Chapter 31
Future Directions for the Positive Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

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You have nearly reached the end of this *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*. In this final chapter, we highlight key themes that emerged across the *Handbook* and identify several deficiencies in theory and research that were also uncovered along the way. We then propose the unification of positive psychology and the psychology of religion/spirituality (R/S) into an integrated field—the positive psychology of R/S—to address these deficiencies. Finally, we make recommendations about strategic priorities to guide science and practice in this unified field.

Key Themes Across the Handbook

Positive Psychology and the Psychology of R/S Are Not Yet Well-Integrated

Despite their similar aims, foundations, and emphases, these two fields are not yet well-integrated (Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume). *Handbook* authors offered possible reasons for this gap.

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Nelson and Canty (Chap. 2, this volume) critiqued the fields by averring that one historical and philosophical reason for this lack of integration is that both fields are hindered by a commitment to *positivistic naturalism* (i.e., the assumption that nothing exists beyond the natural world and all knowledge must be verified empirically by the scientific method). They, Porter et al. (Chap. 3, this volume), and Tsang et al. (Chap. 8, this volume), encouraged positive psychology and the psychology of R/S to transcend this commitment by adopting a more methodologically and epistemologically pluralistic approach that will welcome more diverse methods and sources of knowledge.

Davis et al. (Chap. 1, this volume) indicated there might be personal and professional reasons for this lack of integration as well. They noted that psychologists usually lack personal or professional familiarity with R/S (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022) and often exhibit skepticism and potential bias against both R/S (Slife & Reber, 2009) and positivity (Vaish et al., 2008).

In addition, Davis et al. (Chap. 1, this volume) explained how these biases might influence the openness of editors and peer reviewers to publishing research on R/S in mainstream psychology journals, despite comparatively more openness to publishing positive psychology research. Mattis (Chap. 9, this volume), Rossy et al. (Chap. 15, this volume), and Cowden et al. (Chap. 16, this volume) discussed other structural and logistical reasons for the lack of integration between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S. For instance, many countries and cultural groups lack the access, resources, and infrastructure to support such research. Moreover, the theories, measures, and applied tools in positive psychology and the psychology of R/S are overwhelmingly White-, Christian-, and Western-centric, as was mentioned in most chapters.

There Are Several Natural Bridges Between the Fields

Despite these noteworthy barriers between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields, there are several natural bridges of intersection between them. Numerous authors highlighted the potential for *virtues and character strengths* to serve as a nexus for such integration (Ratchford et al., Chap. 4, this volume; Hill et al., Chap. 7, this volume; Shafranske, Chap. 22, this volume; Washington-Nortey et al., Chap. 23, this volume; Cauble et al., Chap. 24, this volume; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume; Captari et al., Chaps. 26 and 30, this volume; Wang et al., Chap. 29, this volume). As the least-developed area among the positive psychology search terms that were systematically reviewed in Chap. 1 (Davis et al., this volume), there is indeed enormous room for growth in this domain. Several authors pointed to other prime candidates for bridging the fields, including *meaning* (Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume; King et al., Chap. 17, this volume; Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume; Shafranske, Chap. 22, this volume; Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume), *positive emotions* (Van Cappellen et al., Chap. 20, this volume; Shafranske, Chap. 22, this volume; Captari et al., Chap. 30, this

volume), *human and perceived divine relationships* (King et al., Chap. 17, this volume; Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume; Mahoney et al., Chap. 28, this volume; Wang et al., Chap. 29, this volume), and *health and well-being* itself (Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume; MacDonald, Chap. 5, this volume; Singh et al., Chap. 13, this volume; Mancuso & Lorona, Chap. 19, this volume; Masters et al., Chap. 21, this volume; Shafranske, Chap. 22, this volume; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume). These natural bridges between positive psychology and the psychology of R/S reflect three elements in Seligman's (2011) PERMA well-being framework: positive emotions, positive relationships, and meaning.

R/S Are Robustly Linked to Positive Psychology Constructs and to Well-Being, but the Directionality, Mechanisms, and Boundary Conditions of These Links Are Less Clear

Another theme that echoed across the *Handbook* was that R/S is robustly linked to positive psychology constructs and to health and well-being. For instance, extant research indicates that R/S is consistently associated with each of the aforementioned natural bridges with positive psychology: (a) virtues and character strengths (e.g., forgiveness, hope, humility, gratitude, and love; Washington-Nortey et al., Chap. 23, this volume; Cauble et al., Chap. 24, this volume; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume; Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume), (b) meaning (Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume; Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume), (c) positive emotions (Van Cappellen et al., Chap. 20, this volume), and (d) positive relationships (King et al., Chap. 17, this volume; Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume; Mahoney et al., Chap. 28, this volume). R/S is also robustly linked to overall health/well-being (MacDonald, Chap. 5, this volume; Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume) and many of its facets, including life satisfaction (Mancuso & Lorona, Chap. 19, this volume), physical health (Masters et al., Chap. 21, this volume), mental health (Shafranske, Chap. 22, this volume), relational health (Mahoney et al., Chap. 28, this volume), occupational health (Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume), and community health (Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume; Captari et al., Chaps. 26 and 30, this volume).

Even so, the directionality (causal direction of effects), causal mechanisms (mediators), and boundary conditions (moderators) of links between R/S and positive psychology constructs are less clear. One methodological refrain that emerged across chapters is that over 93% of the studies at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S are cross-sectional/correlational (Tsang et al., Chap. 8, this volume), thereby precluding tests of causal effects (directionality; VanderWeele et al., 2020) or causal mechanisms (mediators; Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Furthermore, boundary conditions for effects are largely unknown, especially when it comes to identifying cultural and contextual factors that may influence the strength or direction of the relationship between R/S and positive psychological traits or phenomena.

Deficiencies Inhibiting the Integration of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality

Chapter authors discussed several deficiencies hindering the integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Here we highlight three major themes.

Theoretical and Cultural Deficiencies

First, there are several theoretical deficiencies uncovered in this *Handbook*. Although there are exceptions (e.g., Koenig et al., 2012; see MacDonald, Chap. 5, this volume, for a review), there is a relative dearth of theories that explain how, why, and when R/S and positive psychological traits and phenomena are linked. Several chapter authors addressed this need by proposing or elaborating on integrative theories, including (a) Mattis's (Chap. 9, this volume) Culture, Religiosity/Spirituality, and Positive Development theory; (b) Davis et al.'s (Chap. 18, this volume) Positive Religious and Spiritual Development theory; (c) Van Cappellen et al.'s (Chap. 20, this volume) Upward Spiral Theory of Sustained Religious/Spiritual Practice; (d) Shafranske's (Chap. 22, this volume) Religious/Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health model; (e) Dik and Alayan's (Chap. 27, this volume) R/S and Meaningful Work model; and (f) Captari et al.'s (Chap. 30, this volume) Systemic Model of Disaster Spiritual Fortitude and Resilience. Each of those models also addressed another inadequacy in the extant literature on R/S and positive psychology—the lack of theories attending to multiple levels of analysis and the interactions among those levels (e.g., at the individual, relational, and macrosystemic levels). To date, most research at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology has been atheoretical (i.e., not guided by a particular theory; see Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume) or focused only on the individual level of analysis.

Relatedly, as Mattis (Chap. 9, this volume) underscored, most research at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology has been acultural (i.e., neither focusing on culture nor considering culture meaningfully in its conceptual foundations, research questions, or data analyses and interpretation). In fact, positive psychology often seems to have culturally appropriated religious/spiritual beliefs, practices, and phenomena. For instance, apart from Peterson and Seligman (2004) acknowledging the religious origins of their taxonomy, positive psychology has largely ignored the religious moorings of virtues and virtue development (Nelson & Canty, Chap. 2, this volume; Ratchford et al., Chap. 4, this volume). It also has largely disregarded the religious mechanisms that have helped people cultivate virtues and well-being for millennia—through historic religious practices, guided by historic religious texts, and nurtured in historic religious traditions and communities (Schiffman et al., Chap. 11, this volume; Singh et al., Chap. 13, this volume; Wang et al., Chap. 29, this volume). Positive psychology seems to have appropriated certain historically religious concepts (e.g., hope and forgiveness; Washington-Nortey et al.,

Chap. 23, this volume) and practices (e.g., mindfulness and meditation; Segall & Kristeller, Chap. 14, this volume), secularized them, and demonstrated empirically that the secularized versions apply to and work effectively with nonreligious/non-spiritual people.[1]

Yet the psychology of R/S field is not faultless either. It has rarely attempted to establish the cross-cultural equivalence of its constructs and measures (Hill et al., Chap. 7, this volume), the cross-cultural generalizability of its theories and findings (Rossy et al., Chap. 15, this volume; Cowden et al., Chap. 16, this volume), or the cross-cultural applicability of its theories and interventions (MacDonald, Chap. 5, this volume; Mattis, Chap. 9, this volume; Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume). Moreover, the psychology of R/S field frequently ignores the contributions of culture to R/S, fails to disentangle culture from R/S, and glosses over cultural variations in R/S (e.g., differences in how R/S is approached and practiced; Saroglou et al., 2020).

Methodological and Analytic Deficiencies

This *Handbook* also revealed methodological and analytic inadequacies at the inter-sections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Many authors under-scored this literature's overreliance on cross-sectional studies, culturally homogenous (and small/underpowered) samples, and correlational analyses. Admittedly, this deficiency characterizes mainstream psychology and most (if not all) its subfields—not just positive psychology and the psychology of R/S (Tsang et al., Chap. 8, this volume). Nevertheless, there is a clear need for greater method-ological and analytic sophistication. That of course includes a need for more longi-tudinal and experimental research, but it also includes a need for more studies that recruit large samples characterized by meaningful diversity within and across cul-tural groups (in terms of nationality, religious affiliation, religious/spiritual impor-tance, age, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic status, marital status, and disability status). In addition, there is a need for more studies that use advanced statistical analyses (e.g., growth modeling [Grimm et al., 2017] or outcome-wide analyses [VanderWeele, 2017a; VanderWeele et al., 2020]), conduct sensitivity analyses (to test the robustness of effects to potential unmea-sured confounding; VanderWeele & Ding, 2017), and utilize open science practices (e.g., preregister study plans and hypotheses, share study data and materials, repli-cate study findings, and post manuscript preprints; https://www.cos.io/; Nosek et al., 2015; Tsang et al., Chap. 8, this volume).

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[1] To be fair, religious/spiritual people and groups are often eager to appropriate secular, positive psychological research evidence, claiming it empirically validates their preexisting religious/spiri-tual concepts and practices.

Applied and Practical Deficiencies

Finally, this *Handbook* illuminated the scarcity of practical applications and implications that have been explored adequately at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Most of the literature at these intersections is *basic science* (i.e., "scientific research or theory that is concerned with knowledge of fundamental phenomena and the laws that govern them, regardless of the potential applications of such knowledge," VandenBos, 2015, p. 109), rather than *applied science* (i.e., "the use of scientific principles and theories to serve a practical human purpose rather than to extend knowledge for its own sake," VandenBos, 2015, p. 70). There is a great need to nurture and refine an applied positive psychology (Lomas et al., 2014) and an applied psychology of R/S (Pargament, 2013), but more broadly, there is an exigent need to emphasize the applied and practical sides of integrating positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Several chapters explored possible venues and vehicles for doing that, including public health efforts (Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume), psychological and spiritual interventions (Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume), work settings (Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume), couples and families (Mahoney et al., Chap. 28, this volume), religious communities (Wang et al., Chap. 29, this volume), and humanitarian and disaster contexts (Captari et al., Chap. 30, this volume).

Prospectus for a Positive Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (PPRS)

The Definition, Aims, and Scope of a Unified PPRS Field

To address these and other deficiencies at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S, we propose formalizing a new, unified field—the positive psychology of R/S. Building on the work of Linley et al. (2006; who defined positive psychology as "the scientific study of optimal human functioning", p. 8) and Davis et al. (Chap. 18, this volume; who defined R/S as "people's search for and response to sacred meaning and connection"), we define the *positive psychology of R/S* (PPRS) as the field of psychological science and practice dedicated to understanding and promoting flourishing in and through people's R/S (search for and response to sacred meaning and connection; Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume). In other words, the aims of the PPRS are to understand and promote flourishing in and through people's R/S.

When it comes to the topical scope of PPRS, we adapt the same four elements that Linley et al. (2006) identified as the pillars of positive psychology's scope: (a) *wellsprings*, (b) *internal processes*, (c) *external processes*, and (d) *outcomes*. We have slightly modified Linley et al.'s (2006) definitions and conceptualizations, in part to account for the multilevel nature of R/S.

(a) The *wellsprings* of interest to the PPRS are the distal precursors and contributors to the *processes* that facilitate or impede flourishing in and through people's R/S. These wellsprings might include individual-level factors (e.g., a person's genetics and temperament), relational factors (e.g., family-of-origin experiences and other flourishing-facilitative versus flourishing-undermining experiences earlier in life), and macrolevel factors (e.g., a culture's history and customs).[2]

(b) The *internal processes* of interest to the PPRS are the proximal, internal ingredients that facilitate or impede flourishing in and through people's R/S, such as a person's physical and mental health, character strengths and virtues versus weaknesses and liabilities, and positive versus negative psychological traits. These internal processes might also be conceptualized and assessed at a relational, institutional, or cultural level, such as by examining the internal structure and dynamics of a family, institution, or culture.

(c) The *external processes* of interest to the PPRS are those proximal, external factors that facilitate or impede flourishing in and through people's R/S, such as flourishing-facilitative versus flourishing-undermining factors in the social and cultural ecology within which a person is embedded (in their current family, peer, romantic, and perceived divine relationships; school or workplace; community; social and cultural groups; and society). External processes can also be conceptualized and examined at an institutional level (e.g., church, mosque, temple, school, or workplace), such as by examining the broader community or culture within which the institution is embedded, as well as ways the broader community or culture engages with other communities and cultures.

(d) The *outcomes* of interest to the PPRS are those physical, psychological, social, religious/spiritual, institutional, cultural, and societal states that characterize flourishing.

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[2] Due to space constraints, we have mainly provided examples at the individual level. However, as we show in some of the provided examples, wellsprings and processes can refer to multiple levels of analysis (e.g., dyads, groups, institutions, communities, cultures, and societies). For example, at the dyadic level of analysis (e.g., a parent–child dyad or a romantic couple), examples of *wellsprings* might include the individuals' respective genetics and temperament, their life experiences as individuals and as a dyad, and their respective families and cultures of origin. At the institutional level of analysis (e.g., a school, workplace, or religious community), examples of *internal processes* might include the institution's structure and dynamics, and its *external processes* would include the community and culture within which the institution is embedded. At the macrosystemic level of analysis (e.g., a community or culture), examples of *wellsprings* might include the community or culture's history, *internal processes* might include the community or culture's internal structure and dynamics, and *external processes* might include the community or culture's relations with other communities and cultures, as well as the broader societal context and historical period within which the community or culture is embedded.

Strategic Priorities for Science in the PPRS Field

Basic Science Most fundamentally, we encourage scientists in the PPRS field to remedy the theoretical, cultural, methodological, analytic, applied, and practical deficiencies we mentioned above. Topically, there are at least three major strategic priorities to address in PPRS basic science.

Question 1: What Is the Nature and Function of Flourishing-Facilitative R/S (and Flourishing-Undermining R/S) in Various Cultures and Contexts? There likely are similarities and differences in what characterizes and facilitates (or impedes) flourishing across various cultures and contexts (VanderWeele, 2017b). By extension, there are presumably similarities and differences in the nature and function of flourishing-facilitative versus flourishing-undermining R/S. For instance, there may be some dimensions of R/S that only play a strong role in characterizing, facilitating, or impeding flourishing in certain cultures or contexts, whereas other dimensions may play a strong role across all or most cultures and contexts. Large-scale, longitudinal research with geographically, culturally, and religiously diverse samples (e.g., the Global Flourishing Study of 240,000 people across 22 countries; Crabtree et al., 2021) and well-replicated research across diverse contexts (e.g., the Religious Replication Project; PRSM Lab, n.d.) is greatly needed.

Question 2: What Are the Determinants and Consequences of Flourishing-Facilitative R/S (and Flourishing-Undermining R/S) in Various Cultures and Contexts? In the same way, there probably are similarities and differences in what determines and results from flourishing-facilitative R/S and flourishing-undermining R/S (i.e., internal/external processes and outcomes). For example, there may be mediators (causal mechanisms), boundary conditions (moderators), and outcomes of flourishing-facilitative (or flourishing-undermining) R/S that only emerge in certain cultures and contexts, whereas others may be evident across most cultures and contexts. To illustrate, even though the meaning may be a causal mechanism of flourishing across most cultures and contexts (Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume), cultures vary considerably in how often R/S is approached as a substantive source of meaning (e.g., R/S is often mentioned as a source of meaning in the United States but rarely mentioned as such in most Asian or European countries; Pew Research Center, 2021). Hence, experimental and longitudinal PPRS research may find that R/S causally enhances meaning and flourishing in certain cultures but does not do so in others. To address such questions, team science approaches that coordinate the collection of data internationally at diverse sites should be adopted, as is being done through the Developing Belief Network's (n.d.) coordination across 30 international field sites with participants from multiple religious/spiritual traditions (see also Many Analysts of Religion Project, n.d.; Psychological Science Accelerator, n.d.).

Question 3: What Are the Internal and External Processes That Lead to (or Impede) Flourishing-Facilitative R/S at Various Levels of Analysis? In addition, there is a need for PPRS basic science research on the internal and external processes that cause (or undermine) flourishing-facilitative R/S in individuals, dyads, families, groups, institutions, communities, cultures, and societies. For instance, at the individual level, researchers could work to identify the physiological (e.g., neurobiological) substrates of flourishing-facilitative and flourishing-undermining R/S (Masters et al., Chap. 21, this volume) and examine how those substrates interact bidirectionally with internal psychological processes (e.g., emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and motivational factors) and external social and cultural processes (e.g., relational, systemic, and societal factors). One research center that is pioneering this type of multilevel research on R/S is the Institute for the Biocultural Study of Religion (https://www.ibcsr.org/).

Applied Science Applied science in the PPRS field should of course address the aforementioned deficiencies. In addition, there are at least three major topical priorities to address.

Question 1: Why, When, and for Whom Are PPRS Interventions Effective? As Captari et al. (Chap. 26, this volume) have summarized, there is a growing evidence base supporting the effectiveness of spiritually integrated, positive psychological, and virtue-based interventions. However, there still is a need for process research to identify the change mechanisms and contextual influencers of PPRS interventions' effectiveness (e.g., the Mental Healthcare, Virtue, and Human Flourishing Project; John Templeton Foundation, 2021a). There also is a need for identifying the people for whom PPRS interventions are most (or least) effective, based on the recipient's characteristics, culture, and preferences, such as the recipient's presenting concerns (mental disorders; spiritual struggles) and religious/spiritual affiliation, salience, beliefs, and practices (Shafranske, 2013; Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume). Moreover, there is a need to ensure that all mental health practitioners develop clinical competencies in R/S (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022; e.g., the Religious and Spiritual Competencies in Mental Health Care Project; John Templeton Foundation, 2021b).

Question 2: What Are Ways to Promote Flourishing-Facilitative R/S at Multiple Levels and in Various Cultures and Contexts? Practically all PPRS interventions have been developed (a) in North America, Europe, or Australia–Oceania; (b) from Western conceptual, religious, and valuative frameworks; (c) for WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic), White, and Christian people; and (d) to promote flourishing at the individual level. These deficiencies must be addressed in PPRS applied science. For example, there is a need for PPRS interventions that effectively promote the flourishing of couples (e.g., hope-focused couple therapy; Ripley & Worthington, 2014), families (e.g., sanctification-focused family therapy; cf. Mahoney et al., Chap. 28, this volume), organizations (e.g., meaning-focused organizational interventions; cf. Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume), religious communities (e.g., virtue-focused congregational interventions; McMinn,

2017; cf. Wang et al., Chap. 29, this volume), and societies (e.g., R/S-focused public health interventions; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume). There also is a need for PPRS interventions that are found effective in a diverse range of contexts and with a geographically, religiously, and culturally diverse range of people (e.g., the Building More Forgiving Communities Around the Globe Project; Templeton World Charity Foundation, n.d.).

Question 3: How Can the Science–Practice Gap in PPRS Be Narrowed? One major problem in mainstream psychology and its subfields is the *science–practice gap*—the integration divide between the knowledge produced through scientific research and the knowledge consumed and used by practitioners and the public (Aguinis et al., 2020). Of note, although the science–practice gap usually refers only to the divide between science and clinical practice, we are using this phrase to refer to the divide between science and real-world practice in a much broader sense. Specifically, we use the phrase to refer to the divide between science and practice not only in clinical healthcare contexts but also in religious ministry, educational institutions, organizational contexts, public health, and other broadly defined areas of practice, including laypeople's everyday lives.

The science–practice gap is especially pronounced in the PPRS, partly due to the same barriers and deficiencies described above (see also Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume; Nelson & Canty, Chap. 2, this volume) and partly due to other factors. Some of these other factors include (a) the need for scientists to make knowledge more relevant, useful, and accessible; (b) the need for practitioners and the public to tell researchers what knowledge they want, need, and actually will use; and (c) the need for scientists and practitioners to welcome each other's valuable contributions more humbly and offer those contributions more proactively. To illustrate, (a) PPRS scientists can contribute scientific knowledge about R/S, virtues, and flourishing; (b) PPRS practitioners can contribute practical tips and tools for helping people cultivate their R/S, virtues, and flourishing; and (c) religious practitioners (e.g., religious leaders, institutions, and laypeople) can contribute theological and experiential knowledge about R/S, virtues, and flourishing and offer practical tools (e.g., religious texts and practices) that people across cultures and history have used to cultivate them. For lists of suggestions for science–practice integration that could easily be adapted for the PPRS, see Aguinis et al. (2020) and Geimer et al. (2020).

Strategic Priorities for Practice in the PPRS Field

Lastly, we highlight six strategic priorities for practice in the PPRS field. These priorities are domains through which the PPRS might arguably be of greatest benefit to society and humanity.

Clinical Practice The PPRS interventions mentioned above can be disseminated and used in a diverse array of clinical practice contexts, including healthcare settings

(e.g., hospitals, outpatient clinics, inpatient programs, treatment centers, long-term care facilities), correctional facilities (e.g., prisons), and spiritual care contexts (e.g., spiritual direction centers, spiritual retreat centers, and spiritual study centers). Practitioners in all these settings can also cultivate their clinical competencies in positive psychology (Rashid & Seligman, 2018) and R/S (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022), including skills in how to help people build flourishing-facilitative R/S (Pargament, 2007) and reduce flourishing-undermining R/S (e.g., resolve religious/spiritual struggles; Pargament & Exline, 2022).

Religious Ministry PPRS interventions can be disseminated and used in religious ministry settings as well, but these interventions may often need to be culturally adapted, in order to enhance their compatibility with religious groups' beliefs, values, practices, and worldviews (Soto et al., 2018). Additionally, religious leaders and laypeople can draw on the findings and tools of PPRS to supplement the benefits they glean from their preexisting beliefs and practices. Furthermore, religious leaders and communities can use knowledge and tools from PPRS to enhance the effectiveness of their existing religious ministry efforts and programs (McMinn, 2017).

Character Education *Character* refers to the totality of a person's morally relevant habits of thought, feeling, and behavior (Baehr, 2017), and *virtues* are habits of thought, feeling, or behavior that are consensually esteemed as morally good, contextually adaptive (beneficial to the person and their social context), and situationally coherent (prudent for specific times and places; Lerner, 2019). *Character education* (i.e., deliberate attempts to promote the development of virtues and good character) frequently happens in the context of schools, families, religious communities, colleges, and faith-based organizations. Character educators can incorporate the knowledge and tools of PPRS into their efforts and strategies (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009).

Organizational Settings People's work is one of the strongest contributors to their overall flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017b), and workers often draw on their R/S to enhance the meaningfulness of their work (Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27, this volume). Organizations and their leaders can harness the findings of PPRS research (Hill & Dik, 2012; Neal, 2013) to improve the flourishing, functioning, and performance of their employees, leaders, and overall organization.

Humanitarian and Disaster Contexts The number of people affected by disasters and humanitarian crises has increased dramatically over the past 50 years. For example, since 1970 there have been over 22,000 natural and technological disasters (collectively causing 4.6 million deaths and nearly $5 trillion in economic losses), and the number of natural disasters per decade has increased fivefold (World Meteorological Organization, 2021). Between 2000 and 2019 (i.e., the 20 years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), over 4 billion people were affected by disasters (UNDRR, 2020), and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people in

need of humanitarian assistance and protection has increased exponentially (from 1 in 45 people globally [168 million] during 2019 to 1 in 33 people globally [235 million] during 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

There already is an extensive amount of PPRS research on humanitarian crises and disasters (Aten et al., 2019; Captari et al., Chap. 30, this volume), along with numerous practical tools and resources to use in humanitarian and disaster contexts. Many of these resources are available through Wheaton College's Humanitarian Disaster Institute (http://www.wheaton.edu/hdi). Policymakers, religious communities, and humanitarian aid and disaster organizations can draw on such studies and resources to help prepare for and respond to disaster-related and humanitarian needs.

Public Health As Long and VanderWeele (Chap. 25, this volume) have discussed, public health is the scientific discipline focused on preventing disease, promoting flourishing, and prolonging life (Winslow, 1920). An enormous share of the global population (about 85%) identifies as religious/spiritual (Pew Research Center, 2015), and for most people (around 68%), R/S is an important part of their lives and identity (Diener et al., 2011). This is especially the case for people in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Pew Research Center, 2018). Global research suggests that people living in societies characterized by difficult life circumstances—including many countries in the same regions just mentioned—are particularly likely to self-identify as religious/spiritual and to experience higher flourishing to the degree they are religious/spiritual (Diener et al., 2011). In these and other societies worldwide, policymakers, government workers, and public health officials could draw on the findings of PPRS research (e.g., Chen & VanderWeele, 2018; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, this volume) to inform their efforts in making policies and laws, designing public health initiatives and interventions, and engaging in public health prevention and management. Doing so could improve the lives, well-being, and longevity of literally billions of people around the globe (Idler, 2014).

Conclusion

> Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step. – Martin Luther King, Jr.

You have reached the end of the ***Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality***. Regardless of how religious or spiritual you are personally, we hope you now have a greater understanding and appreciation of how intimately intertwined R/S, positive psychology, and flourishing are. We hope you also are inspired to apply what you have learned and make your work, life, and the world a better place—filled with more love, hope, and flourishing. Even if you don't know exactly how to do that, we encourage you to heed the visionary call of Dr. Martin

Luther King, echoing through the halls of time and beckoning you just to take the first step in faith.

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

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