NOW AND HEREAFTER
The Psychology of Hope from the Perspective of Religion

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"Why do you think we have a winner [in the Hunger Games?] …
Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear."
Hunger Games Movie

1. Introduction

Faced with the harsh reality of death, human beings have often drawn a sense of hope from a belief in life after death. Religions have earnestly supported this faith and hope. As Paul Tillich put it, "Without hope, the tension of our life toward the future would vanish, and with it, life itself."[1] In recent times, hope has also become a subject matter for psychology. Does psychology risk separating hope from religion, focussing too narrowly on the immediate future? Or could the treatment of hope offered by psychology give a sense of meaning to life similar to that provided by religion? This article examines recent developments in the psychology of hope from the perspective of religion.

The objectives of this paper are threefold. First, to expound the dimensions of hope as it is explored within the domain of psychology. This is achieved by working within the theoretical framework of positive psychology, which considers hope as a character strength that contributes to human wellbeing and happiness. As psychology relies heavily on measurements it is also necessary to consider how the construct is operationalized in instruments of measure. The second objective is to consider how hope, as measured by psychology, is seen to contribute to wellbeing. Finally, a brief evaluative reflection is offered on the psychology of hope from the perspective of religion, particularly Christianity.

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[1]Paul Tillich, "Right to Hope" – a sermon at Harvard's Memorial Church in March l965. http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=62. (05/06/12).

2. Virtues and Character Strengths in Positive Psychology

In 1998, when Martin Seligman was elected as the president of the American Psychology Association (APA) he sounded a clarion call, appealing for psychology to focus on wellbeing and happiness as it does on pathology and psychological disorder.[2] He pointed out that since the time of the two World Wars psychology has, perhaps necessitated by the social context, focussed on curing psychological disorder. It has achieved this to an appreciable extent: fourteen mental disorders are now curable or can be considerably relieved. According to Seligman, it is now time to ask what makes people flourish.[3] The stream of psychology that took to this focus is referred to as 'positive psychology'.

Positive psychology draws insights from religious traditions and philosophy. Its interests are similar to those of humanistic psychology, but it differs sharply from it in that positive psychology embraces an empirical approach. It is the focus on existential questions with an empirical grounding that makes positive psychology unique. It sees happiness and wellbeing as the outcome of three dimensions: a pleasant life – the "pursuit of positive emotions about the present, past and future;" an engaged life – consisting in "using your strengths and virtues to obtain abundant gratification in the main realms of life;" and a meaningful life – that presupposes the "use of your strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are."[4] More precisely, authentic happiness is measured in terms of life satisfaction; and wellbeing is delineated in terms of three categories: subjective,[5] psychological[6] and social.[7]

Research – and even intervention based therapy[8] – within positive psychology is guided by a catalogue of core virtues and character

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[2]Raymond D. Fowler, Martin E. P. Seligman, and Gerald P. Koocher, "The APA 1998 Annual Report," *American Psychologist* 54, 8 (1999), 537-568.

[3]Martin E. P., Seligman, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology," *American Psychologist* 55, 1 (2000), 5-14.

[4]Martin E. P. Seligman, "Positive Psychology: Fundamental Assumptions," *The Psychologist* 16, 3 (2003),127.

[5]Ed Diener, "Subjective Well-being," *Psychological Bulletin* 95, 3 (1984), 542-575.

[6]Carol Ryff, "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Wellbeing," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, 6 (1989), 1069-1081.

[7]James S. Larson, "The Measurement of Social Well-being," *Social Indicators Research* 28, 3 (1993), 285-296.

[8]Martin E. P. Seligman, Tayyab Rashid and Acacia C. Parks, "Positive Psychotherapy," *American Psychologist* 61, 8 (2006), 774-788.

strengths,[9] which are also referred to as the 'Values in Action.'[10] This 'Manual of the Sanities' lists six core virtues and 24 character strengths that are said to contribute to human flourishing (Table 1).

Table 1	
Core Virtues	**Character Strengths**
Wisdom and Knowledge	Creativity (originality, ingenuity), Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience), Open-mindedness (judgement, critical thinking), Love of Learning, Perspective (wisdom)
Courage	Bravery (valour), Persistence (perseverance, industriousness), Integrity (authenticity, honesty), Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigour, energy)
Humanity	Love, Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"), Social Intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence)
Justice	Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork), Fairness, Leadership
Temperance	Forgiveness and Mercy, Humility (modesty), Prudence, Self-regulation (self-control)
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation), Gratitude, Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future-orientation), Humour (playfulness), Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose)

Virtue is defined here as "any psychological process that enables a person to think and act so as to benefit him – or herself and society."[11] Although one of the criteria used to generate the list of virtues is that "each

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[9]Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, Washington: American Psychological Association, 2004.

[10]Christopher Peterson, "The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths" in Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Csikszentmihalyi (eds.), *A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 29-48.

[11]Michael McCullough and C.R. Snyder, "Classical Source of Human Strength: Revisiting an Old Home and Building a New One," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 19, 1 (2000), 1.

strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes,"[12] in positive psychology 'virtue' is not to be understood as carrying a prescriptive moral implication. Rather, virtues are generic categories that are expressed in character strengths. "Character strengths are the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues. Said another way, they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues."[13] Beyond this circular definition, character strengths are described as trait-like and are measurable in terms of an individual's behaviour, including thoughts, feelings and actions. The universal occurrence of these virtues and character strengths, in a variety of cultural and religious traditions, has been adequately acknowledged.[14]

3. Hope as Character Strength

One of the character strengths listed under the virtue of transcendence is hope (see Table 1). "Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, and future-orientation represent a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance towards the future."[15] In more precise terms, this stance consists in "expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about."[16] Hope is also expressed in optimism and a positive outlook about life and people. According to some psychologists hope could also be rendered in terms of 'agency thinking:' "I am not going to be stopped."[17] Hope flows from the human ability to imagine, that is, to see what is not present in the here and now. From this ability emerges an outlook that all is going to be well, even when an individual is in the midst of the harsh realities of life at the

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[12]Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 19.

[13]Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 14.

[14]Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 40-50; Katherine Dahlsgaard, Christopher Peterson, and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Shared Virtue: The Convergence of Valued Human Strengths across Culture and History," *Review of General Psychology* 9, 3 (2005), 203-213; C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, *Positive Psychology: The Scientific and Practical Explorations of Human Strength*, California: Sage Publications, 2007, 23-50. Sahaya G. Selvam and Joanna Collicutt, "The Ubiquity of the Character Strengths in African Traditional Religion: A Thematic Analysis," in Hans H. Knoop and Antonella H. Delle Fave, eds., *Wellbeing and Cultures: Perspectives from Positive* Psychology, Heidelberg: Springer, 2013, 83-102.

[15]Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 570.

[16]Peterson, "The Values in Action," 33.

[17]C. R. Snyder, Anne B. LaPointe, J. Jeffrey Crowson and Shannon Early, "Preferences of High-and Low-Hope People for Self Referential Feedback," *Cognition and Emotion* 12 (1998), 807-823.

present. This sense of hope often emanates from one's belief in the existence of a greater power, or God. Having presented a broad-brush understanding of hope, we will now explore various conceptual dimensions of hope focussing on the contributions of four psychologists who work within the framework of positive psychology.

3.1. Seligman: Hope as Optimism

A simple way of understanding hope is in terms of optimism. Positive psychology has made a significant contribution to the understanding of optimism, which is also referred to as "positivity."[18] Within psychological research, optimism has been understood in two ways: as specific optimism, perceivable in hopeful expectations in given situations, and as "dispositional optimism," a relatively enduring characteristic that changes little across time and context, whereby an individual generally expects positive outcomes to emerge most of the time.[19]

Seligman studied dispositional optimism in order to elucidate how people routinely account for events in their lives, in terms of what he called their "explanatory style." People who exhibit an optimistic explanatory style "attribute problems in their lives to temporary, specific, and external (as opposed to permanent, pervasive, and internal) causes."[20] According to Seligman, optimistic people are so highly goal-oriented that they are able to distance themselves from negative outcomes. Being goal-oriented is also often related to the grasp of the meaning of life.

Surprisingly, optimism is not a state that is very natural to human beings. Evidence from neuroscience suggests that human memory is better facilitated, marked by increased sensory processing, when encountering inputs that are perceived to be negative.[21] From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, this hardwired condition of preferential memory

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[18]Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*, New York: Crown Publishers/Random House, 2009.

[19]Michael F. Scheier and Charles S. Carver, "On the Power of Positive Thinking: The Benefits of Being Optimistic," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2, 1 (1993), 26-30.

[20]Martin E. P. Seligman, et al., "Optimism, Pessimism, and Explanatory Style," *Optimism and Pessimism: Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice*, Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001, 54.

[21]Katherine R. Mickley and Elizabeth A. Kensinger, "Emotional Valence Influences the Neural Correlates Associated with Remembering and Knowing," *Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Neuroscience* 8, 2 (2008), 143-152.

for negative events in humans may be attributed to the state that, for survival, it is more important to avoid negative situations or dangers as a priority than to be attracted toward positive situations or pleasures.[22] However, this negativity forces us to focus on survival, and prolonged negativity contributes to pathological conditions such as depression and anxiety. On the other hand, positivity makes us see possibilities, motivating us to be creative and to seek alternatives.

Hope may include, but it is more than, optimism and positivity. Optimism is the expectancy that all will be well, whereas hope includes also striving towards a goal. Of course, optimism as a positive emotion can provide the energy for this striving. The understanding of hope as striving towards a goal is brought out more lucidly by another founding contributor to positive psychology: Charles Snyder. [23]

3.2. Snyder: Hope as Pathways to Desired Goals

Snyder defines hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)."[24] From this definition, the goal can be identified as the element that links agency and pathways. Someone with high levels of hope possesses the capability to develop pathways to their desired goals, and to motivate themselves through agency-thinking to achieve those goals. Snyder's model of hope is basically cognitive in content, but also allows for the inclusion of emotions. Hope-induced motivation is a positive emotional state, as suggested by his use of the term "energy."

For Snyder, "Goals are objects, experiences, or outcomes that we imagine and desire in our minds."[25] However, if a goal is immediate and sure to be achieved then it will not involve much hope. Similarly, goals that

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[22]Martin E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, New York: Knopf, 1991, 114.

[23]C. R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You can Get There from Here*, New York: Free Press, 1994; C. R. Snyder, Kevin L. Rand, and David R. Sigmon, "Hope Theory: A Member of the Positive Psychology Family," *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 257-276; C. R. Snyder, "Target Article: Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," *Psychological Inquiry* 13, 4 (2002), 249-275.

[24]C. R. Snyder, Lori M. Irving, and John R. Anderson, "Hope and Health," *Handbook of Social and Clinical Psychology: The Health Perspective*, Elmsford: Pergamon Press, 1991, 287.

[25]Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope*, 6.

are impossible to achieve do not inspire hope either. Here, the epigraph to this article from the movie *The Hunger Games* seems relevant. Snow, the president of Panem, asks Seneca Crane, the co-ordinator of the Hunger Games, "Seneca, why do you think we have a winner?" "What do you mean?" Seneca replies, puzzled: "I mean, why do we have a winner?" Snow repeats, and answers his own question after a pause, "Hope." "Hope?" Seneca asks. "Hope," explains Snow. "It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective; a lot of hope is dangerous."

In Snyder's words, "the goals involving hope fall somewhere between an impossibility and a sure thing."[26] Snyder goes on to suggest, rather humorously, that the sign at the entrance to Dante's hell, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here" is appropriate because hell offers no possibility for attaining any further goal. On the other hand, he says, even at the entrance to heaven a similar sign might be called for, because heaven is the fulfilment of all goals. His witty reference to heaven and hell notwithstanding, Snyder's theory of goal-oriented hope presupposes none of the hopes that religions envisage. Nevertheless, there are other psychologists, even within the positive psychology movement, who relate hope to these more profound aspirations.

3.3. Damon: Hope as a Sense of Purpose in Life

William Damon, in his landmark study,[27] suggests that one-fifth of young people between the age of 12 and 26 in the USA are thriving. They are highly engaged in activities that they love, experience a lot of energy, and enjoy general wellbeing. On the other hand, the other four-fifths of the young population are wasting their energy, and without effective mentoring they may not reach their full potential. The difference between these two groups of young people is their "sense of purpose." This sense of purpose is often directed outside oneself in altruistic ways: "Only a positive, pro-social purpose can provide the lasting inspiration, motivation, and resilience that is characteristic of a truly purposeful life. […] We are programmed (hardwired) to experience a sense of 'moral elevation' when we behave benevolently and empathetically towards others."[28]

Damon himself does not freely use the word 'hope' in his book. However, in his personal blog he suggests that purpose provides hope:

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[26]Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope*, 6.

[27]William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find their Calling in Life*, New York: Free Press, 2008.

[28]Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 40.

The road to hope, for both the individual and the society, can only be approached by the path to purpose. Purpose is required to fill the spiritual vacuum that leads to drift, apathy, cynicism, and nihilism. Purpose is needed to sustain the will to strive, achieve, contribute, and continue learning. Purpose provides resilience in hard times, elevation in good times, and confident aspiration all throughout life. It is the key to psychological survival […] and a state of thriving and wellbeing.[29]

Damon further acknowledges the role of religion in the path to purpose: "Every religious tradition advances the notion that the closer we come to God's purpose for us, the more satisfied we shall become in our daily lives."[30] A number of the happy young people that he and his colleagues interviewed were strongly committed to their faith. They told researchers that they felt gratitude, and a sense of resilience in their path towards the fulfilment of their purpose of life inspired by their faith in God. Damon concludes that the sense of purpose and meaning takes on a deeper significance when life is viewed as a 'calling.' When this sense of calling is supported by faith, it takes on a higher level of motivation. One central point that has emerged from the above discussion is that hope is oriented towards an end – a goal. Robert Emmons has taken the discussion a step even further, associating hope with "ultimate concerns."[31]

3.4. Emmons: Hope as an Ultimate Concern

For Emmons, an ultimate concern is something in which maximum value is invested, that directs one's whole life. Therefore, an ultimate concern is "that above which no other concerns exist. It is literally at the end of the striving line."[32] However, the ultimate concern is often not just a singular goal, it is a collection of strivings that provide the utmost meaning to life; hence Emmons uses the plural form, 'ultimate concerns.' Emmons points out that there has not been much effort in psychology to include spiritual or religious concerns in goal-oriented categories. Based on the observations of the Christian theologian Paul Tillich, Emmons goes on to investigate the role of religion and spirituality in determining ultimate concerns. He equates spiritual strivings to ultimate concerns, pointing out

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[29]William Damon, "Age of Purpose," http://www.williamdamon.com/2009/10/the-age-of-purpose> (21 June 2012).

[30]Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 44-45.

[31]Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*, New York: Guildford Press, 1999.

[32]Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns*, 95.

that "a religious perspective can illuminate the origins of some of the most profound human strivings. Religions, as authoritative faith traditions, are systems of information that provide individuals with knowledge and resources for living a life of purpose and direction."[33]

There is a reciprocal relationship between spirituality and ultimate concerns. On the one hand, religion and spirituality offer a meaning for human strivings. On the other hand, the goal-orientation that is directed by ultimate concerns "provides a general unifying framework to capture the dynamic aspect of religion in people's lives."[34] In the context of developing instruments of measure in psychology, the approach of ultimate concerns provides certain specificity to measures of spirituality. Interestingly, Emmons contends that "ideological beliefs regarding particular religious worldviews may or may not be revealed in personal strivings. Nor, necessarily would beliefs pertaining to life after death, salvation and redemption, or other ultimate concerns automatically appear on someone's list of strivings."[35] Often they are a mixture of ideological beliefs and existentially based goals.

Considered together, the four psychological approaches to hope that have been presented above show a progressive development when considered from the perspective of religion and spiritual traditions. While optimism might seem more existential in content, ultimate concerns might more easily include ideological beliefs that are inspired by religion. At another level of clarification, some psychologists have made a distinction between "trait-hope" and "state-hope."[36] While trait-hope describes the enduring general disposition that an individual possesses in goal-oriented pathways, state-hope refers to the specific way one might exercise that disposition in a given situation. We suggest that religious sense of hope might include the level of trait-hope. However, given the empirical discourse of psychology these constructs are operationalized in measurable dimensions, thus making them more concrete.

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[33]Robert A. Emmons and Raymond F. Paloutzian, "The Psychology of Religion," *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (2003), 392.

[34]Robert A. Emmons, "Striving for the Sacred: Personal Goals, Life Meaning, and Religion," *Journal of Social Issues* 61, 4 (2005), 731.

[35]Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns*, 108-109.

[36]Pat Harney, et al., "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 4 (1991), 570-585; Raymond L. Higgins, et al., "Development and Validation of the State Hope Scale," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 2 (1996), 321-335.

4. Psychological Measures of Hope

A major concern in positive psychology is to operationalize constructs into measurable items which are eventually factorised into dimensions of the construct, based on the statistical correlation of the data collected from a particular population. Therefore, one effective way of understanding psychological concepts, such as hope, is to examine how they are operationalized in terms of items in a scale. The purpose of this review is not to examine the psychometric properties of the scales but only to focus on the various dimensions of hope as they are itemised in these instruments. We suppose this could further our understanding of the psychology of hope, enabling us to evaluate it in the light of religious traditions.

4.1. The Values in Action: Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS)

Values in Action (VIA) refers to the list of virtues and character strengths developed by Peterson and Seligman (see Table 1). The 24 character strengths are measured by means of "The Values in Action – Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS)" with 10 items for each character strength. It is a self-reported measure, normally administered online.[37] The online version generates the top five "signature strengths" for the participant. Reliability and validity values of the VIA-IS have been reported to be adequate.[38] The 10 items that measure hope and optimism in the VIA-IS are grouped as: optimism, future-orientation, and goal-orientation.

4.2. Adult Dispositional Hope Scale and Adult State Hope Scale

The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (ADHS)[39] is based on Snyder's concept of hope, described above. The instrument measures the two main dimensions of hope, namely, pathways and agency dimensions. One drawback to the ADHS is that it only measures trait-hope or dispositional hope. Therefore, Snyder and colleagues went on to develop the Adult State Hope Scale (ASHS),[40] focussing on goal-orientation at any given time.

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[37]http://www.viacharacter.org/

[38]Alex Linley, et al., "Character Strengths in the United Kingdom: The VIA Inventory of Strengths," *Personality and Individual Differences* 43, 2 (2007), 341-351; Alison M. LaFollette, "The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths: A Test Summary and Critique," *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology* 2, 1 (2010), 7-14.

[39]Pat Harney, et al., "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60, 4 (1991), 570-585.

[40]Raymond L. Higgins, et al., "Development and Validation of the State Hope Scale," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, 2 (1996), 321-335.

4.3. Adult Domain Specific Hope Scale (DSHS)

The general weakness of the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (ADHS) and Adult State Hope Scale (ASHS) is that they measure hope without paying attention to variation in degree. And the degree of hope could be very much conditioned by different life domains. For instance, a young person might exhibit a high level of hope in goals that are linked to academic development, but a low level in goals that are related to family life. To respond to this, Susie Sympson developed the Domain Specific Hope Scale (DSHS).[41] This instrument measures an individual's level of dispositional hope in six specific areas: social, academic, family, romance or relationships, work, and leisure activities.

4.4. Multidimensional Inventory for Religious/Spiritual Wellbeing

This relatively new scale measures six dimensions of religious wellbeing: general religiosity, forgiveness, hope-immanent, hope-transcendent, connectedness, and experience of sense and meaning.[42] The highlight of this measure is its distinction of two types of hope. Hope-Immanent consists in being optimistic that the future is going to be exciting. It includes a sense that life is moving in the right direction; or, if this is not the case, being certain that at least things will improve in the future. While Hope-Immanent is focused on this life, even if it is about the future, Hope-Transcendent is about the afterlife. It consists in the recognition of the transience of this life, together with the hopeful acceptance of life after death, and an experience of hope that emerges from the possibility of being remembered after death.

The above review of sampled measures of hope provides further insight into how hope is construed within psychology. Before evaluating this understanding from the point of view of religion and faith, we briefly point out the role of hope in human wellbeing as claimed by psychological studies.

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[41]Susie C. Sympson, *Validation of the Domain Specific Hope Scale: Exploring Hope in Life Domains*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1999; see also, C. R. Snyder, *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures, And Applications*, San Diego: Academic Press, 2000.

[42]Human Unterrainer, Oliver Nelson, Joanna Collicutt and Andreas Fink, "The English Version of the Multidimensional Inventory for Religious/Spiritual Well-Being (MI-RSWB-E): First Results from British College Students," *Religions*, 3.3 (2012): 588-599; A. Fink, et al., "Dimensions of Religious/Spiritual Well-Being and Their Relation to Personality and Psychological Wellbeing," *Personality and Individual Differences* 49, 3 (2010), 192-197.

5. The Role of Hope in Human Wellbeing

The core mission of positive psychology is to proactively promote research and come up with techniques that will contribute to health, wellbeing and happiness.[43] Health is considered in a comprehensive perspective, inclusive of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. And health and wellbeing are perceived as correlates of happiness.[44] How does positive psychology understand wellbeing and happiness? It has begun to explore these concepts in the parlance of Greek philosophical terminology of *hedonia* and *eudaimonia*.[45] While *hedonia* refers to those aspects of wellbeing that arise from pleasure oriented activities, *eudaimonia* refers to fulfilment of our potential as human beings. Furthermore, positive psychology literature makes some distinctions among emotional or subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and social wellbeing.[46]

Subjective wellbeing or emotional wellbeing[47] includes individual happiness, presence of positive affect, and absence of negative affect. It is an individual experience, which excludes objective conditions like health, comfort, virtue and wealth. Therefore, Ryff and colleagues have been critical of identifying psychological health with subjective wellbeing,[48] and have preferred to use the term 'human flourishing' or 'psychological wellbeing.' In this understanding, wellbeing is not synonymous with happiness, and their approach to defining wellbeing is clearly in terms of *eudaimonia*. Psychological wellbeing is measured in terms of six factors: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, feeling competent and being able to manage one's environment, autonomy, and positive relations with others. As mentioned above, there is a third account of wellbeing that

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[43]Seligman, Martin E. P., "Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission," *APA Monitor* 29, 1 (1998), 2.

[44]Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*, New York: Free Press, 2002.

[45]Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "Hedonia, Eudaimonia, and Well-being: An Introduction," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9, 1 (2008), 1-11.

[46]Corey L.M. Keyes and Shane J. Lopez, S. J., "Toward a Science of Mental Health: Positive Directions in Diagnosis and Interventions," in C. R. Snyder, & Shane J. Lopez, eds., *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 45-62.

[47]Diener, "Subjective Well-Being," 542-575.

[48]Carol D. Ryff and Corey L.M. Keyes, "The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited," *Journal of Personality and Social* Psychology 69, 4 (1995), 719-727; Carol D. Ryff, "Psychological Wellbeing in Adult Life," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 4, 4 (1995), 100.

challenges the individual emphasis implied in both the subjective and psychological approaches to wellbeing. Scholars have evolved constructs and measures to examine what they call social wellbeing.[49] Social wellbeing is considered in terms of the following dimensions: social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration.

Even if the distinction between these three types of wellbeing can be argued for conceptually, there is an underpinning overlap between the three, especially in the means of achieving states of happiness and wellbeing. Often these means are associated with goal, purpose and meaning-making. Studies that suggest a significant impact of hope, particularly goal-oriented types, on subjective wellbeing are abundant. This is true across populations drawn from different continents,[50] various age groups,[51] and among general as well as clinical populations.[52] Hope is also found to correlate positively with a number of beneficial constructs of ordinary life, including academic achievement.[53] While reporting Damon's study of the young people in the U.S. we have already suggested that a clear sense of purpose in life not only reduces the chances of young people engaging in deviant behaviour, but can also provide meaning in life, and contribute to wellbeing – better health of mind and body. On the other hand, depression and suicidal behaviour, and to a lesser degree, alcohol

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[49]Larson, "The Measurement of Social Wellbeing," 1993.

[50]Tsukasa Kato and C. R. Snyder, "The Relationship between Hope and Subjective Wellbeing: Reliability and Validity of the Dispositional Hope Scale, Japanese Version," *Japanese Journal of Psychology* 76, 3 (2005), 227-234; Tharina Guse and Yvonne Vermaak, "Hope, Psychosocial Well-Being and Socioeconomic Status among a Group of South African Adolescents," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 21, 4 (2011), 527-534.

[51]Bonnie Davis, "Mediators of the Relationship Between Hope and Wellbeing in Older Adults," *Clinical Nursing Research* 14, 3 (2005), 253-272; Anthony L. Burrow, Amanda C. O'Dell, and Patrick L. Hill, "Profiles of a Developmental Asset: Youth Purpose as a Context for Hope and Well-Being," *Journal of Youth & Adolescence* 39, 11 (2010), 1265-1273.

[52]Cheri Marmarosh, Ari Holtz, and Michele Schottenbauer, "Group Cohesiveness, Group-Derived Collective Self-Esteem, Group-Derived Hope, and the Well-Being of Group Therapy Members," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 9, 1 (2005), 32-44.

[53]C. R. Snyder et al., "Hope and Academic Success in College," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94, 4 (2002), 820-826.

abuse, are correlated to hopelessness.[54] Hopelessness is understood as the absence of purpose in life and, more precisely, the lack of self-efficacy and problem-solving abilities.[55]

What type of hope is relevant to wellbeing? Even hope understood as optimism, the first and most basic type analysed above, seems to spontaneously build a sense of connectedness with humankind, by facilitating "social interest." This in turn is said to have a positive impact on mental wellbeing.[56] Interestingly, sometimes it is goal-focused hope, rather than spiritually-based hope (having spiritual beliefs concerning the existence of some form of life after death or 'higher power'), that seems to have a greater impact on subjective wellbeing.[57]

These findings, and the conceptualising of hope within the domains of psychology, are very interesting for scholars of religion, given that hope is considered a virtue in many religious traditions. In Christianity, it is one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and charity.[58] How far does the understanding of the psychology of hope, which has emerged from our discussion above, contrast or complement the understanding of hope within religions and theologies? In the final section of this article we proceed to look at this issue.

6. Evaluating the Psychology of Hope from the Perspective of Religion

There have been several scholarly attempts to create a dialogue between positive psychology and religions: such as Buddhism,[59] African traditional

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[54]David E. Schotte and George A. Clum, "Suicide Ideation in a College Population: A Test of a Model," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 50, 5 (1982), 690-696; see also Diener, "Subjective Wellbeing," 1984.

[55]Puncky P. Heppner and Dong-gwi Lee, "Problem-solving Appraisal and Psychological Adjustment," C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, eds., *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 288-298.

[56]Patrick J. Barlow, David Tobin and Melissa Schmidt, "Social Interest and Positive Psychology: Positively Aligned," *Journal of Individual Psychology* 65, 3 (2009), 191-202.

[57]Jen Unwin and Joanne M. Dickson, "Goal Focused Hope, Spiritual Hope, and Well-Being," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (2010), 161-174.

[58]See, Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, Paul Philibert, trans., Minnesota: Order of St. Benedict, 2002, 47-50.

[59]Maurits G.T. Kwee and Marja K. Kwee-Taams, "Buddhist Psychology and Positive Psychology," Antonella Delle Fave, ed., *Dimensions of Well-being: Research and Intervention,* Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006, 565-582.

religion,[60] and religion and spirituality in general.[61] Some scholars have also critiqued positive psychology, particularly its conceptual foundations, from the perspective of religion. Taking a Confucian perspective, Louise Soundarajan has called positive psychology a "happiness donut."[62] She points out that the empirically based version of the good life proposed by positive psychology lacks a moral core. What she calls "Seligman's model" of virtue is an inventory of "signature strengths" which do not have a moral connotation, in contrast to the vision of good life that emerges from the East, especially the Confucian tradition. Positive psychology, she argues, typifies a Western worldview that contrasts with a more Eastern worldview: individualism versus collectivism; mastery over the environment (agency) versus deference and flowing with nature; outward versus inward orientations. She concludes that it is not so much that positive psychology denies the moral implications of virtues, but that it cannot afford to pay attention to them, due to its empirical approach. She suggests that a greater level of reflexivity could supplement this lacuna.

Reflecting on positive psychology from the perspective of Ignatian spirituality within Christianity, Phyllis Zagano and Kevin Gillespie trace several points of similarity. They also point out that

> while the words used may be the same, the meanings they carry for scientists interested in Positive Psychology and for those pursuing spirituality may diverge considerably, essentially because psychology is rooted in an appeal to reason, whereas authentic Christian spirituality is grounded in a recognition that all depends on God.[63]

This dependence on God is a key component of Christian thinking, arising from its faith in God as Creator. Generally, however, a Catholic approach sees faith and reason as complementary.[64] Looking at it this way, although it is true that the two meanings may not be identical, there is, nevertheless, much that the disciplines can learn from each other in their mutual quest for truth.

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[60]Selvam and Collicutt, "The Ubiquity of the Character Strengths in African Traditional Religion," 2013.

[61]Stephen Joseph, P. Alex Linley, and John Maltby, "Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9, 3 (2006), 209-212.

[62]Louise Sundararajan, "Happiness Donut: A Confucian Critique of Positive Psychology," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 25, 1 (2005), 35-60.

[63]Phyllis Zagano and Kevin Gillespie, "Ignatian Spirituality and Positive Psychology," *The Way* 45, 4 (2006), 46.

[64]See, for example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London: Chapman, 1993, 39-40, which quotes documents from both the First and the Second Vatican Councils.

One of the contributions that positive psychology can make to religious thinking is that it often includes optimism as a component of hope.[65] Many Christian theologians strongly distinguish between the two, sometimes on the basis of the priority of faith. David Burrell, for example, speaks of optimism as "unfounded hope," suggesting that it is somewhat naïve. Faced with the reality of sin, Christian hope doubts that we "could do any better," because of its "negative assessment of our condition without divine assistance."[66] This sense of "the meaninglessness of human existence apart from Christ," however, need "not involve pessimism with regard to creation," as Edward Schillebeeckx points out. There is, he says, a "fundamental optimism concerning creation" that can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, an optimism that is therefore shared with Judaism. It is based on faith in the presence of the Creator with his creatures and with his people, a presence that is never removed or rescinded. This creation-based optimism "continues to constitute part of revelation" for Christians, even though, in the New Testament, it is "hidden beneath a moral-religious view of life which is caught up with the opposition between the state of perdition and that of salvation, between death and life, sin and redemption."[67] Thus, even though it is the moral and salvific elements of Christian thought that are the most visible, this need not imply a complete break, either with Judaism or with ways of talking about human flourishing in psychology.

Schillebeeckx holds that Christian faith in creation has "a critical and productive force," which, as Philip Kennedy points out, is influenced by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school. The hope that this faith engenders is not naïve: it is critical of both "overly optimistic and overly pessimistic conceptions of human history and society." At the same time, it is orientated towards the future: the productive force of this faith "frees [people] for their own tasks in the world" and establishes a direction for their action. This way of talking about Christian faith harmonises well with Snyder's account of hope providing pathways towards desired goals and with the sense of purpose that Damon recognises. Further dialogue

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[65]This is an area of debate in psychology, as well as religion. See Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, "Hope: The Power of Wish and Possibility," *Theory & Psychology* 20 (2010), 251-276, esp. 261-262.

[66]David Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997, 25-28.

[67]Edward Schillebeeckx, *God and Man*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1969, 230-231.

could assist both disciplines in developing a more critical form of optimism as a component of their respective accounts of hope.

What Christianity can offer to positive psychology is another step in the development of hope, incorporating hope for an after-life. This is by no means a negation of Emmons' ultimate concerns, because religion need not separate this life from the next. The idea of eternal life in Christianity is often misunderstood as valuing the next life at the expense of this one, but this is far from being the way that the term is used biblically. Stephen Verney persuasively argues that, in John's gospel, the term indicates a new kind of life that is available now, which transforms every aspect of life as it is lived. As well as this, it offers a new horizon on what can be anticipated at the end of life.[68]

Such an understanding of eternal life can help craft an account of the relation between immanent and transcendent forms of hope, which Unterrainer and others are seeking to develop. In Christianity, this relation can be expressed as hoping for the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom will come in its fullness only at the end of time, giving what Christians call an eschatological character to their hope: "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). This plays an important part in the critique that Christianity offers to any account of the future that is merely this-worldly: there is a proviso that holds here, since the future that Christians hope for is both 'now' and 'not yet;' it is both ours and God's. This proviso, however, need not be expressed merely as an eschatological proviso, as if the limit to human folly only held at the end of time. If that were the case, Christians would hope that God will establish his kingdom on the ruins of this world, in spite of everything that humanity has done in its search for wellbeing and the fulfilment of our potential. But this is a misunderstanding of the world, of our role in it, and of God. The proviso of the Creator God assures us that, in the midst of our human planning in this world, which is always threatened by failure and fiasco, God is with us. The presence of God is a stimulus to hope, even in the midst of difficulty and disappointment.[69] It encourages us to search for "life […] to the full" (John 10:10), to work for a better future for our world, to hope for the coming of God's kingdom. It also offers us a share in God's life – a life that we participate in already by virtue of our existence, and a life that grows in us as we flourish. Ultimately, though, it is a life that will come to

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[68]Stephen Verney, *Into the New Age*, London: Fount, 1989.

[69]Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, London: SCM Press, 1983, 97-99.

its fullest expression in the life of heaven, when "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is" (1 Jn 3:2).

7. Conclusion

The psychological treatment of 'virtues' that have hitherto been subjects of theology and philosophy might seem rather odd in the ears of the experts of these latter intellectual endeavours. However, it is our view that to consider these human realities as the sole property of some intellectual endeavours and not others would be to impoverish their understanding. In this sense, the psychological treatment of hope remains a necessary approach, even if it is not a sufficient one. On the other hand, to avoid the risk of reductionism, psychology needs to develop a deeper conceptual framework of these virtues with the help of other disciplines, even before they are operationalized as measurements. As we have pointed out, positive psychology has already done some valuable work in grounding the concept of character strengths in philosophical, cultural and religious traditions. Further still, it has much to gain, and much to offer, if an effective interdisciplinary dialogue can be established between these distinctive traditions of enquiry to deepen our understanding of the complexities of the human psyche which includes the soul. The present article has been a modest attempt in contributing to this interdisciplinary endeavour.