

Chapter 1

Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution



Edward B. Davis, Everett L. Worthington Jr., Sarah A. Schnitker,
Kevin J. Glowiak, Austin W. Lemke, and Chase Hamilton

It was a fall day in 1930, and the famous American philosopher and historian William Durant was raking leaves in his yard. A despondent stranger walked up and shocked Durant by confessing he was planning to commit suicide unless Durant could give him “one good reason” to live. Flustered, Durant gave a feeble reply: “I bade him get a job—but he had one; to eat a good meal—but he was not hungry; he left visibly unmoved by my arguments” (Smith, 2017, p. 19). Durant was so haunted by the man’s question that he wrote over 100 of the brightest minds of his time, asking each luminary to answer the question “What is the meaning or worth of human life?” (Durant, 1933, p. 3). He compiled their answers in *On the Meaning of Life* (Durant, 1933), published in the wake of World War I and heart of the Great Depression (Smith, 2017).

Questions about life’s meaning have vexed humans across history. For millennia, philosophers and religious scholars led discourse on the topic, but since psychology’s inception in the late nineteenth century, psychology has contributed to this discourse as well. Psychology’s contribution budded with the work of William James, a founding figure both in mainstream psychology and the *psychology of religion and spirituality* (R/S; i.e., “the empirical or academic study of spiritual experience or organized religion from a psychological perspective,” VandenBos, 2015, p. 860). James (1890/2011) presciently warned psychology from becoming “a psychology without a soul” (p. 7), experiencing a kind of etymological amnesia

E. B. Davis (✉) · K. J. Glowiak · A. W. Lemke · C. Hamilton
School of Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy, Wheaton College,
Wheaton, IL, USA
e-mail: ward.davis@wheaton.edu; austin.lemke@my.wheaton.edu

E. L. Worthington Jr.
Psychology Department, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA
e-mail: eworth@vcu.edu

S. A. Schnitker
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA
e-mail: Sarah_Schnitker@baylor.edu

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E. B. Davis et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10274-5_1

by forgetting its Greek root words *psyche* and *logos* literally mean “the study of the soul” (Pillsbury & Pennington, 1942, p. 2). Unfortunately, James’s advice went unheeded. Psychology largely ignored the scientific study of R/S until the 1960s, when interest was reinvigorated (Hood, 2012).

Yet another of psychology’s roots remained largely neglected until the end of the twentieth century. In his 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (APA), Martin E. P. Seligman (1999) averred: “It’s my belief that since the end of World War II, psychology has moved too far away from its original roots, which were to make the lives of all people more fulfilling and productive, and too much toward the important, but not all-important, area of curing mental illness” (p. 559). In response, he issued a clarion call for a “positive psychology” (Seligman, 1999, p. 561) that would redress this imbalance and help psychology reclaim its mission by reorienting psychological science and practice toward understanding and promoting human strength and flourishing (Seligman, 1999). Several of Seligman’s predecessors (such as William James, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers) had already called for psychology to focus more on positive mental health, optimal functioning, personal growth, and human potential, but it usually is Seligman who is credited with catalyzing the positive psychology field in 1998 (Hart, 2021).

Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

Positive psychology is the “field of psychological theory and research that focuses on the psychological states (e.g., contentment, joy), individual traits or character strengths (e.g., intimacy, integrity, altruism, wisdom), and social institutions that enhance subjective well-being and make life most worth living” (VandenBos, 2015, p. 810). In developing the Values in Action taxonomy that became the theoretical foundation of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004) consulted scholars and exhaustively searched the scholarly and historical literatures. They drew heavily from the writings of religious scholars and moral philosophers across time, cultures, and faith traditions. Indeed, R/S was one of the 24 character strengths that emerged in their taxonomy.

However, mainstream psychology has historically adopted a “noninteractive stance” (Jones, 1994, p. 184) toward R/S, perhaps because psychologists (a) generally are much less religious or spiritual than the overall population (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013), (b) often do not have much formal training or competence in R/S (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022), and (c) frequently hold skeptical (or even biased) attitudes toward R/S (Gergen, 2009; Jones, 1994). But how much has positive psychology adopted this noninteractive stance toward R/S, given that R/S is one of the core character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and is robustly linked to health and well-being (Koenig et al., 2012)? In many ways, this question is what sparked the current handbook.

With this *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, we particularly sought to accomplish three goals: (a) examine the existing degree of overlap between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields, (b) summarize and synthesize the relevant theoretical and empirical literature at these intersections, and (c) catalyze the integration of these fields and thereby potentiate their coevolution toward greater scientific and societal impact. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to set the stage for your evaluation of whether this book achieves these lofty goals. First, we describe the cumulative growth of the two fields, including how much overlap exists and where their research is published. Second, we outline reasons why the increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S would be reciprocally beneficial. Third, we discuss potential barriers to this integration and suggest ways to transcend them. Lastly, we preview the handbook and recommend ways to glean the most as you read it.

Existing Trends and Overlap

To examine existing trends and overlap, we conducted two systematic literature searches in the APA's PsycINFO database. Both searches were conducted on December 31, 2020, and only used the standardized index terms available in the *APA Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms* (APA, 2020). The following four index terms were the only ones available to use for positive psychology: "positive psychology," "virtue," "happiness," and "well-being"; the only three available for the psychology of R/S were "religion," "spirituality," and "faith." We constrained our search to index terms, because using a controlled (standardized) vocabulary is generally recommended, due to countless ways researchers can describe related concepts (Soto, 2017). Additionally, for these searches, we used the search field "DE" (Descriptors), because doing so ensured the retrieval of entries that were focused on a specific concept (rather than entries that merely contained a keyword anywhere in the entry, regardless of that entry's focus).

In Table 1.1, we present the results of the first search, which identified the cumulative number of academic articles and book entries that focused on positive psychology topics, psychology of R/S topics, and both types of topics. Entries are presented by year, starting with 1998, when Seligman gave his APA Presidential Address on positive psychology. From 1998 to 2020, 48,623 articles and book entries focused on at least one of the indexed positive psychology topics; 26,192 on R/S topics; and 1,783 (2.4% of the collective 73,032 entries) on both.

Table 1.2 displays results of the second search, which examined a selection of premier psychology journals to see how much they each published articles on positive psychology topics, R/S topics, or both, between 1998 and 2020. Among the selected 23 journals (most of which were among the top-ranked psychology journals in the 2019 *Journal Citation Reports* [Clarivate Analytics, 2020]), the proportion of articles focusing on positive psychology varied widely—from 0.5% to 7.2%. By comparison, the proportion of articles on R/S was consistently low (0.0–2.0%),

Table 1.1 Cumulative Number of Academic Articles and Book Entries on Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality

Year	Positive psychology (<i>n</i> = 48,623)				Psychology of R/S (<i>n</i> = 26,192)				Total	Both (%)
	Positive psychology ^a	Virtues ^b	Happiness ^c	Well-being ^d	Religion ^e	Spirituality ^f	Faith ^g			
1998	0	2	64	399	180	176	11	792	10 (1.3)	
1999	0	4	137	831	346	380	26	1,616	27 (1.7)	
2000	10	10	259	1,413	572	664	46	2,756	56 (2.0)	
2001	29	14	379	2,038	823	968	63	3,979	79 (2.0)	
2002	101	24	523	2,893	1,141	1,339	93	5,529	134 (2.4)	
2003	183	36	668	3,780	1,551	1,777	125	7,318	178 (2.4)	
2004	341	42	821	4,780	2,010	2,277	175	9,436	226 (2.4)	
2005	413	58	1,018	5,817	2,584	2,927	225	11,734	281 (2.4)	
2006	534	66	1,241	7,235	3,379	3,728	293	14,783	359 (2.4)	
2007	675	91	1,527	8,685	4,140	4,510	369	17,953	439 (2.4)	
2008	835	114	1,856	10,268	4,889	5,280	432	21,214	518 (2.4)	
2009	1,066	136	2,215	11,908	5,710	6,074	501	24,692	609 (2.5)	
2010	1,271	198	2,600	13,707	6,493	6,822	586	28,337	689 (2.4)	
2011	1,539	274	3,031	15,668	7,328	7,668	729	32,321	815 (2.5)	
2012	1,787	385	3,458	17,876	8,238	8,641	935	36,760	945 (2.6)	
2013	2,167	529	4,071	20,681	9,165	9,617	1,139	42,018	1,066 (2.5)	
2014	2,601	700	4,623	23,494	10,200	10,529	1,352	47,359	1,205 (2.5)	
2015	2,956	877	5,121	26,236	11,069	11,347	1,597	52,367	1,325 (2.5)	
2016	3,318	952	5,637	29,148	11,783	12,053	1,687	57,133	1,403 (2.5)	
2017	3,634	1,050	6,048	31,921	12,510	12,786	1,734	61,702	1,529 (2.5)	
2018	3,963	1,160	6,461	34,658	13,232	13,469	1,816	66,190	1,630 (2.5)	
2019	4,197	1,247	6,929	37,474	13,789	14,115	1,910	70,542	1,722 (2.4)	
2020 ^h	4,297	1,295	7,144	39,157	14,111	14,477	1,962	73,032	1,783 (2.4)	

Note. R/S = religion/spirituality. Entries were identified in PsycINFO, using the following search terms: ^aDE "Positive Psychology," ^bDE "Virtue," ^cDE "Happiness," ^dDE "Well-Being," ^eDE "Religion," ^fDE "Spirituality," ^gDE "Faith." For all searches, the only limiters were "excludes dissertations" and that the Source Types were either "academic journals" or "books."

^hUp through December 31, 2020

Table 1.2 Positive Psychology (PP) and Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (PoRS) Articles in Select Psychology Journals, 1998–2020

Journal	2-year IF	Total articles	PP articles	PoRS articles	PP + PoRS articles
Psychological Bulletin	20.838	1,122	38 (3.4)	5 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Annual Review of Psychology	18.111	573	15 (2.6)	8 (1.4)	2 (0.3)
Personality and Social Psychology Review	12.321	453	19 (4.2)	9 (2.0)	2 (0.4)
Clinical Psychology Review	10.255	1,480	26 (1.8)	4 (0.3)	0 (0.0)
Perspectives on Psychological Science	8.275	1,008	46 (4.6)	6 (0.6)	0 (0.0)
American Psychologist	6.536	4,094	141 (3.4)	30 (0.7)	1 (0.0)
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	6.315	3,423	218 (6.4)	37 (1.1)	2 (0.1)
Journal of Applied Psychology	5.818	2,471	80 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Psychological Science	5.367	4,153	151 (3.6)	20 (0.5)	0 (0.0)
Current Directions in Psychological Science	5.110	1,548	46 (3.0)	9 (0.6)	1 (0.1)
Child Development	4.891	3,290	66 (2.0)	14 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	4.632	2,481	28 (1.1)	8 (0.3)	1 (0.0)
Journal of Counseling Psychology	3.697	1,290	80 (6.2)	17 (1.3)	4 (0.3)
Journal of Personality	3.667	1,311	95 (7.2)	25 (1.9)	2 (0.2)
Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology	3.656	1,693	9 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Journal of Experimental Psychology: General	3.169	1,718	38 (2.2)	8 (0.5)	0 (0.0)
Health Psychology	3.052	2,502	80 (3.2)	16 (0.6)	2 (0.1)
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	2.961	2,898	158 (5.5)	28 (1.0)	3 (0.1)
PLoS ONE	2.740	13,035	292 (2.2)	40 (0.3)	5 (0.0)
Attachment & Human Development	2.656	741	12 (1.6)	3 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Psychological Trauma	2.595	1,233	31 (2.5)	25 (2.0)	2 (0.2)
Counseling Psychologist	2.263	1,078	52 (4.8)	19 (1.8)	2 (0.2)
Journal of Clinical Psychology	2.138	2,805	59 (2.1)	56 (2.0)	2 (0.1)
Total (% of total)		56,400	1,780 (3.2)	387 (0.7)	31 (0.1)
Journal of Positive Psychology (2006–2020)	3.819	889	–	35 (3.9)	35 (3.9)
Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (2009–2020)	2.367	522	69 (13.2)	–	69 (13.2)

Note. IF = impact factor from the 2019 *Journal Citation Reports* (Clarivate Analytics, 2020)

and the proportion on both R/S and positive psychology was extremely low (0.0–0.4%). Of the 56,400 articles published collectively across these journals, only 387 (0.7%) were on R/S and 31 (0.1%) were on both R/S and positive psychology. Even in the top niche journals in these fields, the proportion of articles on both topics was low, ranging from 3.9% (35/889) in *Journal of Positive Psychology* to 13.2% (69/522) in *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.

Integrating the Fields of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of R/S

There is growing scientific evidence that, across a wide variety of complex systems, integration (“the linkage of differentiated elements,” Siegel, 2020, p. 461) is a central marker and mechanism of flourishing (Siegel, 2020). Indeed, we approach the current handbook with the belief that increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S will lead each field not only toward greater flourishing but also to greater flourishing in mainstream psychology and society. Yet first we explore reasons why such integration is even possible.

Why Can We Integrate These Fields?

They Often Have Similar Aims The overall aims of mainstream psychology are to (a) enhance scientific understanding of the human mind and behavior and (b) use this understanding to benefit society and improve people’s lives (APA, 2011; Bermant et al., 2011). Similarly, the central aims of positive psychology are to advance scientific understanding of human strengths and flourishing and then use that understanding to benefit people, institutions, and societies (Hart, 2021; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Likewise, the main aims of the psychology of R/S are (a) to enhance scientific understanding of *spirituality* (“search for or relationship with the sacred,” Harris et al., 2018, p. 1) and *religion* (“search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions designed to facilitate spirituality,” Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15) and (b) use that understanding to benefit society and improve people’s lives (Pargament, 2013). In sum, because positive psychology and the psychology of R/S have resonant aims (with each other and with the aims of mainstream psychology), they can be integrated readily. Both fields are working toward the same goals—advancing understanding and improving lives.

They Have Similar Foundations Next, both positive psychology and the psychology of R/S are dedicated to the empirical study of the human mind and behavior; thus, they share a fundamental methodology (empirical science) and topical focus (human mind and behavior). They also have similar historical and philosophical

origins, dating back to the classical and medieval periods (e.g., the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and early and medieval Christian authors; see Chap. 2, this volume). Moreover, each has historically explored the foundations of morality, ethics, and virtues (see Chaps. 3 and 4, this volume). Further, there historically has been considerable overlap in these fields' epistemological assumptions (Nelson & Slife, 2012; Snyder et al., 2021).

They Have Similar Emphases In the modern era, both fields have resonant emphases as well. For instance, positive psychology focuses on the study and promotion of subjective experiences and individual traits that enhance well-being, as well as on the social institutions that facilitate these experiences and traits (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Similarly, the psychology of R/S studies people's search for the sacred and the social contexts and institutions that facilitate this search (Pargament et al., 2013). Both fields also emphasize practical applications (in clinical, workplace, and other contexts; Donaldson et al., 2020; Pargament, 2013) and issues relevant to people across cultures and time (health, well-being, meaning, virtues, positive emotions, and relationships; Seligman, 2011; Vaillant, 2008).

Why Should We Integrate These Fields?

Taken together, clearly we *can* integrate these fields, but *should* we? In the inaugural article of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Linley and colleagues (2006) asserted that positive psychology "can prosper through integration [with other fields and with mainstream psychology], rather than wither through isolation" (p. 5), and they outlined strategies for accomplishing that goal. Likewise, many scholars (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Jones, 1994; Pargament et al., 2013) have argued that the psychology of R/S will prosper to the degree it becomes more integrated with other disciplines, with other psychology subfields, and with mainstream psychology.

Greater Integration Will Benefit Both Fields By "integration" we do not mean the two subfields will become indistinguishable. Rather, we are suggesting that these differentiable fields can achieve more interconnection and become increasingly intersecting circles on a Venn diagram in which their overlap represents a truly shared space of dialogue, synergy, and collaboration. As shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, this shared intersection is currently quite minimal.

If positive psychology and the psychology of R/S achieve greater integration, it will be mutually beneficial. Because positive psychology already has a substantial platform in the scientific literature (Rusk & Waters, 2013) and public sphere (Donaldson et al., 2020), its integration with the psychology of R/S could permit the latter to have greater visibility and impact. Similarly, because positive psychology is grounded firmly in the highest standards of scientific measurement and methodology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), its

integration with the psychology of R/S could enhance the scientific rigor of the latter's studies, measures, and methodologies (see Chaps. 7 and 8, this volume).

Positive psychology will also benefit from increased integration with the psychology of R/S. For billions of people across the globe, R/S is a major source of meaning (Park, 2010), identity (Hays, 2016), growth (Tedeschi et al., 2018), and resilience (Pargament & Cummings, 2010). Nonetheless, R/S has received relatively little attention within positive psychology (Rusk & Waters, 2013; Snyder et al., 2021). Increased integration of these fields would enable positive psychology to enhance its scientific understanding of how people from diverse cultures and traditions draw on R/S to nurture positive emotional and relational experiences, create and sustain a sense of meaning, cultivate and enhance their well-being, and cope with and grow from adversity (Pargament, 2013; Vaillant, 2008). It also would enable positive psychology to draw on well-validated measures of R/S and the expertise of religious/spiritual scholars and practitioners (Pargament, 2013).

Greater Integration Will Benefit Mainstream Psychology Additionally, the broader field of psychology would benefit. Indeed, the APA's vision statement (i.e., the change APA aspires to bring in the world) is "a strong, *diverse*, and *unified* psychology that enhances knowledge and improves the human condition" (APA, 2011, p. 4, emphasis added). Within mainstream psychology, R/S is recognized as an important facet of human diversity (Hays, 2016; Vieten & Lukoff, 2022), yet as shown in Table 1.2, premier psychology journals still do not publish many articles on R/S. This dearth represents an enormous opportunity for positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Because the link between R/S and well-being is so well-established (Koenig et al., 2012; Lefevor et al., 2021), research and practice at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology can help psychology fulfill its mission of improving people's lives. For example, greater integration of these fields can help psychology grow in scientific understanding of how R/S can enhance the flourishing of people, institutions, and societies. It also can help develop and refine spiritually integrated interventions that are evidence-based and designed both to alleviate problems and actualize potentials (Pargament, 2013; see Chap. 26, this volume).

Greater Integration Will Benefit Society Ultimately, the increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S will benefit society. Research suggests that the largest influence on someone's well-being is the country in which they live (Geerling & Diener, 2020). Nations can draw on scientific R/S research to enhance the well-being of their citizens individually and the flourishing of their society collectively (Diener & Seligman, 2004, 2018). People who are higher in well-being tend to live healthier and longer lives, have more positive and rewarding relationships, be more economically prosperous and productive, feel greater meaning and purpose in life, and exhibit better citizenship and civic engagement. Additionally, countries with higher collective well-being tend to experience greater collective economic, environmental, social, and societal flourishing (Diener & Seligman, 2018; Diener & Tay, 2015). When it comes to R/S, empirical evidence suggests that R/S may exhibit its strongest effects on people's well-being via its

influence on their social support (Geerling & Diener, 2020), meaning/purpose in life (Jebb et al., 2020), and positive emotions (Van Cappellen et al., 2016). These effects are especially pronounced for people in societies characterized by difficult life circumstances (e.g., low safety, income, life expectancy, and basic need fulfillment; Diener et al., 2011). Increased research at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S could have a particularly strong and positive impact on those societies and their communities and citizens.

Early in the positive psychology movement, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) envisioned that “a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities” (p. 13). Advancing scientific understanding and practical interventions at the intersections of positive psychology and R/S will help make this dream a reality. In so doing, the coevolution of these fields can promote their respective and collective actualization.

Barriers to Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

Personal and Professional Unfamiliarity with Religion and Spirituality

In general, psychologists are not very religious or spiritual (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013). For example, in the U.S., roughly 90% of people believe in God and 75% say R/S is a *very* or *fairly important* part of their lives (Gallup, n.d.; Pew Research Center, 2017). However, only 30% of U.S. psychologists believe in God, and just 50% indicate R/S is *very* or *fairly important* (Delaney et al., 2013; Shafranske & Cummings, 2013). Although over 80% of U.S. psychologists believe R/S is beneficial to mental health (Delaney et al., 2013), only 20–30% receive explicit professional training in R/S competencies (Hathaway, 2013; Vieten & Lukoff, 2022). This lack of personal and professional familiarity with R/S is presumably one barrier that has limited the integration of the psychology of R/S field with both positive and mainstream psychology (Jones, 1994).

Skepticism Toward and Potential Bias Against Religion and Spirituality

Furthermore, psychology has historically exhibited considerable skepticism toward R/S, perhaps due to the dominant influences of positivism, naturalism, and materialism (Jones, 1994; Shafranske & Cummings, 2013; Slife & Reber, 2009). This skepticism creates a barrier between R/S and both mainstream psychology and positive psychology. In fact, some scholars have even averred that mainstream psychology is fundamentally biased against R/S (Gergen, 2009; Slife & Reber, 2009). This skepticism and possible bias may be one explanation for why there currently is so little

incorporation of R/S into positive psychology research (see Table 1.1; Rusk & Waters, 2013) and so little R/S research published in premier psychology journals (see Table 1.2).

Skepticism Toward and Potential Bias Against Positivity

Correspondingly, one possible barrier to the integration of positive psychology with mainstream psychology and psychology of R/S research might be humans' evolutionarily adapted *negativity bias* ("propensity to attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information," Vaish et al., 2008, p. 383). This bias helps explain why people across the world are often more psychophysiologicaly reactive to negative than positive news content (Soroka et al., 2019). This negativity bias likely contributes to mainstream psychology's tendency to focus on negatively valenced phenomena such as distress, disease, and dysfunction (Seligman, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Another consequence of this tendency may be a bias *against* positivity, especially when it comes to publishing manuscripts or funding projects that focus on positive topics (e.g., strengths, virtues, resilience, and well-being) or processes (e.g., growth, optimal functioning, flourishing, and actualization). Psychology's potential bias against positivity may be so strong that it fuels skepticism toward various forms of positivity that are encountered in scientific research, clinical practice, and everyday life (e.g., posttraumatic growth; Tedeschi et al., 2018). This skepticism and bias may impede the integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S.

Recommendations for Transcending These and Related Barriers

Despite these barriers, integration between positive psychology and psychology of R/S is possible. Several scholars have proposed theoretical accounts for how mainstream psychologists can better engage the study of R/S (Cresswell, 2014; Gergen, 2009; Jones, 1994; Paloutzian & Park, 2021; Slife & Reber, 2009) and positive psychology (Hill & Hall, 2018; Snyder et al., 2021). These accounts often begin with identifying value conflicts (Yarhouse & Johnson, 2013), self-assessing biases embedded in one's own worldview assumptions (e.g., about ontology, anthropology, universalism, and morality; Hill & Hall, 2018) and philosophical assumptions (e.g., about epistemology and about whether theism and scientific naturalism are compatible; Nelson & Slife, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009, 2021), and then working to transcend these biases.

Although people may adopt a variety of approaches to interacting across disciplines and subdisciplines (e.g., Jones [1994] describes critical-evaluative, constructive, and dialogical approaches to interactions between R/S and psychology), there is recent convergence on approaches that emphasize social constructionism, cultural diversity, and lived experiences. For example, Cresswell (2014) argues

psychologists should adopt a pragmatic cultural-psychology approach that focuses on “inductive understandings of realities shaped in everyday practices within communities as opposed to naturalist laws” (p. 137), partly to avoid the “nothing but—” reductionism William James sought to redress. Hence, in this handbook, we devote considerable attention to theory, methodological assumptions, cultural diversity, and practical applications.

Outline of the Handbook

The handbook is divided into eight parts: historical and theoretical considerations (6 chapters), methodological considerations (2 chapters), cultural considerations (8 chapters), developmental considerations (2 chapters), happiness and well-being (4 chapters), character strengths and virtues (3 chapters), clinical and applied considerations (5 chapters), and field unification and advancement (1 chapter).

Part I: Historical and Theoretical Considerations

The six chapters comprising the first part of the book will lay the foundation for understanding the ways the psychology of R/S and positive psychology overlap. The present chapter offers an orientation to the topic and the book, and then Nelson and Canty (Chap. 2) offer an overview of each field’s history, including how those histories interact. In Chap. 3, Porter and colleagues explore philosophical questions regarding whether these fields can and should be integrated, as well as philosophical reasons why methodological pluralism is a promising paradigm for integration. Next, Ratchford et al. (Chap. 4) examine the intersections of virtue theory and research in these fields, and MacDonald (Chap. 5) reviews each field’s dominant theories of health and well-being. Park and Van Tongeren (Chap. 6) propose that meaning is a framework for integrating science and practice in these two fields, and they offer suggestions for guiding this process. Throughout Part I, authors explore motives, models, and methods for bringing together these currently rather disconnected fields. They approach integration historically, philosophically, and theoretically, and they argue that virtues, health/well-being, and meaning are focal areas by which these subfields can become unified more fully and synergistically.

Part II: Methodological Considerations

Two chapters comprise this section, and each chapter reveals the shared commitment that the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields have to empirical methods. In Chap. 7, Hill et al. review existing measurements in these fields and

offer recommendations for using those tools and techniques in research and practice. Tsang and colleagues (Chap. 8) summarize existing methodologies utilized in each field, and like Porter et al. in Chap. 3, they suggest that methodological diversity is a promising strategy for achieving greater integration and impact. Overall, in Part II, the authors help lay the methodological groundwork for the rest of the handbook.

Part III: Cultural Considerations

Similarly, the next section helps lay the cultural groundwork for the book. Mattis (Chap. 9) discusses how various cultural groups have grappled with matters of virtue, justice, and well-being, including how religious/spiritual institutions and individuals have successfully (and unsuccessfully) promoted virtue, justice, and well-being worldwide. This leads to chapters exploring the intersections of positive psychology with each of the world's major religions: Christianity (Hodge et al., Chap. 10), Judaism (Schiffman et al., Chap. 11), Islam (Saritoprak & Abu-Raiya, Chap. 12), Hinduism (Singh et al., Chap. 13), and Buddhism (Segall & Kristeller, Chap. 14). The section's last two chapters examine the geographically different cultural contexts of science and practice at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Rossy and colleagues (Chap. 15) focus on the regions of Europe, non-U.S. North America, and South and Central America. Cowden and colleagues (Chap. 16) look at the regions of Africa, Asia, and Australia–Oceania. Taken together, in Part III, authors unpack the cultural nuances and complexities embedded in science and practice at these intersections.

Part IV: Developmental Considerations

But these nuances and complexities are not limited to matters of culture, faith tradition, or geography, as Part IV illustrates through its focus on human development. Like in Chap. 6, King and colleagues (Chap. 17) adopt a meaning-making framework to discuss how R/S can help promote the thriving of children and adolescents. In Chap. 18, Davis and colleagues propose Positive Religious/Spiritual Development theory, an integrative theory that explains how R/S develops and interacts with well-being across the lifespan. In these chapters, we see how science and practice at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology must adopt a developmentally sensitive framework, even as they must adopt the culturally responsive frameworks highlighted in Part III.

Part V: Happiness and Well-Being

Parts V and VI shift the discussion of positive psychology and R/S toward particular topics of study. Part V looks at the topics of happiness and well-being. Mancuso and Lorona (Chap. 19) review existing theory and research on the relationship between life satisfaction and R/S, including the nuances that affect the directionality and dynamics of this relationship. Likewise, Van Cappellen and colleagues (Chap. 20) synthesize existing theory and research on the link between positive emotions and R/S, with a focus on the self-transcendent emotions of awe, gratitude, compassion, and love. The other chapters in this section consider the intersections between R/S and both physical health (Masters et al., Chap. 21) and mental health (Shafranske, Chap. 22), including the directionality and influencers of these relationships.

Part VI: Character Strengths and Virtues

In Part VI, the topical discussion pivots to specific character strengths and virtues. This section begins with chapters exploring theory and research at the intersections of R/S with two sets of related virtues: (a) forgiveness and hope (Washington-Nortey et al., Chap. 23) and (b) humility and gratitude (Cauble et al., Chap. 24). Then, in Chap. 25, Long and VanderWeele examine another set of related virtues—the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love—but they do so from a public health perspective. In so doing, they help transition to the next section, which is practical and applied in focus.

Part VII: Clinical and Applied Considerations

Part VII looks at applications in particular domains. Captari and colleagues (Chap. 26) focus on clinical and applied interventions at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology. The next four chapters look at these intersections in other applied contexts: work (Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27), couple and family relationships (Mahoney et al., Chap. 28), faith communities (Wang et al., Chap. 29), and disasters and humanitarian aid (Captari et al., Chap. 30).

Part VIII: Field Unification and Advancement

In Chap. 31, we summarize key themes that emerged across the book. We propose unifying positive psychology and psychology of R/S into an integrated field—the positive psychology of R/S—and make recommendations for science, practice, and funding in this field.

Conclusion and Suggestions

We hope this review of the topic and the handbook has whetted your appetite for the chapters that follow. We encourage you to approach this book as an intellectual meal to savor slowly and mindfully. Yet we recognize you might not be satisfied fully with the buffet, because as always, there are many unanswered questions. As this chapter’s analysis of publishing trends reveals, there currently is not much overlap between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields, but there is exciting potential for them to become more unified in science and practice. We encourage you to approach this handbook with that vista of possibility in mind. Search for reasons that might be beneficial for positive psychology to integrate R/S more into its theorizing, empirical research, and practical applications. Similarly, look for ways religious/spiritual individuals and institutions might benefit from positive psychology’s theories, research, and applied tools. Ultimately, we hope this chapter’s suggestions will inform what you “eat” and digest from this book, so that it can help guide you to new horizons of discovery in your research, practice, and life.

Acknowledgement This publication was made possible through the support of Grant 61865 from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

Conflict of Interest We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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