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AN INTRODUCTION TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

1 ARISTOTLE: THE VIRTUE OF FRIENDSHIP

Do you have a close friend? Can you always count that this person will be loyal by your side, or only in fair weather emotionally? Is your relationship one of unconditional trust, or do you each often withhold feelings from one another? Growing evidence from psychology and medicine indicates that your answers hold a key to optimal functioning. Nevertheless, the notion that a link exists between friendship and well-being is hardly new.

Nearly 2,500 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1908) addressed the topic in his treatise on ethical conduct and character virtues, *Nicomachean Ethics*. In a highly influential formulation, he distinguished among three types of friendship—those based on *utility*, *pleasure*, or *virtue*. Those comprising *utility* were basically business relations, based on mutual tangible benefit like money or power. Friendships based on *pleasure* were founded on fun interests, such as attending sporting events or concerts together. For Aristotle, *virtuous* friendship was the highest of the three—involving emotional concern and compassionate care. In his view, friendship based on *virtue* has the greatest impact on human well-being in everyday life. He regarded such friendship as an important feature of the good life.

Since the advent of behavioral medicine in the mid-1970s, investigators have closely studied what is known as social support, particularly the confidant relationship because of its importance for our well-being. The range of studies has been wide: from drug abuse and depression among American and Canadian teenagers to health practices among young Mexican men. Research consistently shows that having a trusted friend with whom to share emotions reduces virtually all kinds of risky and self-destructive behavior. Studies also demonstrate that people with a confidant have better physical health—and are less likely to suffer from a variety of chronic medical problems. Such individuals also show greater emotional resilience and less vulnerability to depression. As reported by Dr. Paul Surtees and his colleagues (Surtees, Wainwright, & Khaw, 2004) in England's Strangeways Research Laboratory, there is evidence that having a confidant can add 4 to 5 years to one's life. Aristotle would probably have not been surprised to learn of such findings. In this activity, interview two people over the age of 40 who enjoy a long-term friendship (not necessarily with each other), that is, originating during college years or earlier. Your questions may include these: When and how did you first become friends? What topics do you discuss together? Do you enjoy any shared activities or hobbies? If so, what are these? In your opinion, what has kept your friendship vibrant all these years? Finally, what do you think is the secret to maintaining a long-term friendship?

2 WILLIAM JAMES: GETTING YOUR SECOND WIND

William James ranks among the greatest thinkers in American history. Not only did he establish psychology as a scientific discipline in this country, but he is also revered as our most important philosopher. Born into a wealthy New England family, James planned in his youth to become a professional painter, but lacking artistic talent, he chose medicine instead. At Harvard University in the late 19th century, he developed America's first psychology laboratory and, later, turned his immense intellect to such topics as religious experience including prayer and mysticism, the mind–body relationship in health and sickness, and the nature of human consciousness.

In December 1906, James presented a superb speech before the American Philosophical Association at Columbia University. It was published a few weeks later in the *Philosophical Review* as “The Energies of Men” (James, 1907) and had a tremendous popular as well as professional impact. In this paper, James asserted that people often give up on tasks and projects too soon, that is, before they get their “second wind” to propel themselves across the finish line. “Our organism has stored-up reserves of energy that are ordinarily not called upon” but that exist and can be tapped effectively, James insisted (p. 5).

Usually, the second-wind phenomenon occurs without our deliberate planning or effort, but James suggested that psychology might someday discover ways to help each of us tap our stored-up energy, whether we engage in “physical work, intellectual work, moral work, or spiritual work.”

In this activity, describe an experience in your life when you were feeling exhausted or drained—either mentally or physically—and then suddenly regained vitality and enthusiasm. What do you think caused your second wind to kick in? Did it involve encouragement from another person such as a family member or friend, a powerful moment of self-motivation, both of these causes, or something else entirely? If so, what? If you were teaching a skill or sport to elementary-school-age children, what advice would you give to help them tap into their second wind? What do you think is children's biggest obstacle to developing this ability? Do you think it's easier for teenagers to access their second wind? If so, why?

During the next week, record any experiences in which you felt tired or bored but then gained a second wind of energy and enthusiasm. See if you can identify what caused this phenomenon to occur.

Write your answers below.

Your Work: Please use this space, and additional journal space as appropriate, for your work.

3 ALFRED ADLER: DEVELOPING SOCIAL INTEREST

Another “grandparent” of positive psychology was Alfred Adler. Whereas William James focused on the heights of human consciousness—such as transcendental experience—Adler’s attention was devoted to social life. He grew up in late-19th-century Vienna as a sickly child. Unable to participate actively in sports like many other boys of his time, he nevertheless gained popularity by helping his classmates with schoolwork and exuding a cheerful personality. By the time Adler entered medical school at the University of Vienna, he enjoyed close friendships often centering on politics, literature, and art.

As a physician and then as a psychological thinker, Adler saw our early interactions with our parents and siblings as the foundation for successful adult relationships including friendship, romantic love, marriage, and parenthood. In Adler’s view, our tendency for social feeling is innate, but it must be nurtured through attentive parenting in order to flourish. In other words, social interest does not flower automatically; it must be constantly encouraged, such as through praise. Adler was a highly popular lecturer in both Europe and the United States, and he often addressed parent associations as well as professional audiences of doctors, teachers, and mental health professionals.

Once at such a gathering, Adler had been highlighting the importance of encouraging even young children to develop good social skills, and then the question-and-answer period began. A woman stood up and said, “I understand that children need adults to help them acquire social feeling. But how early should parents begin this effort?” Adler paused for a moment and smiled. “You must begin the moment the baby comes out of the womb!” he replied. “If you wait even five minutes, it’s too late!” The audience roared with laughter.

In this activity, think back to your childhood and recall your first friend, that is, a boy or girl whom you chose to be with, rather than someone brought to your home by relatives. How did you first meet this child? Was it at school, in your neighborhood, or some other setting? What shared qualities, interests, or hobbies brought the two of you together? How quickly did the friendship develop, and how long did it last? Did you mainly spend time involving just the two of you together or more often as part of a small group? Keeping Adler’s ideas in mind, what social skills did you develop from this friendship?

Record your answers below.

Your Work: Please use this space, and additional journal space as appropriate, for your work.

4 ROMANTICISM

Romanticism was a social and cultural movement that occurred in the Western world from the latter part of the 18th century to around the middle of the 19th century. This movement placed emphasis on individual expression, especially the deep experience of emotions. Romanticism often idealized the image of the creative artist who experienced the full range of his or her emotions in a deeply personal way. The movement was a reaction to rapid industrialization that forced people from farms and life in the country into crowded and polluted cities, places that many felt destroyed the dignity of the individual for the sake of technological progress.

The influence of romanticism was found primarily in literature, art, and music. Examples of romantic literature include the poetry of Keats and Shelley, along with novels by Goethe (*Faust*) and Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*). In painting, romanticism can be seen in lush landscape paintings, such as those of J. M. W. Turner. The deep emotionality of Beethoven's music is a prime example of romanticism. Romanticism also changed the social sciences and politics. In fact, the precursors of humanistic psychology can be found in the romantic movement. Today, elements of post-romanticism can be seen in the "back to the land" movement that emphasizes small farms, growing wholesome food, the artisan and craft focus on handmade specialized products, and even environmentalism that urges people to live in harmony with nature.

For this activity, we would like you to live like a romantic artist for a week. Don't panic, we don't want you to write a novel or compose a symphony. However, we would like you to experience emotions as if you were a romantic artist. Begin by listing the works of art in your life that really draw strong emotions from you. For example, what are the pieces of music that often pull deep emotions from you? Look at other artistic works as well, such as movies, novels, poetry, television shows, and online videos. Remember, these emotions can be positive, nostalgic, sentimental, or even sad and tearful. The common theme, however, should be that they draw *strong* emotions from you. Please note that there is one caution as you choose emotions. Emotions that are clearly negative such as anger, resentment, jealousy, revenge, or depression should be avoided. An underlying theme of the romantic movement was that emotions should be felt deeply in order to facilitate the higher potential of being human. Emotions that are destructive and self-indulgent simply don't fit with that ideal.

For this activity, please allow yourself time at least once each day to fully immerse yourself in one work of art or experience that evokes deep and strong emotions for you. For your journal, please record and reflect on what it was like to experience emotions deeply for a week.

Your Work: Please use this space, and additional journal space as appropriate, for your work.

5 MY GREATEST SATISFACTION

For this activity, please rate yourself on which of the following gives you the most satisfaction in your life. That is, indicate how well each one helps to create in you a sense that life is good, that you are doing what feels right to you, and that you are spending your time wisely by pursuing these goals or activities or experiences. There is no need to reflect deeply on each of the options below. Often it is best to just go with your initial reaction.

MY GREATEST SATISFACTION IN LIFE COMES FROM:

1	2	3	4	5
not important to me	less important to me	neutral	more important to me	very important to me

1. Experiencing pleasurable feelings and sensations _____
2. Achievement, competition, reaching goals _____
3. Knowing that I'm following God's commandments _____
("God" as you understand it or a Higher Power)
4. Relaxation, contentment, and freedom from stress _____
5. Embracing creativity, aesthetics, beauty _____
6. Having spiritual experiences (these may or may not be associated with a formal religion) _____
7. Close friendships and personal relationships _____
8. Being healthy with a sense of energy and vitality _____
9. Appreciating the world around me _____
10. Feeling happiness, joy, and positive emotions _____
11. Intense involvement in activities so that I lose a sense of time _____
12. Being involved in meaningful work _____
13. Being of service to other people or my community _____
14. Resolution of internal psychological conflicts _____
15. Having a sense of maturity, wisdom, and intellectual understanding _____
16. Having enough money to buy what I want _____
17. Being famous, being a celebrity _____
18. Being physically beautiful and attractive _____
19. Feeling an inner sense of peace _____

