

# Positive Psychology, Psychotherapy & Cognitive Behavioral Sciences

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### The scientificity of positive psychology: Rising star or empty suit?

Positive Psychology, a prodigiously influential global movement in psychology, is defined as the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. It is grounded on the notion that “people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within them and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. Positive Psychology, turning away from psychopathology and promising to enhance the happiness and wellbeing of non-pathological persons, is said to be a practical application of the “scientific method” to real-life scenarios of everyday people to enhance or give free reign to their “signature strengths.” Adherents, assessed through numerous quizzes designed to assess their measure of happiness, are “taught” techniques for enhancing their wellbeing, and the best tutors are, of course, Positive Psychologists. There is avowedly nothing prescriptive or evaluative in such quizzes and tutorials; they, it is said, aim to be at the level of dispassionate, above-board scientific inquiry. Because it concerns humans’ feelings, traits, and strengths or virtues, Positive Psychology has limitless applications in everyday life. As such, it promises, and the mountains of interdisciplinary literature on it have already shown this, collaborative research with numerous sciences or disciplines, even psychotherapy. Such collaboration is evidence of its abundant fruitfulness and scope—two seemingly feathers in its cap. Yet those very successes *viz.* that it seems to do everything and does everything well should give us pause. Science seldom ever works out so neatly, so cleanly. In short, this “signature strength”—that it promises to help just about everyone in all aspects of life—could be its greatest flaw. To personify the discipline “Is Positive Psychology a rising star—in the words of Martin Seligman, “the road out” of “the parking lot of life”—or an empty suit—in the words of Richard Lazarus, “just another one of the many fads that come and go in our field”? This essay offers an answer to that question.

### Biography

Mark Andrew Holowchak is a professional Philosopher and Historian of Science. He specializes in psychotherapy, ethics, and the writings of Thomas Jefferson. He has published over 40 books and over 100 peer-reviewed articles on topics such as psychotherapy, ancient philosophy and ethics, philosophy of sport, and critical thinking. He is an Avid Writer and is also the Founder of Phi-Psy Therapy (PPT)—a cognitive-based and principally self-help approach to psychological therapy, chiefly based on ancient Greek and Roman Stoicism, which also draws from other ancient sources (e.g., the writings of Aristotle) as well as contemporary psychological approaches to therapy—especially those with a cognitive base. His current research includes Positive Psychology.

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