# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overview of Positive Psychology</th>
<th>Towards a Christian Theology of Flourishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Problems with Positive Psychology</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Promises of Positive Psychology</td>
<td>Christian Virtues and Psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
01 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW
Positive Psychology (PP) – An Overview

- Movement led by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the late 1990’s
- In the past, psychology has often focused on what is going wrong with humans (i.e. pathology) instead of a focus on what is going right with humanity
- “Human goodness and excellence are as authentic as disease, disorder and distress” (Peterson, 2006)
Positive Psychology

PP begins by asking different questions

Instead of asking, “What is the problem with a person’s thoughts or behavior?”

PP begins by asking “What do people need to thrive?”

PP emphasizes the virtues, values, and traits that people need to thrive
PROBLEMS WITH

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
Problems with Positive Psychology

- Positive Psychology lacks common ways of characterizing optimal development

- What does optimal development look like?
  - How is optimal development measured?
Problems with Positive Psychology

- Peterson & Seligman’s (2004) list of virtues and character strengths (Values in Action - VIA) are generally devoid of much of the philosophical and theological content that helped originally define these virtues.
<table>
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<th>Hope</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seligman &amp; Peterson (2004)</td>
<td>A positive mental state where one believes that good events will outweigh the bad; Grounded in one’s own ability &amp; agency to work towards a goal</td>
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<td>Christian Theology</td>
<td>Relies on a future reality established through Jesus Christ. The reality of God’s future provides power and strength in the present to persist; Grounded in God’s action (Aquinas, Moltmann)</td>
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03 PROMISES OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
Promises of Positive Psychology

• Positive Psychology is interested in the goals, values, and reasons that motivate people to heal and find a meaningful life.
• This interest has created space for understanding the distinctive nature of Christian virtues (Titus, 2017).
Towards a Christian Theology of Flourishing

Creation

God creates a world where goodness exists

Humans are created with the cognitive, emotional, relational and spiritual capacities to experience grace and beauty
Towards a Christian Theology of Flourishing

Trinity

God, in his mercy, redeems and sustains the human creature and all of creation through the work of the Son and Spirit thereby promoting goodness and love
05 Christian Virtues and Psychology
What are key virtues from Christian Theology that overlap with Psychology?

- Justice
- Love
- Grace
- Hope
- Hospitality
Christian Virtues and Psychology

Justice
When the prophets called for justice and righteousness they were referring to an order in human society that is viable and sustainable—one in which neighbors can dwell in solidarity with one another

~ Walter Brueggemann
Christian Virtues and Psychology

- God’s justice is connected to a concrete social reality here on earth
- God’s justice is action-oriented
Christian Virtues and Psychology

• Implications for psychology:
  • Injustices occur on a systemic level, personal level, and intrapsychic level
  • Work towards eradicating injustices through our research and clinical practice
Christian Virtues and Psychology

- In theological perspective, justice and love go hand in hand.
- Because of God’s deep and steadfast love for the world God, God is against those things that destroy humanity and human dignity.
### Virtues in Positive Psychology and Christian Theology

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<td>Love represents a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward another. (3 types) Love for parents, for children for partners</td>
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<td>-- Love is action-oriented</td>
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<td>-- <em>hesed</em> (Hebrew), <em>agape</em> (Greek) both convey a steadfastness, unconditional, and self-sacrificing nature to God’s love</td>
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<td>-- God’s love moves us to act in a loving way towards neighbor and self (Matt. 22:36-40)</td>
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Christian Virtues and Psychology

- Implications for psychology:
  - Relationships that have been neglected or shaped by hatred, violence, and greed lead to the diminishment rather than the enhancement of human personhood.
Conversely, relationships that are carefully nurtured through love over time have the potential to thrive.
Christian Virtues and Psychology

Grace
Christian Virtues and Psychology

- Jesus is the one on whom God’s grace resides (Luke 2:40)

- Jesus is also the one who gives grace to others through his life, death, and resurrection (John 1:16).
Grace can be understood as unmerited divine favor. The gift of a benevolent and loving God.

-- Common Grace – God’s goodness bestowed to all people Christians and non-Christians alike (Kuyper)
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<td>Seligman &amp; Peterson (2004)</td>
<td>Gratitude - The word gratitude is derived from the Latin <em>gratia</em>, meaning “grace,” “graciousness,” or “gratefulness” (p.554)</td>
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<td>Seligman &amp; Peterson (2004)</td>
<td>Some Eastern Orthodox theologians compare grace to the rays of the sun that both warm and change anything they encounter.Grace is the transforming energy that allows other virtues to be cultivated (Callaway &amp; Whitney, 2022)</td>
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Christian virtues deepen and broaden perspectives of human flourishing that are discussed in Positive Psychology.

Christian virtues connect us with a reality that is transcendent (beyond the self) that is not always included/recognized in positive psychology.
CONCLUSIONS

- Christian distinctives of virtues can be understood more through qualitative and mixed-methods approaches
CONCLUSIONS

• For Christians working in the field of psychology, these virtues work together to provide a holistic account of flourishing that sustains our clinical work and practice
References


END PRESENTATION