved actor and comedian who promoted wholesome family values and good-natured humor. However, Cosby was recently accused of drugging and sexually assaulting upwards of forty women, thereby undermining the very values he was admired for promoting. Despite the many decades of accolades and honor, this ending will likely result in Cosby being remembered not as a good man, but as a rapist and an immoral person who deceived his fans and harmed those around him. This example highlights

the psychological phenomenon called “peak-end evaluations,” which suggests that individuals primarily remember and evaluate experiences by the “peak” or most intense or strongest moment, and how the experience ends (Kahneman, Wakker, & Sarin, 1997). Given that peaks and ends have the ability to undermine or enhance our ability to flourish, the good life is a description of the way one’s life takes shape as a whole, as one continues to grow and become the best that one can be. According to Aristotle (trans. 1985), a flourishing life is a life of virtue and human excellence and is therefore characterized by a virtuous ending.

The questions mentioned above are ripe for discussion in the field of positive psychology and those interested in the study of well-being and human flourishing. This paper seeks to build on previous psychological research around these concepts and to integrate ideas of the good life from older philosophical theories. Specifically, this paper will advocate for practical wisdom as a valuable concept to help individuals discern and do the right thing in the pursuit of excellence and the good life. Most importantly, this paper seeks to contribute to an emerging and ongoing discussion of practical wisdom and its related constructs to enhance positive psychology’s ability to promote individual and collective well-being.

Introduction to Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology is not afraid to ask big questions. In fact, it was founded for this very purpose. Positive psychology uses empirical studies to ask and answer important questions about well-being that historians, philosophers, theologians, and scholars have been asking throughout the ages (Boniwell, 2012; Kristjánsson, 2013). At its core, positive psychology aims to further search for what makes life most worth living (Peterson, 2006a) and how individuals and societies can pursue and support the good life, while adhering to the standards of rigorous scientific study (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive

psychology is willing to challenge old norms by suggesting that psychology in its traditional sense has become imbalanced through its focus on pathology and its orientation towards reducing human suffering. This does not imply that there exists a “negative psychology” or that traditional fields in psychology are unsound or that they need correction. Rather, positive psychology asserts that mental health is more than the absence of mental illness and that the knowledge of what goes wrong does not equate to the knowledge of what makes things right (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The field argues that studying strengths, positive emotions, strong relationships, and other affirmative topics is just as important as studying weakness, depression, and negativity. Studying affirmative traits and conditions is important for both building the best things in life and for understanding the buffering effects positive traits and experiences have on our human frailties and weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is therefore complementary to the other psychological disciplines and seeks to help individuals, organizations, and societies experience more positive emotions, greater fulfillment, more meaning in life, and in general a higher level of well-being (Seligman, 2011).

Although positive psychology is a relatively new discipline, studying the constituents of the good life and what makes life most worth living is not new to psychology. In the 1930s, Carl Jung wrote about individualism and the importance of becoming the best we can be as individuals (Boniwell, 2012). Over the next few decades, psychology produced notable thinkers such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who were leaders in humanistic psychology. Rogers is famous for pioneering research on what it means to be a fully functioning person, and Maslow studied a related concept of self-actualization (Boniwell, 2012). As opposed to the behaviorists who argued that individuals are passive and conditioned by external stimuli (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), humanistic psychologists posit that individuals have agency, strive for

goals, and use logic and reason to think about existential questions and concepts such as meaning and optimal functioning (Peterson, 2006). Humanistic psychology laid a solid foundation for the conceptual mapping of affirmative topics in positive psychology because it deviated from psychology's predominantly negative orientation during the 1960s and 1970s. Humanistic psychology also set itself apart from other psychological disciplines during its era by positing that the scientific method was not sufficient for measuring the complexity of human nature (Boniwell, 2012). For this reason, humanistic psychology primarily neglected quantitative research and relied heavily on qualitative data. The utility of the scientific method is what predominantly divides positive psychology and humanistic psychology, as positive psychology embraces the scientific method and argues that empirical studies are able to complement, support, and shed light on theoretical accounts of what makes life most worth living.

Not only was positive psychology heavily influenced by the qualitative exploration of the good life seen in humanistic psychology, it was built upon seminal research related to depression and its effective treatment. Notable scholars Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck are well known for their work on cognitive therapy. Beck (1991) demonstrates that one's internal thoughts mediate the relationship between one's experiences in life and one's affective responses. Specifically, he found that negative internal communication including self-criticism, negative interpretations of events, low expectancies, and the like contribute to depression and hopelessness. He found that by focusing on and challenging these often irrational thoughts, one can decrease depressive symptoms. Ellis (2003) is known for his work on cognitive behavior therapy and rational emotive behavior therapy, which share many similarities with one another including a commitment to helping individuals adopt realistic, flexible, and logical thinking to ameliorate unhealthy thoughts and feelings. These techniques lay groundwork for positive psychology's

study of the connection between an optimistic explanatory style and well-being (Seligman, 2011), as well as research on resilience (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). These theories reveal that by adopting healthy thinking patterns, individuals can create conditions that buffer against the pitfalls of pessimism, depression, and helplessness, and become more resilient leading to a life of increased well-being. With a strong empirical base, positive psychology can continue to use the scientific method to understand the good life and the conditions that aid in its cultivation.

Social and political factors also contributed to the founding of positive psychology. Before World War II, psychology had three overarching goals: to reduce and ameliorate mental illness, to improve the lives of all people through increasing productivity and fulfillment, and to foster human excellence and talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). After the war, psychology became predominantly concerned with diagnosing and treating mental illness as opposed to the latter two aims of the field. The prioritization of curing mental illness resulted from two war-related economic events: the creation of the Veterans Administration, which produced thousands of jobs for practicing psychologists, and the founding of the National Institute of Mental Health which provided grants to researchers interested in human pathology. This has certainly benefitted humanity at large, as psychological research contributed to the development of successful treatment for many psychological disorders. Yet this shift has contributed to a drastic imbalance in the state of psychology for the past 50 years (Gable & Haidt, 2005). In 1998, as the president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman perceived that psychology was not producing research in all domains that it originally intended to study, and was consequently not actualizing its fullest potential. He deliberated about what was essential to psychology and what practical actions could be taken. He made a reasoned choice that ultimately led to the founding of positive psychology. In this sense, practical wisdom

has been a part of positive psychology since the very beginning. Through the continual use of practical wisdom, positive psychology has the potential to help actualize psychology's original aims of improving the lives of all people and fostering human excellence and talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

II. Positive Psychology and the Origin of “Eudaimonia”

Positive Psychology and Virtue Ethics

The search for what makes life most worth living extends far beyond psychology. Answering this question has been a perennial quest in various cultures and areas of study including ancient Greek philosophy, Christianity, during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and are embedded in the founding documents of the United States of America (McMahon, 2013). Therefore, one of positive psychology's strengths is its ability to build upon and integrate theories from various academic disciplines that share a common interest in human flourishing and its pursuit. One such field is virtue ethics. Virtue ethics draws a connection between human flourishing and human excellence: psychology's third original aim. Virtue ethics posits that the good life extends beyond feeling happy and experiencing pleasure. For a virtue ethicist, flourishing encompasses a state of being where one's character is aligned with excellence and his/her ability to live well in accordance with reason and moderation (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006). Thus, living well is a process in which human beings develop their characters through cultivating the virtues to become the best one can be according to one's individual human nature (Fowers, 2005). Virtue ethics asks questions about the nature of “good ends” for humans to pursue and what character strengths are needed to work towards these ends. All of these ideas emerge from Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*, translated to happiness or flourishing, which are presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Melchert, 2002). According to Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is characterized

by a life in pursuit of worthwhile ends made possible by the right dispositions and character one needs to be the best one can be. To illustrate this idea, Aristotle presents the following two analogies: just as a flutist's function is to play the flute well and the cobbler's function is to produce excellent shoes, a human's function is to act with reason in accordance with the most fitting or complete excellence, which is the appropriate use of the virtues (Melchert, 2002). Aristotle believes that these strengths and virtues can be learned through practice and become dispositions or habits to act in accordance with what is good. As a result, instead of assessing well-being through particular incidents or experiences in one's life, virtue ethics equates human flourishing with the kind of person one is and the way one's life is taking shape as a whole (Fowers, 2005).

Aristotle's depiction of the good life shares some similarities with the seminal theories of well-being in positive psychology, including Martin Seligman's original theory of Authentic Happiness. His theory differentiated among three different lives: the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life (Seligman, 2002). Seligman argued that hedonism (increasing pleasure and reducing pain) is helpful in pursuing the pleasant life, but ultimately falls short of the life most worth living. The life most worth living builds on hedonism and includes eudemonic notions of gratification, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2002). Seligman realized that the good life could not be fully captured by assessing life satisfaction, as this measure is inextricably tied to how a participant feels at a particular time (Seligman, 2011). Instead of studying the temporary states of happiness and pleasure, Seligman advocated for the study of positive traits, which are characteristics that occur in various situations over time (Seligman, 2002). In this sense, positive psychology acknowledges that well-being and human flourishing are multifaceted constructs comprised of various and diverse constitutive parts,

making these constructs increasingly difficult to precisely define (Pawelski & Moore, 2013) and operationalize/measure (Seligman, 2011). As a result, Seligman refined his original theory of well-being, understanding that an adequate theory necessitates the collection of various constitutive elements that can be measured independently. These elements were to encompass both hedonic and eudaimonic ideas of well-being and were things that many pursue for their own sake and could be measured using both subjective and objective measures (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011). Seligman found five elements of well-being that meet his criteria: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. This theory is commonly referred to by its acronym, PERMA.

PERMA and the Eudaimonic Life

With the new well-being theory PERMA, positive psychology became better equipped to gain a stronger empirical understanding of the elements underpinning well-being and their contribution to the eudaimonic life. In the following sections, I will discuss each element individually and how pursuing each element can help individuals become better versions of themselves and live a life most worth living.

Positive emotions. The first element of PERMA, positive emotions, is typically associated with hedonia; however, leading researcher Barbara Fredrickson argues that positive emotions help individuals both feel good and function at their best. Fredrickson's (2013) research on the broaden and build theory of positive emotions shows that positive emotions temporarily broaden our awareness, both visually and cognitively, allowing us to experience a wider array of thoughts, actions, and precepts. This broadened awareness enables individuals to think creatively and acquire new skills. Fredrickson's groundbreaking research on positive emotions highlights the relationship between emotions and practical wisdom. Through the

broaden and build theory, individuals can better perceive the most worthwhile end, deliberate possible actions, and develop the necessary moral skill to do the right thing (Fowers, 2005; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). The association between positive emotions, growth, and broadened awareness and cognitive abilities is highlighted in one of 2012's highest rated CEOs, Jeff Bezos. Bezos is the founder and CEO of Amazon, which rapidly evolved from an online book store to an organization selling over 20 million products while increasing its stock by 397% in merely five years (Anders, 2012). Bezos describes himself as a "legitimately happy person" and with an unrivaled dedication to making customers happy, takes risks for innovations and growth. He deliberately hires individuals who can work through ambiguity and do the right thing for the customer through creative and innovative thinking. Bezos has a commitment to becoming the best that he can be, and leverages his positive emotions to fuel his own creativity and innovation, which in turn enables Amazon to flourish.

Engagement. The second pillar of well-being, engagement, has been extensively studied by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his construct of flow. Flow is described as optimal experience, where individuals perceive complete control of their actions and fate, experience a deep sense of enjoyment where all other worries fade away, and where time seems to stand still (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow exists in a channel where one's level of skill adequately matches the extent to which the task is challenging. If an individual's skill greatly surpasses the complexity of the task, one will become bored and fall out of flow. However, if one does not have the required skill for a challenging task, one will feel anxious thereby restricting the experience flow. As a result, flow is a state of perpetual forward motion and self enhancement where the more one increases his/her skills through repeated actions, the more difficult and complex tasks must become to remain in this optimal state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is

related to Aristotle's conception of the good life, as flow is an autotelic experience, which means it is pursued as an end in itself. Flow experiences often inform individuals that their actions are in alignment with their potential, thereby increasing their skill and their connection to the end they are pursuing (Coatsworth & Sharp, 2013).

Relationships. Relationships are the third element in the PERMA model of well-being. One of the founders of positive psychology, Christopher Peterson, stated that a good summary of positive psychology is that "other people matter" (Peterson, 2012). There is empirical evidence to support this claim. Research demonstrates that relationships are a biological and social foundation to flourishing and that our need to belong is one of our most basic needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Additionally, evidence shows individuals experience boosts in well-being through sharing positive events with others (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006), and happiness spreads across social networks (Fowler & Christakis, 2009). In addition to increasing our happiness and emotional state, Aristotle (trans. 1985) argues that other people are important in helping us become our best selves and can enhance our ability to cultivate and exercise virtue. In Aristotle's description of the most noble form of friendship, he states that each person values the goodness of the other and works together to pursue a shared goal, which constitutes the main source of pleasure for the friendship (Fowers, 2005). Thus, true friendship that produces eudaimonia is a shared good that exists between two people that cannot be pursued individually. Haidt, Seder, and Kesebir (2008) build on this idea in their presentation of the "Hive Hypothesis." They note that historically psychological research has studied the benefits of positive relationships by putting on "atomizing glasses," meaning that the individual is studied first outside of the group context (Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008). In response, they argue that it's important that researchers put on "network glasses" and acknowledge the impact groups have in

human flourishing. In their presentation of the Hive Hypothesis, Haidt, Seder, and Kesebir (2008) state that individuals can sometimes act as a barrier to well-being and must occasionally lose themselves in a larger social organism to obtain the highest level of flourishing. This idea leads us into the fourth pillar of well-being: meaning.

Meaning. Viktor Frankl is arguably one of the most lauded and influential writers on meaning in the last century. Frankl (1963) believed that flourishing is not a tensionless state (resembling hedonia), but is characterized by the struggle and pursuit of a worthwhile goal that is freely chosen and can be accomplished by the individual alone. He argued that one could find meaning in life even in the most despairing times. As a prisoner in a German concentration camp, Frankl helped many fellow prisoners find meaning amidst the most horrific circumstances by stating, “it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected of us” (Frankl, 1963, p. 77). In this sense, Frankl’s thoughts on meaning in life are in line with Seligman’s (2011) belief that meaning is found through serving something larger than oneself. Meaning in life has been shown to help individuals integrate ideas about who they are, how the world operates, and how they interact with others (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), become more resilient and overcome hardships (Steger, 2009), and confront difficult and long lasting challenge through viewing one’s overarching mission as a part of a life narrative (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Meaning and purpose are constructs that contribute to the eudaimonic life by enabling individuals to take stock of their lives as a whole, discern and select worthwhile goals to pursue, and ultimately find meaning in doing the right thing in service of something larger than oneself.

Achievement. Achievement is the last element presented in the PERMA model of well-being. One of the leading constructs of achievement and goal attainment in positive psychology at this time is grit. Grit can be defined as the perseverance and passion for long-term goals

(Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Grit is what gives individuals the ability to exert strenuous effort in the face of adversity and ultimately achieve success. Studies have revealed that grit is a better predictor of success than IQ, showing that if one is able to exert continuous effort in the face of adversity, long-term goals can be attained (Duckworth et. al, 2007). This research encourages individuals to embrace temporary setbacks as a common part of achievement because excellence in any domain requires years of effort on a task and the passion to persevere. Being “gritty” aligns with the eudaimonic lifestyle as opposed to a hedonic lifestyle, as it equating human flourishing with personal growth and mastery. Because grit is inherently future oriented, it allows one to work towards becoming the kind of person he/she strives to become. Success often involves hard work, struggle, and even failure, which will likely cause momentary discomfort and negative emotions. Yet, being gritty allows individuals to cultivate their strengths and hone their skills to be able to do the right thing in the right way. It is for this reason that grit aids in the development and use of practical wisdom by building competencies to live the life most worth living according to our human nature (Aristotle, trans. 1985).

We have seen that each element of well-being in the PERMA model is related to the good life characterized by eudaimonia and has the potential to help individuals increase their ability to do the right thing. While PERMA is a helpful theoretical model that can orient individuals towards behaviors and worthwhile ends, pursuing each element individually may not necessarily lead to the highest level of flourishing. Even worse, pursuing each element for the sole purpose of increasing one’s individual well-being may be counterproductive, may conflict with other goals, and may even cause harm to oneself or others. The following section will provide a brief discussion of such limitations and will present a case for practical wisdom as a framework to

help individuals pursue a life most worth living that is good for oneself, good for others, and broadly good for society.

Limitations of PERMA: A Call for Practical Wisdom

Finding balance between the elements. When developing his new theory of well-being, Seligman (2011) used the following three criteria to determine what would be considered an element of human flourishing: 1) each element needed to contribute to well-being, 2) each element needed to be pursued for its own sake by many people, and 3) each element could be measured and defined apart from the other elements. The third criterion significantly aids the scientific study of well-being, as it allows each element to be studied independently without confounding variables. Outside of the laboratory, however, rarely do our activities and decisions isolate each element. In fact, many of the decisions we face include some if not all the elements in the PERMA model and one element may enhance, nullify, or negate other elements. This can leave individuals in a state of confusion and uncertainty as one attempts to balance and weigh the various elements to maximize well-being. I believe that this is the first limitation of the PERMA model; it does not provide individuals with a framework to understand how the elements interact and how to make decisions when they conflict. This point can be illustrated in the following example. Imagine you're offered a prestigious new job in a different city and you're faced with the decision of whether or not to accept the offer. Taking the job will certainly be advantageous for career development, yet you'd be compromising very meaningful relationships if you moved to a new city. The new job is with one of the most reputable organizations in your field and comes with a higher salary, yet the work itself will be less engaging. Accepting the job will increase your positive emotions, meaning, and achievement, but will decrease your engagement and relationships. How will you integrate this information and make a decision that aligns with

your goals, values, and purpose in order for you to become the kind of person you ultimately want to become (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013)? Additionally, assuming Aristotle's original definition of human flourishing as using one's strengths to perform at one's best while becoming a virtuous person, how will you discern whether taking the job is the right thing to do (Aristotle, trans. 1985)? This shift from thinking about maximizing individual well-being to thinking about whether an action or decision is right leads to the second limitation in the PERMA model.

Finding balance between "I" and "us". Seligman (2011) stated that each element in his model of human flourishing must contribute to well-being, but the PERMA model does not explicitly differentiate between individual and collective well-being. I believe this is the second limitation of the PERMA model. Finding balance between individual and collective well-being lies at the heart of the field of psychology, as demonstrated by the American Psychological Association's mission to "advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives" (What is the mission, 2015). A plethora of research in positive psychology contributes to our knowledge and understanding of positive subjective experiences and positive individual characteristics, but the topic of positive institutions and communities has been largely under-researched (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Adopting a primary orientation towards individual well-being is one of the prominent concerns scholars have in the fields of psychology and philosophy about the study of human flourishing. A focus on personal well-being, growth, and achievement often fails to adequately consider the impact these pursuits have on other people (Huta, 2013). This concern likely stems from a larger entrenched pattern in psychology to describe human action through the framework of instrumentalism (Fowers, 2010).

Instrumentalism asserts that individuals are primarily self-interested agents who seek to accomplish subjectively selected ends through the most effective self-selected means (Fowers, 2010). This means that it is our own subjective experience that determines the goodness of the end, and that the means we choose are considered rational, effective, and clever if they assist in achieving our goal (Kristjánsson, 2013). In this sense, instrumentalism keeps the means distinct from the ends and assesses the value of the means by their ability to aid in the achievement of their goal (Fowers, 2005). In many ways, instrumentalism lies contrary to Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia. Whereas Aristotle states that human flourishing is contingent on pursuing worthwhile ends, instrumentalism posits that our subjectively chosen ends exist beyond rationality and instead, the means we select are considered rational or irrational depending on their utility towards the end one is pursuing (Kristjánsson, 2013). Many of our actions and decisions are made within this means-end framework, yet adopting an exclusively instrumental framework for human action discourages individuals from deliberating and thinking about the inherent worth of the end they are seeking (Fowers, 2005). Perhaps more importantly, instrumentalism allows one to use his/her abilities to be highly effective through selecting means that are exploitive, damaging, or disregard the costs to others. For example, if one chooses to pursue wealth through the lens of instrumentalism, one can choose the means of being innovative, to work hard, to marry someone wealthy, to be fraudulent, exploitive, or engage in theft (Fowers, 2005). Selecting appropriate means is consequently essential for contributing to beneficial outcomes the end has on oneself and others. As a result, if one is pursuing human flourishing as an end, instrumentalism is a necessary but not sufficient framework to enable individuals to find balance between individual and communal good and to ultimately do the right thing.

This brings us back to the second limitation of the PERMA model of well-being. Without an accompanying framework to help individuals do the right thing and overcome the limitations of instrumentalism, positive psychology runs the risk of enabling individuals to pursue their subjective well-being at the expense of others, thereby undermining positive psychology's aim of building flourishing communities. In the PERMA model's current structure, an individual can exhibit high levels of positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and/or accomplishment, yet cause substantial harm through selecting inappropriate means. As an example, consider the life and legacy of one of history's most infamous figures: Adolf Hitler. Hitler's life was not necessarily easy, nor was it pleasant and free from hardship, yet he embodied many of the elements of well-being at the peak of his dictatorship. Hitler had many strengths including eloquence with speech, helping him achieve success in politics and ultimately propelling him to the dictatorship (Wallach, 1933). His mission for his image of racial purity was a significant source of meaning for Hitler and his followers, many of whom were close friends. He gave compelling speeches, rallied troops and supporters, and coined popular ideas and slogans, all of which presumably produced flow like states of engagement. When listening to the cries of injustice done to Germany, Hitler was said to have "listened to the discord and found it music," implying engagement and the experience of positive emotions (Wallach, 1933, p. 7). Yet, despite his strong sense of meaning, political achievement, friendships and admirers, and episodic experiences of positive emotion and engagement, intuitively, it would be ludicrous to say that Hitler's life was worthy of being labeled as a life of human flourishing, the good life, or the life most worth living. Fundamental to the attainment of the highest levels of euadaimonia is the ability to pursue the elements of PERMA in such a way

that one integrates and enhances both the individual subjective experience of well-being and the well-being of society at large (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Sandage & Hill, 2001).

PERMA has been a groundbreaking theory of well-being during the formative years of positive psychology and has greatly contributed to the scientific study of the good life. Some of PERMA's strengths are that it uses both objective and subjective measures to assess eudaimonic and hedonic forms of well-being. However, because well-being is a social-psychological construct and not something entirely concrete (Pawelski, 2013b), the measures of well-being can be improved, specifically in the measurement of objective flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2013). Two limitations of the PERMA model of well-being are that the model does not provide individuals with a framework to evaluate how to best pursue increasing well-being when different elements conflict, and it does not help individuals discern worthwhile ends to pursue that promote human flourishing on an individual and communal level. Some scholars claim that aggregation and adjudication, the difficulty in choosing between competing routes to well-being, are two of the most pressing problems in positive psychology at this time (Kristjánsson, 2013). Being able to see what is most important, to deliberate between competing ends, to understand possible actions and implications of decisions, and to have the moral skill and will to do the right thing are needed to pursue human flourishing by overcoming the limitations of aggregation and adjudication (Fowers, 2005; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). These skills and competencies fall under the construct of practical wisdom. By embedding practical wisdom in the scientific study of the good life, I argue that positive psychology is better equipped to help individuals achieve human excellence, become the best one can be, and ultimately do the right thing.

III. Background of Practical Wisdom and Related Concepts

Phronesis: Aristotle's Account of the Master Virtue

Aristotle did not believe that appropriate action could be determined exclusively by following formulas and rules (Melchert, 2002). This is why he said that ethics is more of an art than a science. For Aristotle, living well was defined by cultivating excellence to become the best kind of person one can be, not by following moral rules that restricted behavior in absolute or universal terms. Aristotle argued we are at our best when we use our virtues and strengths to pursue worthwhile ends (Aristotle, trans. 1985). Therefore, in order to act appropriately in pursuing the good life, one needs to be able to use wisdom to understand what the right thing to do is considering the particular circumstance, particular people involved, at a particular moment in time (Schwartz & Shapre, 2010). This ability to align reason, emotion, and action to do the right thing is what Aristotle defined as *phronesis*, which is translated as practical wisdom (Aristotle, trans. 1985).

Practical wisdom lies in the center of Aristotle's conception of the good life insofar as one cannot flourish if he/she lacks practical wisdom. For this reason, Aristotle calls practical wisdom the master virtue. Practical wisdom governs all other virtues such as courage, honesty, temperance, and the like, and guides them to be used in their proper amounts and in the right contexts (Kristjánsson, 2013; Aristotle, trans. 1985). To use one's strengths appropriately and in the right amount means that one has the ability to deliberate and use the strengths in moderation between deficiency and excess. Aristotle believes that the virtues rest as the mean between two vices. To illustrate this point, Aristotle argues that the virtue of courage lies between the vices of foolhardiness and cowardice, just as the virtue of righteous indignation lies between the vices of envy and malevolence (Aristotle, trans. 1985). Finding the mean is not a simple calculation like finding the arithmetic midpoint. Rather it is an intricate process of deliberation and perception of each particular circumstance, context, and individual involved to determine what the moderate

use of each virtue would be. Therefore, doing the right thing is a relative mean that will vary for each person and is up to each of us to determine. This is why practical wisdom is at the heart of Aristotle's virtue theory; it is what enables each individual to translate an abstract definition of the good, like "act courageously," into concrete actions that are contextually relevant to the person and his/her specific circumstances (Fowers, 2005).

Using practical wisdom to do the right thing requires more than cognitive skills and the use of right reason to determine the correct use of virtues; it also entails the use of rightly oriented emotion. According to Aristotle, emotions are neither inherently good nor bad, but are deemed worthy whether the emotions guide us towards good or bad dispositions (Aristotle, trans. 1985). Aristotle believes that reason and emotion comprise two different parts of the soul and that practical wisdom allows us to do the right thing by bringing our thoughts and feelings into alignment with the good (Aristotle, trans. 1985). This is why practical wisdom is described as the combination of moral skill and moral will (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010).

The question still remains of how one develops the required skill and will to do what is right. Aristotle provides an answer to this question by discussing the importance of two related concepts: habit and character. He believes individuals are not born practically wise and that one develops the necessary skills and virtues through effort over time by the continual use of appropriate action towards worthwhile goals (Aristotle, trans. 1985). He argues that we acquire virtues by doing related actions over time, and that these actions turn into habits. Aristotle notes the importance of performing actions that are good, because good actions lead to good habits, and ultimately form a good character. Thus, practical wisdom builds gradually and is concerned with the particular actions one takes in a specific moment as well as the impact these actions have on the individual over the course of time. Given that flourishing entails performing

according to our proper function and increasing our capacity to act rightly, practical wisdom is a necessary tool to enable us to deliberate and make right decisions in a given moment to become the best we can be over time.

To summarize, Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) provide a list of six characteristics that describe a person who would be considered practically wise. The practically wise person is able to do the following: 1) Understand the proper aims of the activity she/he is engaged in. 2) Balance and improvise when aims are in conflict and interpret rules appropriately. 3) Be perceptive, understand social cues and contexts, and find the gray area between black and white rules. 4) Take the perspective of others and be appropriately empathetic 5) Make emotion the ally of reason and use emotion as a tool to inform judgment without distorting it. 6) Have relevant and sufficient experience to understand and do the right thing.

Comparing this list with historical figures allows for a concrete exploration of the use of practical wisdom in tangible daily circumstances. In continuing the example of the Nazi regime, we can see the ways in which the German theologian and political activist Dietrich Bonhoeffer embodied practical wisdom. Bonhoeffer actively protested the Nazi regime as the party ascended to power in the 1930s. He continued teaching and publishing despite admonishment and opposition from the Germans (Sherman, 2013). Bonhoeffer traveled to the United States in 1939 where he was safe to teach and publish, but understood the proper ends on his purpose to aid in Germany's reconstruction and immediately forwent his own safety and security by traveling back to Germany to continue working undercover towards Hitler's overthrow. He was known as a pacifist, yet sought balance between non-violent protests and a forceful removal of Hitler. Bonhoeffer's decisions were guided by the proper use of emotion and empathy in the face of human suffering, and understood when and how to appropriately break rules. Finally, as a trained

theologian, he was experienced as a teacher, leader, and ethical scholar, enabling him to deliberate between moral dilemmas and to make reasoned choices that promoted good ends, even when no “good” options were readily available. In 1943, Bonhoeffer was captured, interrogated, and ultimately executed, but he will forever be remembered as a martyr and a hero for his unwavering commitment to doing the right thing and for possessing the practical wisdom to perceive, deliberate, and actively choose means that fulfilled worthwhile ends while becoming the best person he could be.

I will now turn to a brief discussion regarding the ways in which forming good habits and cultivating good character are vital to the pursuit of a life most worth living and can help an individual acquire the six skills that Schwartz and Sharpe outline for a practically wise person.

The Importance of Habit

To have a deeper understanding of Aristotle’s virtue theory and his conception of human flourishing, it is necessary to discuss the role habits play in pursuing the good life. Like many eudaimonic theories of well-being, Aristotle asserts that happiness lies in the kind of person one becomes over time as opposed to how one feels in a given moment. This suggests that habits of thought, behavior, and inclination have the capacity to significantly impact who we become as individuals and professionals, as well as our ability to flourish. Aristotle writes about this idea in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he states that the happiest of men are defined by having the property of permanence (Aristotle trans. 1985). Being happy requires stability in one’s disposition to act towards the good in our daily circumstances. This stability is not something we have from birth, but is rather something we can develop through diligence, time, and relevant experience (Aristotle, trans. 1985). Having stability in thought and action is related to practical wisdom, as good habits enable individuals to consistently see and respond to situations

appropriately and to make doing the right thing become second nature (Fowers, 2005). Habits in themselves are what allow individuals to perform actions with greater ease and fluidity, but it is practical wisdom that guides individuals towards excellence that will lead to habits of worthwhile actions in pursuit good ends. William James demonstrates the importance of good actions when he states, “As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work.” (James, 1892, p. 139). Each moment shapes who we will ultimately become; and with each individual action, we are either building good or bad habits that will either help or hinder us from doing the right thing.

We depend on good habits to strengthen our capacity to act in new situations and broaden our range of possible human activity and function. For without habits, we are required to direct our attention and skill to all of our human endeavors, which would confine life to just one or two deeds (James, 1892). Attention and effort are imperative for habit acquisition, but become inversely related to habits, as the stronger ones’ habits becomes, the less one needs to exercise attention and effort to act. Habits are a crucial mechanism for personal growth and development because they allow individuals to invest their attention and effort into new and more complicated tasks. These tasks will become ingrained and automatic over time, thus creating an upward spiral of skill towards excellence. In the same way, acquiring the habit of doing the right thing allows one to be better equipped to navigate the complexity of moral action and find balance between conflicting goods. This upward spiral of personal growth can be seen in practical wisdom and other psychological theories including the broaden and build theory of positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2013) and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) channel of flow. These three examples demonstrate that continual action and effort ignites cyclical patterns of refining and enhancing

our skills/abilities until we form a habit, resulting in an increased human capacity to function at a higher potential. Just as habits are needed to help us do the right thing, we need practical wisdom to help us develop habits in alignment with what is good. Along with helping us do the right thing with greater ease, habits can also cause us to involuntarily do the wrong thing (James, 1892). In this sense, habits and practical wisdom are dependent on one another and are inseparable from living a life most worth living and becoming the best we can become.

Habits are largely physical in nature and sometimes exist outside of consciousness. This is why many are unable to describe the order in which they brush their teeth or which sock they put on first, yet can perform these actions effortlessly (James, 1892). William James says that habits are pathways forged in the brain that allow for concentrated discharges in our nervous system, which implies that good habits lead to good actions. The key to acquiring good habits is to make our nervous system our ally and to practice each new habit whole-heartedly without exception. This can be done by adhering to James' (1892) three maxims of successful habit acquisition: to launch oneself with as strong an inclination as one can towards the habit, to never experience a lapse in action until the habit is strongly formed, and to take every opportunity to act. James (1892) states that no matter how well intentioned an individual may be, without having the capacity to translate good sentiments into a worthwhile action, one's character may be left unaffected and the good will not be actualized. Doing the right thing depends on more than having the moral will (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Doing the right thing also requires a moral skill that is actualized through rightly ordered actions and the development of habits to act in accordance with what is good. Good habits are needed, but still not sufficient to becoming the best one can become (Aristotle, trans. 1985). For Aristotle, good habits help individuals do the right thing because good habits develop good character, and our character shapes who we

ultimately become. It is within our control to cultivate good habits and a virtuous character by doing the right thing in each individual moment.

On Developing One's Character

One of positive psychology's seminal projects was the development of a classification of character strengths and virtues. The classification was designed to be the "Un-DSM", given that it focuses on what is right with people as opposed to what has gone wrong (Peterson, 2006b). This classification, called the Values in Action, or VIA, lays the groundwork for answering questions about the definition of character, if character can be developed, and what it means to have a good character and exercise our strengths and virtues through doing the right thing. In both positive psychology and Aristotle's virtue theory, character plays a central role in the pursuit of good life. Character is important because we refine and solidify who we are as individuals through each individual action over time (Fowers, 2005). In positive psychology, research has shown that utilizing our signature strengths that are closely connected to our character leads to increased life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004) and in virtue ethics, character is a concept that orients one towards worthwhile ends and appropriate means that promote human flourishing (Aristotle, trans. 1985). Using the term "character" in such cases implies *good* character, which is often how the term is used colloquially (Fowers, 2008). However, as one's character is the union of one's will, actions, habits, and other features, there are various types of character, some of which are better suited to the pursuit eudaimonia. In the Nichomacean Ethics, Aristotle (trans. 1985) outlines four types of character (virtuous, continent, incontinent, vicious), and their relationship to living the life most worth living. Out of these character types, Aristotle argues that the most noble character aligns one's emotions, will, and actions to act well in various circumstances, which depends on practical wisdom as an

integrating framework to do the right thing in the right way (Fowers, 2008). Because we can sometimes learn more about a concept by first understanding what it is not (Pawelski, 2013a), we will explore four ignoble types of character before discussing the virtuous character type and how it utilizes practical wisdom to promote flourishing for ourselves and for others.

The beastly character. If the life most worth living is a life of human excellence in accordance with proper human function, intuitively, the most ignoble character is one in which an individual abandons his/her humanity. This is labeled as the beastly character. An individual with a beastly character is one who becomes enslaved to improper ends and thereby loses the capacity to pursue the most fundamental human capacities such as reason and friendship (Fowers, 2008). An individual addicted to an illicit drug that forsakes all other goods to acquire and consume the substance is an example of somebody with a beastly character. Often these individuals adopt damaging means, such as theft, exploitation, deception, etc., to fulfill their subjectively chosen end. For this reason, individuals with a beastly character highlight the dangers of an instrumental orientation towards human flourishing given the harm that can result. As an example, stealing money may be effective to acquiring an illicit drug to induce the desired positive emotions. However this pursuit can ultimately cause substantial harm to individuals and/or others around the person.

The vicious character. Unlike the beastly character, Aristotle's first ignoble character type is able to embrace his/her humanity, yet possesses a misguided understanding of what is good (Fowers, 2005). The vicious character type continuously acts according to improper ends that align with the individual's subjective desires, many of which lead to harm or detriment to other people. Many of these ends are external goods, such as pleasure, wealth, power, social status, etc., which are predominantly pursued without regard to the impact on others.

Additionally, persons embodying a vicious character feel wholly justified in their actions because they do not experience tension between their will and desire; these individuals act wholeheartedly in line with ends that may be self-indulgent, greedy, and exploitive (Fowers, 2008). The value of a vicious character is deceptive because one's character becomes formed in such a way that one believes he/she is acting correctly and sensibly, when in fact he/she is pursuing ends that lie counter to the best kind of life.

A second danger of the vicious character type is that the individual will possess many positive traits that are shared with an individual possessing a virtuous character. It is fully within the vicious individual's capacity to present him/herself well and even embody many desirable characteristics studied in the field of positive psychology (Fowers, 2008). For example, a vicious person may be cunning and win many friendships, become wildly successful, and experience considerable meaning and engagement in his/her work, yet participate in work resulting in harm for others. The previous example of Adolf Hitler acts as a prototypical vicious character, as he adopted ends that clearly deviate from what is good, yet possessed many strengths and potential for human achievement and excellence. What differentiates the vicious character from the virtuous character, then, is the ability to perceive what is good, which is one of the defining features of practical wisdom (Fowers, 2005). If one wants to flourish by pursuing a life with a lasting impact on the world, practical wisdom helps one discern what is good and guides appropriate action towards developing one's habits and character to impact the world as a figure like Ghandi or Mother Theresa as opposed to one like Hitler or Osama Bin Laden (Fowers, 2008).

The incontinent character. Aristotle's second ignoble character is the incontinent character. The incontinent character is categorized by the will to do what is right but the

inability to overcome the temptation to pursue less worthy desires (Fowers, 2008). As opposed to a vicious character who wholeheartedly pursues a misguided form of the good, the incontinent individual knows what he/she should do yet does not decide to act well. The Apostle Paul depicts the thoughts and actions of an incontinent character when he states, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19 King James Version). The incontinent character can act as a barrier to our individual well-being and our ability to flourish, as the inability to act well tends to induce negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and remorse (Fowers, 2008). As practical wisdom is a framework that integrates one’s will, actions, and habits to promote human excellence in alignment with what is good, living in a perpetual state of tension that results in poor actions falls short of the life most worth living.

The continent character. One step closer to Aristotle’s virtuous character is the continent character. Similar to the incontinent character, the continent individual has a clear understanding of what is good, yet lacks the will to act in the best ways (Fowers, 2008). What differentiates the continent from the incontinent character is the ability to overcome temptation and act well despite desires toward a lesser good. Therefore, the continent person is able to behave ethically and do the right thing while appearing virtuous from an external perspective. The reason that Aristotle considers the continent character to be ignoble is that acting virtuously entails more than performing correct observable behavior; it requires the alignment and integration of the whole person towards what is good (Kristjánsson, 2013). The continent character falls short of the character needed to pursue Aristotle’s notion of eudaimonia, as a continent individual has the moral skill to do what is right, but lacks the moral will. This prevents the continent character from integrating his/her actions, thoughts, and emotions in the pursuit of human excellence and the life most worth living.

It's important to note that not all scholars agree with Aristotle and argue that the ability to exercise self-control and act against inclination towards duty is the highest form of moral excellence (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). Duty-based ethical theories, including Kantian ethics and utilitarianism, view our emotional state as inherently contrary to moral action, and that overcoming our inclination to act according to a universal maxim or by a calculated best outcome is what characterizes the best life (Fowers, 2005). In such theories self-control is considered to be the master virtue given that most accounts of sin and vice arise from the failure to curb our desires (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). Baumeister and Exline describe self-control as a "moral muscle," meaning that it can be depleted and strengthened through its practice and use. They found that after exerting high levels of self-control on one task, individuals experience ego depletion that prevents them from effectively using self-control during a second task. This can be problematic, as the over-exertion of self-control can leave one in a weakened and vulnerable state that can lead to immoral or bad behavior in the short term if self-control has been depleted. On the other hand, Baumeister, Vons, and Tice (2007) reveal that regularly exerting self-control can enhance one's will-power strength, fostering resilience and allowing one to overcome temptation to act inappropriately. Aristotle believed that most individuals' characters falls somewhere between the continent and incontinent (Aristotle, trans. 1985), and would therefore agree that self-control can enable one to do the right thing. In addition, exerting self-control to increase one's will-power capacity to overcome temptation would be an effective intervention to transition one from an incontinent character to a continent character. However, if one strives for human excellence and seeks to become the best one can be, adopting practical wisdom as the master virtue to align one's will and desire in the pursuit of what is noble and good will eradicate the need for self-control, as one will not experience tension between will and desire thus finding

harmony between one's emotional state and one's actions (Fowers, 2005). This is what Aristotle considered to be good character.

The virtuous character. The virtuous character type is intrinsically motivated to pursue what is good and direct one's actions willingly in the service of worthwhile ends (Fowers, 2008). A virtuous person does not experience tension between what he/she desires to do and what the situation calls him/her to do. Stated simply, a virtuous character has a love of what is good (Fowers, 2008). Having a virtuous character allows one to effectively integrate the moral will and moral skill to do what is right, which is conducive to an integrated life characterized by Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia (Fowers, 2005). In this sense, a virtuous person is able to clearly see what is good in each circumstance and act wholeheartedly towards a good end.

Although the virtuous person freely and agreeably acts in accordance with goodness, this does not imply that the life of a virtuous character type is high in hedonic happiness or free from struggle, hardship, and tension. As discussed previously, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had an unwavering commitment to virtuousness, which ultimately cost him his life. Ghandi was imprisoned for a majority of his lifetime and everyday heroes committed to doing the right thing may often be reproached or rejected. Consequently, virtuous individuals can inevitably lose sight of good ends during stressful times or lack the best motivation to act in all circumstances. Therefore, an essential ability of the virtuous character type is to continually bring one's desires and motives back into alignment with the good. This requires practical wisdom. Having good character is important for discerning the right thing to do, which is also contingent on the proper use of practical wisdom (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Practical wisdom is what enhances one's ability to perceive, deliberate, and do the right thing while integrating rightly ordered emotion. This is why the continent character falls short of the best kind of character. A virtuous character,

on the other hand, uses practical wisdom as a master virtue to integrate his/her emotions and to facilitate actions that develop good habits and promote the best character for our human nature. Becoming practically wise and developing a virtuous character are interrelated processes that depend on one another to act rightly in various situations and lead to the successful pursuit of the life most worth living. For this reason, possessing a virtuous character type plays a prominent role in the pursuit of human flourishing, as we use practical wisdom to determine right action, use right action to develop good habits, use our habits to build virtuous characters, and from good character, become the best that we can be in regards to our human nature (Aristotle, trans. 1985).

The Psychological Mechanisms of Practical Wisdom

Given that our daily actions, habits, and character impact our ability to flourish and collectively shape who we are in all of our activities (Fowers, 2005), I will now turn to a discussion of practical wisdom and cognitive components that help individuals do the right thing in the right way. Before exploring the psychological mechanisms of wisdom, it is important to note that wisdom, in its general sense, is a complex construct that has been operationalized and defined in various ways (Sternberg, 1998). Converging research agrees that wisdom fundamentally entails the ability to judge correctly and to follow through with the best course of action, given one's knowledge and experience. Building on this definition, Sternberg (1998) argues that wisdom involves a balance in many domains, including but not limited to intrapersonal (good for ourselves), interpersonal (good for others), and extrapersonal interests (contextual factors). Because wisdom is inherently about finding balance in right action, practical wisdom is an appropriate framework to address the limits of positive psychology's PERMA model and to help guide individuals in the pursuit of the good life. Practical wisdom builds on

this definition of wisdom and helps enhance one's skills of moral perception, deliberation, and reasoned choice in everyday situations (Fowers, 2005).

Moral perception. Practical wisdom is not a skill only to be used in the direst circumstances or the most complicated moral dilemmas. Rather practical wisdom is a construct that integrates our daily lives and allows us to function at our best in each decision and action we take. To function at our best, we need to have acute moral perception and to seek the appropriate goods in each situation (Fowers, 2005). Moral perception is about being able to recognize what kind of action will be appropriate for the situation and circumstance one is in. Thus, we are using practical wisdom when we decide what kind of gift to buy for a friend, or how to pursue one's goals at a given point in time. Moral perception is largely about understanding what the situation demands of us as opposed to what we expect to gain from the situation. This bears resemblance to Frankl's (1963) writing on finding meaning and purpose in our circumstances, positive or not. To be morally perceptive, we must recognize what has moral worth, value, and significance and understand what does not (Fowers, 2005). Often times, understanding what has worth and significance in a situation depends on understanding the essential elements of a situation, as well as what lies in the periphery. Taking the previous example of the friend at the wedding who asks how she looks, the practically wise person would have the moral perception to understand whether it's more important for the friend to feel good about herself or to be told the honest truth, and would be able to determine whether kindness or honesty would lead to the best outcome (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Research in the field of moral psychology suggests that human beings are born with an innate moral awareness, which is evident in babies as young as three months (Bloom, 2013). Specifically, Bloom's research reveals that three month old babies show a preference for helpful characters rather than hindering characters by looking at and

reaching for the helper in a situation. This suggests babies are born with an innate ability to be morally perceptive and associate goodness with prosocial behavior, but more research is needed to determine whether individuals are born with an innate prosocial disposition to do the right thing. Cognitive awareness is an innate precondition to moral perception, but we also need a moral will to do what is right (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010).

Moral perception is dependent on emotion, as rightly ordered emotion notifies individuals of the relevant features of a situation (Fowers, 2005). It is when we rightly feel angry at injustice we acquire a better understanding of the relevant features of the situation. Similarly, when we feel afraid, we understand that courage is called for because something of value or significance is in jeopardy and we should act to protect it (Fowers, 2005). Therefore, if our emotions are in alignment with what is good, which is seen in individuals embodying a virtuous character, we have increased clarity about what is good and most important. Thus, moral perception is more than the ability to differentiate between right and wrong. Instead it is about seeing the relevant features in each new situation and having the ability to understand what is needed to do the right thing and pursue the greatest good for ourselves and for others.

Deliberation. Having a clear understanding of what is good will sometimes lead to an immediate appropriate action; however, there are some situations in which the right thing to do is not sufficiently obvious (Fowers, 2005). In situations such as these, one needs to use practical wisdom to deliberate between different courses of action to determine the right thing to do. To deliberate well, one must have a clear understanding of what goals are important and relevant to focus on while considering how one can best pursue these goals in a given situations. The daily situations we are in and the decisions we are faced with are infinitely complex, and there are no rules we can follow to ensure we do the right thing in each of our circumstances. This is why

deliberation is needed and is a part of practical wisdom. Doing what is right will always be dependent on the details of our situations, and we need a method to derive how to act rightly in a particular situation from general rules of the good (Fowers, 2005). In our personal and professional lives, we strive to adhere to general rules such as “do no harm to others,” and depend on practical wisdom to deliberate between different courses of possible action that will minimize the degrees of harm for other people. Therefore, through deliberation, we are able to develop a better understanding of the actions and decisions a situation calls for to promote human flourishing.

Deliberation is an important process for doing the right thing and pursuing the eudaimonic life, specifically in regards to goal setting (Fowers, 2005). Because eudaimonia is inherently tied to pursuing human excellence over the course of one’s life and bringing alignment to one’s actions, values, and purposes according to what is good (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013), setting appropriate goals and selecting fitting means to achieve them is a necessary precondition for flourishing. Modern psychological research has revealed a correlation between deliberating well and goal attainment, specifically when one is able to clearly envision a desired future outcome and the barriers that could stand in the way (Sevincer, Busatta, & Oettingen, 2013). This specific process of deliberation is labeled mental contrasting, which has been shown to increase the chance that one will actualize an idealized future through increased energy, effort, and enhanced performance. Mental contrasting comprises two consecutive steps: indulging and dwelling. Indulging entails imagining the best outcomes of the future, envisioning free-flowing fantasies, and considering possible future actions. Indulging is essential to goal setting and the pursuit of what is good, as it enables one to develop a clearer understanding of the ends and the characteristics of the ends that make them worthwhile to pursue.

Dwelling is the second step in mental contrasting. Dwelling is a process of reflecting on obstacles that might be barriers to goal achievement (Sevincer, Busatta, & Oettingen, 2013). Dwelling allows one to realize a better understanding of the present reality and what practical actions can be taken to overcome the identified obstacles and achieve a worthwhile end in an appropriate way (Fowers, 2005). Mental contrasting is related to practical wisdom as it allows one to deliberate both between worthwhile ends and appropriate means, thereby helping one understand whether or not pursuing a goal continues to be the right thing to do in striving for the life most worth living.

While mental contrasting is a useful process for constructing and attaining individualized goals, it does not provide individuals with the necessary skills to deliberate between various goals one may be pursuing simultaneously. Due the complexity of our daily lives and circumstances, rarely are we pursuing one goal in isolation (Fowers, 2005). Often times, we are pursuing multiple ends simultaneously, some of which may be contingent on other goals, or even stand in opposition against them. Thus, to pursue human flourishing, we need to use practical wisdom to deliberate between various goals and determine the best way to align our short-term actions with our overarching life goals (Fowers, 2005). Practical wisdom is a framework that allows us to work towards this harmonization and deliberate between means and ends that will lead to coherence in our endeavors to the best of our ability. Just as deliberation is dependent on moral perception, reasoned choice is dependent on deliberation. This allows one to act in the best possible way to do the right thing at the right time.

Reasoned choice. After engaging in the process of deliberation, the next step of using practical wisdom to do the right thing is to make a reasoned choice, which is the ability to choose the best of all possible alternatives (Fowers, 2005). A reasoned choice is the unification of desire

and what is good and results in a concrete action that is appropriate given the circumstances and results in the best pursuit of the end. To make a reasoned choice entails the ability to see what actions are possible, anticipate the likely outcomes of each action, and the engagement in self-reflective practices including seeking instruction, receiving feedback, and learning from previous experience (Fowers, 2005). Having relevant experience is necessary for making well-reasoned choices, but it is not sufficient. We depend on reason, guidance, and correction along with experience, for without them we run the risk of solidifying bad habits and stifling our ability to achieve excellence (Fowers, 2005). As an example, without guidance and correction, one cannot become a masterful musician no matter how much experience one has with practicing his/her respective instrument. For this reason, wisdom is not simply a result of age and experience, as one requires the use of reason and intention to learn from his/her previous endeavors to be considered wise (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996). Making a reasoned choice ensures after one perceives the relevant information about appropriate means and the ends one pursues, deliberates between various goals and actions to be taken, and considers the possible actions, anticipated outcomes, and evaluates these actions by considering one's previous experiences.

Recent psychological research demonstrates that engaging in a cognitive exercise called implementation intentions helps individuals make reasoned choices and close the gap between goals that they set and goals that are actualized (Golwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). Implementation intentions are mental representations of possible future outcomes and structured cognitive plans for overcoming obstacles if they arise. Essentially, implementation intentions are if/then statements that help individuals start working towards a goal, prevent individuals from getting derailed, and even help individuals discern when it's best to abandon a goal (Golwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). To set an implementation intention, one thinks of a future situational cue that

is related to one's goal, and then links a goal-directed response to the cue. For example, one can consider "if I encounter obstacle X, I will do action Y to overcome X." In doing so, one is able to come to a better understanding of the likelihood of accomplishing the goal and respond to obstacles with goal-affirming behaviors reflexively. Because making a reasoned choice is contingent on assessing possible actions and potential strengths and weaknesses of successful implementation of a short term or long term goal, implementation intentions are useful cognitive strategies to help individuals assess and weigh potential future outcomes and make a reasoned choice to ultimately do the right thing.

Practical wisdom's psychological mechanisms of moral perception, deliberation, and reasoned choice, give individuals greater acuity in discerning the right thing to do and promote decisive action in accordance with the good. It helps individuals understand possible actions given situational constraints, as well as the skills to reflexively overcome obstacles when they arise. These skills are also embedded in Phillip Zimbardo's work with the Heroic Imagination Project. In 2010, Zimbardo created the Heroic Imagination Project with the intention to empower people to make difficult moral decisions with confidence and decisive action in the face of challenges and obstacles (Zimbardo, 2010). It contains a curriculum that is being launched in schools, corporate, and military settings to help individuals adopt a mindset that they can do the right thing by teaching skills that enable individuals to act wisely and courageously beyond their comfort zone in pursue of the good. To do this wisely, individuals can use the psychological skills of practical wisdom to overcome the temptation to pursue inferior aims and build the moral skill and will to do what is right. Through programs such as the Heroic Imagination Project, individuals can use practical wisdom and gain the necessary skill and motivation to contribute to and build individual and collective flourishing.

Practical wisdom is an integrative concept that helps individuals align their thoughts, actions, emotions, and goals towards what is worthwhile and good. Being practically wise involves an amalgamation of pursuing worthwhile ends with appropriate actions, forming good habits, striving for virtuous character, and the effective use of cognition to be perceptive, to deliberate well, and to make reasoned choices. Practical wisdom is essential for flourishing given that flourishing involves the way one's life is taking shape as a whole as opposed to the pursuit of momentary happiness. In this sense, practical wisdom is a construct that leads to refinement in action, habit, and character, allowing individuals to become the best that they can be in the pursuit of the good life. Now that practical wisdom has been defined in regards to its components and related concepts, I will turn to a discussion of the use of practical wisdom in individual pursuits of what is good.

IV. Practical Wisdom in Individual Pursuits of the Good

Character Strengths and Virtues

Any discussion of the good life and practical wisdom would be incomplete without mentioning character strengths and virtues. Throughout history, philosophers, theologians, legislatures, and educators have put forth various accounts of human strengths that underpin well-being and enable us to work towards living a life of human flourishing (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). These accounts provide valuable insight into the nature of the good life, yet some are critiqued for being tilted and biased, bound by culture and implicit values. In response, positive psychology undertook a groundbreaking project of creating a classification of human strengths that are considered to be universally valued across culture and time (Peterson, 2006b). This classification lays the groundwork for a descriptive empirical study of the strengths and virtues that make life most worth living (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). After a rigorous

three year collaborative process of reviewing relevant historical literature, Peterson and Seligman (2004) created a typology that consisted of 6 overarching virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) and 24 accompanying strengths (see appendix A). In the classification, virtues are defined as core characteristics endorsed by moral philosophers and religious thinkers across culture and throughout history, and character strengths as the psychological mechanisms that comprise the virtues. For example, justice is classified as a virtue that can be achieved by using the strengths of fairness, loyalty, or by exercising the strength of leadership. This classification is accompanied by a measure called the Values In Action survey (VIA), which can be used by individuals to become more aware of their strengths and researchers to empirically study the various character strengths and their correlations to well-being and human flourishing.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) classified the strengths using the following criteria: strengths must contribute towards fulfillment, be morally valued, not diminish the strengths of others, have an opposite, be traitlike, be distinct from other strengths, embodied in a paragon, seen in prodigies, are absent from some individuals in certain situations, and are promoted and encouraged by larger society. They acknowledge that not all traits fulfill all 10 criteria, making the criteria a guiding framework rather than a necessary and sufficient evaluative measure. Additionally, this classification of universal character strengths is not intended to be exhaustive and leaves room for researchers to continue working on character strengths and virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) express their hopes for subsequent research on this topic and state that positive psychology will flourish if their classification evolves into a taxonomy and contributes to the development of one or more deep theories of the good life. While this paper does not contribute to the catalogue of strengths and virtues, it seeks to raise questions about the best use

of strengths and how they contribute to the good life. Specifically, it will explore the role of practical wisdom as a master strength that allows individuals to use their strengths more effectively, and ultimately achieve human excellence in the way that Aristotle depicted eudaimonia, which is essential to his conception of the good life.

Character strengths in positive psychology. The field of positive psychology has produced an impressive amount of research in the domain of character strengths and virtues since the classification was released in 2004. Most studies have explored the relationship between strengths and subjective well-being while a moderate amount of research has established a link between the construct psychological well-being and character strengths (Linley, 2013). Studies demonstrate that the well-being effects of using character strengths are diverse and abundant, ranging from repairing negative affective states (Lavy, Litman-Ovadia, & Bareli, 2014) to increasing life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Additionally, research reveals that the most commonly endorsed strengths are kindness, fairness, authenticity, gratitude, and open-mindedness while the least endorsed strengths are prudence, modesty, and self-regulation (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This can be seen across cultures, which provides fertile ground for further psychological research around universal strengths and what it means to flourish according to a shared human nature (Peterson & Park, 2005). Seligman et al. (2005) also found the “strengths of the heart” which include zest, gratitude, hope, and love, are better predictors of satisfaction with life than “strengths of the head.” This may suggest that the kind of person one is as opposed to what external ends one gains or accomplishes with his/her strengths is what significantly impacts subjective well-being and leads to a flourishing life. More research that explores the relationship between eudaimonic well-being and strengths is needed to corroborate this claim, however, which Linley (2013) reports is the least empirically studied

conceptualization of well-being in relation to strengths, but is one of the greatest new research opportunities for the future of positive psychology.

With a robust understanding of the benefits of using character strengths for increasing our well-being, researchers and scholars have begun to consider different models and various frameworks for strengths development, cultivation, and use. Positive psychology practitioners often use a strengths assessment tool, such as the VIA, to increase a client's awareness of his/her strengths and how these strengths can be leveraged to increase success, happiness, and other self-identified aims (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2010). This "identify and use" approach has proven to be an effective and straightforward intervention that enables individuals to uncover their strengths and actively search for new situations that can be used in their daily lives. As an example, one of positive psychology's seminal positive interventions, using signature strengths in a new way, helps individuals become aware of their top five strengths, and use them in new ways and more frequently each week (Seligman et al., 2005). Results from this intervention consistently show that individuals experience an increase in well-being and less depressive symptoms following the intervention, which demonstrates that becoming aware of and using strengths can make us lastingly happier (Seligman, 2002).

What if instead of becoming happier, individuals strive to flourish by becoming the best version of themselves through seeking good ends by using their strengths in the right context to do the right thing? Peterson and Seligman (2004) articulate that strengths should be used appropriately and should not diminish others, yet the identify and use approach doesn't prevent individuals from using character strengths for instrumental purposes. Implicitly, the identify and use approach suggests that we should use our strengths more often and in new ways, and that more of a strength leads to improvement and beneficial outcomes (Biswas-Diener et al., 2010).

However, exploitive individuals often use their strengths frequently and successfully with disregard to the needs and well-being of others (Fowers, 2005). Considering the example of Adolf Hitler, he possessed and effectively exercised multiple strengths including leadership, social intelligence, perseverance, among others, yet used his strengths for subjectively chosen, highly damaging and malevolent ends. In this extreme example, becoming increasingly self-aware of one's strengths and using them more frequently and in new ways in the service of harmful ends impedes one's ability to flourish according to Aristotle's description of eudaimonia and undermines positive psychology's aim of increasing civic virtues and flourishing societies. This has led some researchers to consider more nuanced approaches to strengths development and use that align more closely with the eudaimonic conception of well-being.

Character strengths: An emerging perspective towards eudaimonia. Biswas-Diener et al. (2010) proposed a subtle shift in strengths interventions that provide individuals with a framework to answer questions about what their individual strengths are and how they can be exercised to increase individual well-being, as well as how to use character strengths in the right context and amount by considering the impact the use of strengths will have on other people. Contrary to the identify and use approach, they advocate for a "strengths development approach," which asserts that strengths interventions should be more concerned about the proper use and development of strengths than using strengths for meeting performance goals. This shift in perspective allows practitioners and individuals to acknowledge that strengths are contingent on situational factors and are used in a specific context. Individuals are then able to shift their thinking from "how can I use my strengths to fit in this situation?" to "what strengths does this situation call for and how do I effectively use them?" In this way, the strengths development approach prompts individuals to use practical wisdom to understand the environment and to

deliberate about the possible ways to employ their strengths given the context to do the right thing.

Additionally, if one desires to do the right thing, it is important to develop and possess the relevant strengths that the situation might call for, to use them in the right proportion, and to use the strengths in proper conjunction with one another. These beliefs that strengths don't exist in isolation and should be used in the optimal amount are additional tenets of the strengths development approach (Biswas-Diener et al., 2010). Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) share these thoughts and call them the problems of relevance, conflict, and specificity. They argue that strengths are not effective if used in isolation, and that more of any specific strength is not necessarily a good thing. They equate strengths to muscles, and just as a bodybuilder must develop the whole body to perform optimally, so must the individual develop the strengths and virtues to prevent a deformity in character (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Additionally, there are many situations we may find ourselves in where virtuous actions might be in conflict. Some examples could include a tension between honesty and kindness, justice and forgiveness, or being courageous and exercising self-regulation in the face of uncertainty. Through the development and use of practical wisdom, one can discern how to best resolve such conflicts and to determine which and how much of a virtue is most appropriate for each situation. Without practical wisdom, one might be able to use strengths to become happier and effectively work towards one's inappropriate ends, but would not be able to effectively use his/her strengths to do the right thing in the right way.

Finding the mean: Using strengths in moderation. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle claimed that strengths lie as the mean between deficiency and excess and that practical wisdom is the master virtue that calculates the mean given each circumstance for each person

(Aristotle, trans. 1985). This theory continues to be corroborated by modern psychological science. Grant and Schwartz (2011) explored various empirical studies regarding strengths and well-being and discovered an inverted u-shaped relationship between the use of strengths and the benefit produced for four out of six virtue categories. As an example, consider the relationship between optimism and performance. Too little optimism results in helplessness and a lack of motivation to perform adequately, whereas a moderate amount of optimism instills an appropriate amount of confidence that leads to increased planning and effort. Too much optimism, on the other hand, can result in complacency and leave an individual underprepared for performance on a specific task. Grant and Schwartz's (2011) findings are significant because they demonstrate that too much of a given strength does more than simply cease to provide benefit, it begins to cause more harm than good. As eudaimonia is characterized by excellence and becoming the best one can be, the underuse and overuse of strengths deviates from the actions necessary for optimal functioning, and have even been classified as disorders (Peterson, 2006b).

Two years after the release of the Character Strengths and Virtues Classification, Peterson wrote an article suggesting that positive psychology, specifically the classification of character strengths and virtues, can provide information about disorders through a lens of normality and supernormality (Peterson, 2006b). In addition to schizophrenia and bipolar disorders, he argues that real psychological disorders are also disorders of character, which includes the absence and misuse of strengths. He suggests that many people go to therapy to work on goals related to character strengths, as some may feel they are not kind enough, need to become a team player, don't experience enough gratitude, are unable to appreciate the beauty and good in the world in which they live, etc. This suggests that mitigating and preventing

disorders of character lie in the ability to use strengths appropriately in the right amount and context.

Like Aristotle, Peterson (2006b) suggests that strengths are exercised in moderation, and that underuse and overuse of strengths results in disorder/vice. To demonstrate this point, he created a taxonomy of the 24 character strengths from the Character Strengths and Virtues classification, along with each strength's absence, opposite, and exaggeration (See Appendix B). For example creativity is a strength, but becomes conformity if underused and eccentricity if overused. This taxonomy is a helpful framework individuals can use to begin to think about specific ways to develop strengths and use them in the right amount. However, this classification doesn't resolve the problem of specificity (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Knowing that kindness is the mean between indifference and intrusiveness helps individuals begin to deliberate between various courses of action, but to make a reasoned choice, one must know how to be kind in the specific circumstance in this particular time. Consequently, rules and formulas are helpful, but not sufficient for individuals to discern and do the right thing (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). This is why practical wisdom is needed as the master virtue; it translates the abstract ideal into particular actions, and helps one use the other strengths in the right way. Without practical wisdom, one may be well intentioned to use one's strengths in moderation, but may inadvertently use a strength in its excess or deficiency. Practical wisdom may not be needed if one's end is to use strengths to increase one's subjective well-being; however, if one is more interested in living well than feeling good, practical wisdom is the construct that guides right actions through the proper use of strengths, which will lead to good habits, form a virtuous character, and ultimately contribute to the good life.

Pursuing Worthwhile Ends: An Exploration of External, Internal, and Shared Goods

Given that eudaimonia is defined as a way of living in accordance with the pursuit of human excellence through orienting one's life towards worthwhile ends, our actions and aims directly impact our ability to live a flourishing life (Ryan et al., 2008). Our goals and actions are voluntarily taken and determined, which suggests that living well entails a continual search and dedication to pursue what is intrinsically good. As stated previously, practical wisdom as a master virtue enables individuals to find balance between the strengths and do the right thing in a given situation. Practical wisdom also acts on a broader level as an organizing agent to align one's ends towards an integrated whole or way of being (Fowers, 2005). Thus, to live the best kind of life, individuals depend on practical wisdom to balance and integrate pursuits towards external, internal, and shared goods.

External goods. The first category of goods that make up our goals and pursuits are external goods. These are goods that can be possessed that are typically objects and states of affairs such as money, a career, social status, power, etc. (Fowers, 2005). Such goods are considered external, as the end goal is different than the activity itself. Many external goods are commodities that are divided and shared between individuals, meaning they can be limited or scarce. External goods are important for living well, but are also shown to have diminishing marginal utility (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Studies show that money leads to increased subjective well-being initially, but as one's income continues to increase, the less impact additional money has on overall happiness and subjective well-being. (Diener, Ng, & Tov, 2009). External goods are subject to the phenomenon of the "hedonic treadmill" which states that individuals adapt to their external conditions and circumstances, and the happiness produced by acquiring external goods is not as long-lasting as we might expect it to be (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Thus, if one is solely pursuing external goods, one will be chasing episodic and fleeting fulfillment,

and will not have an overarching life narrative or deep sense of meaning that the good life entails (Fowers, 2005).

External goods contribute to our well-being and are needed in moderation to live a life most worth living (Fowers, 2005), yet they have a shadow side and can sometimes act as a barrier to the eudaimonic life (Ryan et al., 2008). External goods can be pursued by various subjectively chosen strategies, which puts external goods at risk of being attained through instrumental means. For example, one can become wealthy by either working hard or by deceiving and exploiting others. Because there are multiple strategies one can adopt to acquire external goods, individuals can choose the simplest or least costly means to achievement, even if their actions are detrimental to others (Fowers, 2005). Practical wisdom can help individuals discern the appropriate amount of external good needed for the good life, and how to obtain these goods in the best possible way. These external goods must be balanced and aligned with a second category of goods, internal goods, for one to flourish and become the best that one can be.

Internal goods. Internal goods are a second form of end that contributes to the good life. As opposed to external goods, internal goods are first ordered goods, meaning that they have inherent value in and of themselves (Ryan et al., 2008). Examples of internal goods include friendship, personal growth, community, family security, etc. (Fowers, 2005). These goods are internal because they cannot be separated from the means to their achievement and are an integral part of one's identity and life. To illustrate this, consider the internal good, friendship. Developing a strong friendship entails being a good friend oneself and taking pleasure in being in the other person's company. True friendship in this sense is not developed for secondary or instrumental reasons, but is a result of a bond that is inherently worthwhile. In this way,

cultivating an internal good is dependent on an individual and the kind of life one lives, and is a central component to the life well-lived.

It is important to note that internal and external goods are not completely independent and that quite often, external goods provide a foundation for which internal goods can be pursued. Fowers (2005) demonstrates this point with the description of college students. Students will often work hard during a semester to obtain the external good of excellent grades, which will allow them to have an external good of a prestigious job after college, which will ultimately provide the necessary external conditions to allow one to pursue the internal good of human flourishing. Thus, the good life requires an intricate balance of external and internal goods in common daily occurrences and in long-term over-arching life goals. Flourishing is often described as the way that one's life is taking shape as a whole, and in order for one to achieve excellence according to one's proper function over time, one can use practical wisdom to perceive what ends are worthwhile, deliberate between different actions, make reasoned decisions, and ultimately align and balance external and internal ends to become the best that one can be.

Shared goods. When setting goals and considering worthwhile ends to pursue, psychology has traditionally lead us to question whether our motivation stems from self-interest or from altruism (Fowers, 2005). Even though at times, we may feel forced to make a decision between the two, this is usually a false dichotomy. In many situations, there are ends that can be pursued that are good for a collective "us." These are called shared goods. Shared goods are the ends that cannot be possessed by one person alone: democracy, friendships, professional groups, communities, and the like. For shared goods to exist and thrive, they require active and ongoing participation from a dyad or collection of individuals. Shared goods are essential for participation

in the best kind of life, as we are social by nature and cannot flourish independently outside of a community (Fowers, 2005). The belief that we need other people to achieve excellence and cultivate goodness is not new to positive psychology, and can be traced back to Aristotle's (trans. 1985) claim that it is impossible for one to reach eudaimonia without other people. To be the best kind of person, Aristotle argued that one must participate in community life. If one does not and chooses to receive from others more than one actively participates and contributes back to the whole, one will be restricted to instrumental external goods (Fowers, 2005), which as we have demonstrated, are not sustainable and are subject to hedonic adaptation.

Related to the notion of shared goods is a way of acting that Rebele (2013) calls being "otherish." Being "otherish" means finding where our interest and others' interests intersect, and choosing actions that are simultaneously good for all parties involved. He acknowledges that this is not always easy and that individuals often face dilemmas between personal and prosocial goals. However resolving this conflict is theoretically possible and through effort, individuals can sometimes find a third, "otherish" option. Rebele (2013) argues that learning to be otherish requires thoughtful problem solving abilities and he outlines ten strategies as a helpful starting point. Some strategies include understanding our own needs and goals, helping in small amounts over time, learning when it's best to say no, asking for help from others, learning when helping is energizing or depleting, among other strategies. On a fundamental level, learning how to be otherish is parallel to asking what is the right thing to do in a given situation. Both questions entail seeking balance, considering individual and external factors, and making a decision to maximize the desired beneficial outcome. Thus, practical wisdom can help individuals find balance between individual and shared goods, as well as personal and prosocial interests. I argue that being "otherish" is synonymous with being practically wise, and that through moral

perception, deliberation, and reasoned choice, individuals can learn to do the right thing for oneself, for others, and for society at large. In 1998, Martin Seligman articulated a vision that positive psychology would restore balance to the field of psychology and would help cultivate excellence and human flourishing in both individuals and communities (Seligman, 1999). By helping individuals discern and pursue worthwhile ends, practical wisdom is the tool that can bring this vision to fruition.

V. Practical Wisdom: Flourishing in the Workplace

Many individuals spend a majority of their waking hours doing some form of work (Rath & Harter, 2010). The work one does has the potential to become more than a job or a means to a paycheck; it can become a defining feature of one's identity and provide a deep sense of meaning and purpose for one's life (Wrzesniewski, 2013). The work individuals choose to engage in can help shape them into who they wish to become and can contribute to their happiness, health, and well-being. Research has shown that having a high sense of well-being at work makes individuals twice as likely to report high levels of well-being in other domains of life (Rath & Harter, 2010). On the other hand, Rath and Harter (2010) also show that being unhappy and/or disengaged at work can detract from one's ability to become who one wants to be and can lead to increased stress, poorer health, and impair one's ability to flourish in other domains of life. In this sense, work plays a prominent role in one's overall well-being, perhaps even more so than most people realize. One way positive psychology can help protect individuals against the negative effects of workplace stress, burnout, and disengagement and instead promote growth and flourishing is through teaching the skills of resilience. Early research on cognitive therapy suggests that learning how to recognize maladaptive thoughts and challenge irrational beliefs allow individuals to gain more control over their emotional responses to external stimuli at work

and mitigate unnecessary negative responses (Beck, 1991). This bolsters resilience by helping employees think realistically, flexibly, and thoroughly at work in the face of uncertain or ambiguous situational factors (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Consider an employee who receives an email from his/her supervisor that simply states they need to talk. Chances are, an employee under considerable stress who adopts a pessimistic explanatory style will jump to a negative conclusion that he/she did something wrong and is bound to be reproached by his/her supervisor. However, it is also plausible that the supervisor was in a rush when sending the email, wanted to personally acknowledge the employee's hard work, or wanted to ask for advice for an upcoming project. Without sufficient evidence, individuals are prone to fall into similar thinking traps, but by noticing and challenging irrational thoughts, employees can become more resilient and experience increased well-being at work (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Because human flourishing is the integration of different aspects of one's life into a coherent whole, increasing one's wellbeing at work is essential to promote the pursuit of the good life and the life most worth living.

Various fields from organizational behavior to positive organizational scholarship have studied various factors that promote happiness and well-being at work. Many researchers have outlined diverse interventions and strategies individuals and employers can take to enhance employee well-being, some of which are related to hedonic happiness and others eudaimonic happiness. For the purpose of this paper, I will explore just one route to eudaimonia at work, specifically, the use of practical wisdom to do the right thing and pursue the good of one's profession.

By pursuing virtuousness in an organizational setting, individuals are able to be "otherish" (Rebele, 2015) and engage in actions that provide benefit to organizations, employees, and society at large (Cameron & Caza, 2013). By striving to do the right thing and seek the good

of the profession, individuals can flourish through achieving professional excellence and can experience their job as a calling (Wrzesniewski, 2013). Doing the right thing entails pursuing the internal goods of the profession (Dunne, 2011), but also requires that one fulfill the appropriate external ends of his/her profession in non-instrumental ways, so that he/she contributes towards and not detract from what is inherently good (Fowers, 2005). Being a good professional in this sense means having the moral skill and will to do the right thing at work (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2006). Often this entails the ability to balance competing ends, to use various strengths in moderation, to deliberate between internal and external goods, and ultimately, to use practical wisdom to guide one's thoughts, actions, and professional aims towards what is ultimately good.

Pursing the Ends of the Profession

Just as Aristotle (trans.1985) argued that a good person acts virtuously towards the proper function of a human being, being a good professional entails seeking and acting towards the proper end of the profession (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). For example, being a good doctor entails promoting the health of his/her patients and recommending the best kind of treatment. Additionally, being a good teacher involves educating students and instilling motivation and passion for knowledge. Being a good professional means entering into a civic agreement where one works to provide public value and benefit the population the profession works with (Sullivan, 2013). In this sense, one becomes a professional to sustain and promote the public good through pursuing the internal goods of the profession (Dunne, 2011). However, just understanding the ends of the profession and how it benefits others is not enough to do the right thing at work. The ends of professions are described in abstraction, and one needs to be able to discern how to act rightly in a specific situation, given the relevant circumstances. Thus practical wisdom is what allows the good doctor to recognize that a patient should change his/her diet

instead of take a new medication, and the good teacher to realize that a particular student will best understand the material if an explanation is paired with a visual image. Many doctors want to contribute to their patients' health; it is only the good doctors that are able to perceive, deliberate, and wisely choose the correct means to promote the health and well-being of their patients.

Often times when there is a problem in an organization or a scandal broadcasted in the news, the root cause can be traced back to an employee or an organization pursuing alternate goods, many of which are external like money, power, or prestige (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Because external goods can be pursued through instrumental means, they run the risk of causing harm to others and undermining the mission of the organization and/or the end of the field. On a small scale, this can be seen in lawyers who pad their timesheets to acquire more billable hours. Lawyers are often ranked by billable units, and adding just a little more time to a timesheet is an effective, yet unethical, way to advance in the field. These small actions can ultimately act as a significant barrier to one's ability to flourish, because as Aristotle (trans. 1985) argues, actions lead to habits, habits shape our character, and ultimately, our characters determine who we are holistically. Thus with each small action that is not aligned with what is good, professionals run the risk of becoming extremely successful, yet exploitive, malicious, vicious individuals who gradually lose the moral will to do what is right. The banking crisis of 2008 is a clear depiction of this gradual decline and ultimate neglect of the ends of the profession (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). For most of the twentieth century, a good banker was characterized by a commitment to help the community in a trustworthy manner. Good bankers relied on practical wisdom to balance the interests of their clients, the community, and the bank. As time progressed, the aim of the banks shifted away from providing for the community, to simply making money. The most

effective means to this end were to deceive and exploit clients into buying risky irresponsible loans that they could not afford. This ultimately resulted in substantial financial hardship for businesses and millions of households in the United States.

Clearly, pursuing subjectively chosen external ends can pose a serious threat to the well-being of oneself and others, and organizations and societies should aim to prevent similar crises and foster the best for employees and communities. In general, we tend to enforce stricter rules and create smarter incentives to encourage individuals to do the right thing at work (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). However, rules and incentives are not enough; we also need practical wisdom.

The Problem with Rules and Incentives

Professionals need to do the right thing to flourish in the workplace and to contribute to a collective good and fulfill the end of their profession. In some cases, doing the right thing is a simple choice between what is clearly right and wrong, but in other situations, what is right is obscured between conflicting obligations, complicated situational factors, and uncertain outcomes. Consider a psychologist who learned about a client's hostile feelings towards a third party and the client's intention to buy a gun (Fowers, 2005). Should the psychologist honor his/her field's aim of protecting confidentiality or should he/she break confidentiality to warn the potential victim? While situations like this may not be the norm, they carry significant weight and have considerable consequences for professionals, organizations, and society at large. To prevent crises and ensure employees do the right thing, organizations and ethics boards tend to create more rules and stricter regulations (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Rules and regulations are an important starting point, as they outline general conceptions of how one should act, but are written in abstraction and often include ambiguity (Fowers, 2005). Rules and regulations act as guidelines and rules of thumb, but they need to be applied to concrete situations that

professionals face on a daily basis. Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) provide an analogy of rules as a road map to help individuals get to the right city, but not the right street. To find the right “street,” one needs to be able to perceive what needs to be done in a specific context, given the individuals involved, with the possible actions that can be taken. Rules guide individuals in the right general direction, and practical wisdom produces right action in each particular situation. General rules can prevent professionals from pursuing clearly wrong and malicious ends, but if flourishing entails pursuing excellence and becoming the best one can be, then professionals need a framework to resolve moral dilemmas, to be morally perceptive, deliberate well, and make rightly ordered decisions in line with the good of the profession. In addition to rules, we need practical wisdom.

Another reason rules are insufficient for professionals to flourish is that rules can undermine the moral skill needed for one to do the right thing (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Practical wisdom is the culmination of moral will and moral skill, which includes perceptiveness, nuanced-thinking, aligning thoughts and emotions, and an appreciation of the context and situation at hand. Using practical wisdom to do the right thing requires seeking balance and moderation relative to the situation. Rules, on the other hand, do not require deliberation; they necessitate adherence. Rules are universal black and white statements while the right thing to do is an ever-changing shade of gray. We depend on rules to prevent egregious errors and wrong doings, but simultaneously stifle creativity, flexible thinking, and other necessary skills to act appropriately in new or ambiguous situations. Thus, an overreliance on rules will leave an individual’s moral skills underdeveloped, and he/she will not be able to effectively perceive, deliberate, and choose an appropriate action to suit the situation. Becoming practically wise is a process in which skills are strengthened through experience and practice (Schwartz & Sharpe,

2006). The less one practices the skills of practical wisdom, the worse one's judgment and actions will be. When employees demonstrate poor judgment, organizations strive to create stricter rules to guide action, thus creating a vicious cycle. Interrupting this cycle is essential to promote flourishing at work and can be accomplished by recognizing the limitations of rules and regulations, and dedicating oneself as a professional to pursuing relevant experiences and practices to strengthen the moral skills to do the right thing in accordance with the ends of the profession.

In addition to establishing stricter rules and regulations, organizations often attempt to create smarter incentives to promote flourishing and to encourage individuals to do the right thing at work (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). The intention behind creating smarter incentives is that through providing an additional external motivator, individuals will be more inclined to do the right thing. Incentivizing specific behaviors in this way may lead to increased performance, but this comes with a cost. By providing external incentives to do the right thing, one's intrinsic motivation to perform the specific behavior in the future will be undermined (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Extrinsic incentives for performance can cause individuals to see their actions as being dependent on rewards and the organization distributing the incentive, thereby eroding individuals' intrinsic motivation to act. To illustrate this notion, consider a child who enjoys reading. If a parent begins to give a child a financial incentive every time he/she finishes a book, the child will attribute his/her motivation to read to the money and not as a result of his/her internal desires (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Take away the incentive, and the child will be less likely to read a book on his/her own. In this sense, incentives run the risk of eroding intrinsic motivation and the moral will to do the right thing.

A related problem with incentives is that they have the potential to undermine the internal goods of the field or profession (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Many incentives are external goods, such as money, prestige, and power, and can be pursued for instrumental purposes that are separate from the ends of the profession. Incentives can divert one's commitment to seeking balance in the pursuit of what is right towards self-serving individualistic aims. Employees can lose sight of the goods of the profession for their own wealth, prestige, and happiness. Additionally, individuals will begin to evaluate their performance in relationship to the incentives and will seek to do "just enough" to meet the quota as opposed to finding the "right amount" (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Lastly, because incentives can be pursued instrumentally, they can be achieved at the expense of other employees, clients, or society at large. As flourishing entails exercising the strengths and virtues appropriately to fulfill the proper ends on oneself and one's profession, incentives can prevent professionals from flourishing by diverting their attention away from doing the right thing for the right reasons. As Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) stated, if not used correctly, incentives undermine one's moral will to do the right thing.

For these reasons, there is no substitute for practical wisdom to promote flourishing at work. Practical wisdom allows professionals to navigate complex and ambiguous situations at work while exercising and cultivating the moral skill and moral will to do the right thing. Often, this means finding a balance between pursuing the internal ends of the profession and doing subsidiary things to keep the organization afloat and in operation (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Rules and incentives guide individuals in the right direction, but they are not nuanced enough to find and strike the right balance. An overreliance on rules can cause imbalance by weakening one's moral skill, where incentives can diminish one's moral will. Rules and incentives are not inherently bad, however, and when used appropriately, contribute to employee's well-being and

performance. But rules and incentives are not enough to do the right thing. To do the right thing, we ultimately need practical wisdom.

Practical Wisdom and Callings

The work we do pervades our identity and our lives as a whole. Because work plays such a foundational role in our lives, it can be a significant source of joy, engagement, sustenance, and overall well-being (Caza & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Doing the right thing at work promotes various positive outcomes, and research has shown that individuals and organizations ranking high in virtuousness are correlated with increased productivity, happiness, and higher patient/client satisfaction ratings (Cameron & Caza, 2013). This research suggests that using practical wisdom to act virtuously has intrinsic worth that benefits all parties involved. For this reason, how we approach the work that we do shapes us as professionals and the larger society in which we work, and can either contribute to or detract from our ability to flourish.

Organizational researcher, Amy Wrzesniewski, studies the importance that one's work orientation has on one's ability to flourish at work. Her research brings to light additional support for the use and development of practical wisdom in professionals. Wrzesniewski (2013) characterizes work orientations into three broad categories: job orientations, career orientations, and calling orientations. Those who view work as a job tend to focus on material benefits and other external goods they receive from engaging in their work. Traditionally, these individuals are motivated by financial incentives and work to meet their needs and derive their meaning and fulfillment outside of their work lives (Caza & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Professionals adopting a job orientation may experience high levels of positive emotions and hedonic happiness, but this is not sustainable and is subject to adaptation over time (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Additionally, pursuing external goods can stifle one's ability to flourish by seeking self-serving

ends at the expense of others and distracting one from what is most worthwhile in the profession. For this reason, adopting a job orientation does not necessitate practical wisdom, as one is not pursuing excellence in accordance with the ends of the field, and is therefore less inclined to find balance between conflicting aims within the profession.

The second orientation that Wrzesniewski (2013) describes is a career orientation. Those with a career orientation are motivated by advancement in their profession. Increased prestige, power, and achievement are many common aims of individuals with this orientation. Similar to job orientations, those with a career orientation are primarily motivated by external goods. These individuals may seek goodness in relation to their profession's ends and act well in an effort to achieve advancement, but possess internal motives that arise from self-interest and an unbalanced commitment to one's own well-being. Individuals with a career orientation have the moral skill to do what's right, but may have a misguided moral will, directed towards lesser and instrumentally chosen ends.

The final work orientation Wrzesniewski (2013) describes is a calling orientation. Individuals who view work as a calling find meaning and fulfillment in their work and are motivated by the internal ends of the field. They engage in the work to make the world a better place and derive part of their identity from the work that they do. Seeing one's work as a calling has been shown to increase one's work and life satisfaction, productivity, and sense of meaning more than the other two work orientations (Caza & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Such individuals are intrinsically motivated to pursue excellence and find fulfillment in doing their jobs well. In this sense, professionals with a calling orientation have the moral skill and moral will to do the right thing considering their profession and the situational factors in each given moment. (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Individuals with a calling orientation depend on practical wisdom to be

perceptive, deliberate between various outcomes, and make decisions to act well given the circumstances. They find balance between the ends of the profession while benefitting themselves and others. Professionals with a calling orientation align and integrate their work with their identity as a whole, while finding fulfillment in pursuing professional excellence and contributing to society at large. Those with a calling orientation work for more than hedonic happiness; they strive for eudaimonia. Flourishing at work depends on having a calling orientation, and having a calling orientation depends on possessing and cultivating practical wisdom.

VI. Conclusion

Practical wisdom is an ancient concept that continues to have modern relevance for individuals, professionals, and the field of positive psychology itself. At its core, practical wisdom is a conceptual framework that helps individuals do the right thing through using moral perception, deliberating between ends and possible actions, making reasoned choices, and taking appropriate actions (Fowers, 2005). The concept of practical wisdom is derived from Aristotle's (trans. 1985) virtue theory, which posits that individuals flourish by using their strengths in moderation to do the right thing and to pursue worthwhile ends according to human excellence given our human nature. This description of human flourishing is akin to the kind of person one is as opposed to the way that one feels in a given moment. Flourishing (eudaimonia) is a state of *being* and an evaluation of the way that one's life is taking shape as a whole. Practical wisdom is a necessary virtue to pursue eudaimonia, as it balances and aligns individuals' actions and aims in accordance with what is ultimately good. It helps individuals understand and do the right thing in novel and ambiguous situations, to form good habits, to cultivate a virtuous character, and to become the best that one can be. By cultivating practical wisdom and striving to do the right

thing as individuals, our workplaces will see more employees pursuing the ends of the profession, and our society will reap the benefits of living in a flourishing community. In 1998, positive psychology was founded with the intention of making all human lives better by fostering individual and communal well-being (Seligman, 1999). Positive psychology has already made great strides towards these goals in the past 17 years, and as we look to the future, practical wisdom can help the field of positive psychology fulfill its ends in excellence and promote flourishing for individuals and societies alike.

Future Directions

If this capstone was successful in pursuing its most worthwhile end, readers will have a renewed understanding of the concept of practical wisdom, its relevance to the field of positive psychology, and an invigorating desire to flourish by doing the right thing. My hope is that this capstone begins a conversation about practical wisdom that builds as positive psychology continues to advance.

At the present time, positive psychology studies various eudaimonic theories of well-being, but has not fully explored the necessity of practical wisdom as a guiding and integrating framework to do the right thing. Additionally, as presented in this capstone, the field of positive psychology can further explore abstract ideas of goodness and their relationship to the various models of well-being. Practical wisdom has a rich theoretical history and many scholars have offered detailed philosophical accounts of its importance and relationship to the good life. Given that positive psychology is a scientific study of the good life, it can provide a richer and more robust empirical exploration of practical wisdom and its contributions to the life most worth living. To strengthen empirical results, researchers can also work on creating comprehensive measures to operationalize practical wisdom and its related constructs.

One correlation that I hypothesize is ripe for empirical study is the relationship between practical wisdom and resilience. Leading researchers in resilience state that resilience is determined by a complex relationship between environmental factors, beliefs, and abilities (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). They relate resilience to patterns in thought that are flexible, accurate, and thorough. Resilience is undermined when individuals are in situations that are ambiguous and when one has incomplete information, which can cause one to fall into a “thinking trap.” Reivich and Shatte (2002) suggest that the key to getting out of thinking traps and increasing one’s resilience is to gather more evidence, consider the implications and likelihood that one made an incorrect assessment, and to think critically about the situation. I hypothesize that the skills of resilience are similar to the psychological mechanisms of practical wisdom (moral perception, deliberation, and reasoned choice), and that cultivating practical wisdom will make one more resilient. As the science of positive psychology progresses, researchers can look for additional correlations with other constructs including but not limited to positive emotion, achievement, relationships, goal attainment, and creativity.

Lastly, positive psychology has the opportunity to advance our knowledge and understanding of various methods to cultivate practical wisdom. Research suggests that one can become practically wise through experience (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010) and by seeking good mentors (Fowers, 2005). Future researchers can explore more nuanced ideas surrounding the kinds of experiences one needs to become practically wise, and what qualities comprise a good mentor. With a better understanding of the means to developing practical wisdom, positive psychology can work towards creating specific interventions to help individuals gain the moral skill and moral will to do the right thing. In doing so, positive psychology is presented with a revolutionary opportunity to leverage practical wisdom as a framework and tool to help

individuals become the best that they can be. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle articulated his account of human flourishing as a life-long process of using practical wisdom to become increasingly virtuous, wise, and excellent. Today, positive psychology is able to support Aristotle's account with empirical evidence that highlights the necessity of virtue, meaning, fulfillment, and growth in the pursuit of the eudaimonic life. Life is complicated and the right thing to do is often obfuscated between conflicting aims and situational ambiguity. This is why we need practical wisdom. In his reflections, Christopher Peterson (2012) wisely stated, "No one said doing the right thing is easy. But the right thing remains the right thing." (p. 172).

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Appendix A: Character Strengths and Virtues**1. Wisdom and knowledge**

Creativity (originality, ingenuity)
Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience)
Open-Mindedness (judgment, critical thinking)
Love of Learning
Perspective (wisdom)

2. Courage

Bravery (valor)
Persistence (perseverance, industriousness)
Integrity (authenticity, honesty)
Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy)

3. Humanity

Love
Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “nice-ness”)
Social Intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence)

4. Justice

Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork)
Fairness
Leadership

5. Temperance

Forgiveness and mercy
Humility/Modesty
Prudence
Self-regulation (Self-control)

6. Transcendence

Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation)
Gratitude
Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation)
Humor (playfulness)
Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose)

Appendix B: Classification of Psychological Disorders of Character

Strength	Absence	Opposite	Exaggeration
Creativity	Conformity	Triteness	Eccentricity
Curiosity / Interest	Disinterest	Boredom	Morbid curiosity / nosiness
Judgment / Critical Thinking	Unreflectiveness	Gullibility	Cynicism
Love of Learning	Complacency	Orthodoxy	Know-it-all-ism
Perspective	Shallowness	Foolishness	None
Bravery	Fright / Chicken Little-ism	Cowardice	Foolhardiness
Persistence	Laziness	Helplessness	Obsessiveness
Authenticity / Honesty	Phoniness	Deceit	Righteousness
Vitality	Restraint	Lifelessness	Hyperactivity
Intimacy	Isolation/Autism	Loneliness / Avoidance of Commitment	Emotional Promiscuity
Kindness	Indifference	Cruelty/Mean-spiritedness	Intrusiveness
Social Intelligence	Obtuseness/Cluelessness	Self-Deception	Psychobabble
Citizenship	Selfishness	Narcissism	Chauvinism
Fairness	Partisanship	Prejudice	Detachment
Leadership	Compliance	Disruptiveness / Sabotage	Despotism
Forgiveness / Mercy	Mercilessness	Vengefulness	Permissiveness
Humility / Modesty	Footless Self-Esteem	Arrogance	Self-Deprecation
Prudence	Sensation Seeking	Recklessness	Prudishness / Stuffiness
Self-regulation	Self-Indulgence	Impulsivity	Inhibition
Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence	Oblivion	Schadenfreude-ism	Snobbery
Gratitude	Rugged Individualism	Entitlement	Ingratiation
Hope	Present Orientation	Pessimism / Despair	Pollyannaism
Humor	Humorlessness	Dourness	Buffoonery
Spirituality	Anomie	Alienation	Fanaticism