

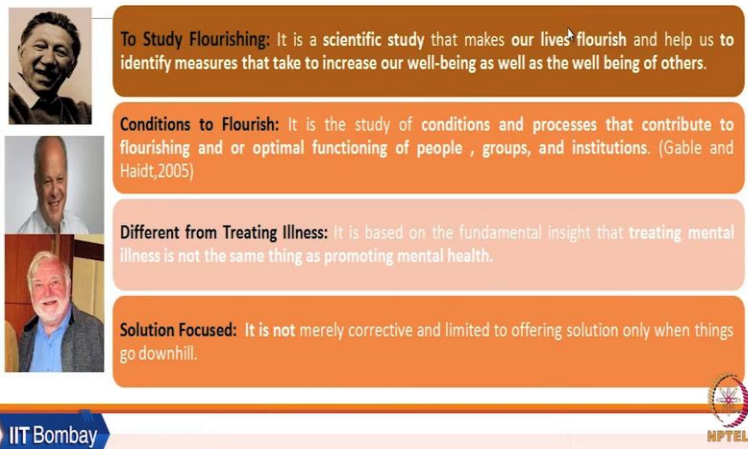
**Yoga and Positive Psychology for Managing Career and Life**  
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**Why Positive Psychology and Yoga in this Course?**  
**Lecture - 6**  
**Can there be a Universal Positive Psychology?**

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**What is Positive Psychology?**

PERMA: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life, and Accomplishments




**To Study Flourishing:** It is a scientific study that makes our lives flourish and help us to identify measures that take to increase our well-being as well as the well being of others.

**Conditions to Flourish:** It is the study of conditions and processes that contribute to flourishing and or optimal functioning of people , groups, and institutions. (Gable and Haidt,2005)

**Different from Treating Illness:** It is based on the fundamental insight that treating mental illness is not the same thing as promoting mental health.

**Solution Focused:** It is not merely corrective and limited to offering solution only when things go downhill.

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Here, I would like to quickly give an introduction of the positive psychology; how it is understood mostly in the current times and then we will move on to the cultural nuances and how the role of yoga has emerged and eventually became part of this course. So, here, I would like to mention about Abraham Maslow, Seligman, and Csikszentmihalyi's work. Abraham Maslow; obviously, was much before the Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's work.

Abraham Maslow is mentioned here because he was the very renowned psychologist who did his writings in the 50s and 60s. Most of you must be familiar to his need hierarchy theory, but many of you may not also be familiar that he was the person who first time you know in a very articulate ways talked about holism, meta needs and the self-actualizing tendency of human being. All these are very positive in nature.

He talked about holistic perspective of looking at psychology. He critiqued the atomistic functional view of the world and he claimed, that he warned, that psychology should not suffer from it. And called for not only developing holistic perspective, but also developing research methods which can understand the the human being in its holistic nature.

And holistic means it cannot be reduced stimulation response. It cannot be reduced to simple few tendencies which someone has acquired in the childhood, and looking at human being as a dynamic, constantly evolving entity. He talked about the meta needs which is beyond the basic needs which need not be satisfied.

He talked about self-actualization and in order to fulfil the meta needs in self-actualization human beings can forego even the lower level needs. These all things were appeared in Abraham Maslow's writing, but probably it was not carried out in a very empirical way.

At least in the famous American psychologist paper of 2001, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi point out that and they say that, Abraham Maslow and other psychologist who are termed as humanistic psychologist, their work at number 1: it became much more self-centric and number 2: not much empirical inquiry was carried out to take forward that work.

Whatever may be the reason, Seligman and his colleague were able to articulate the positive psychology in a very emphatic way. Currently, positive psychology, the aim of positive psychology is claimed by the leaders of the field as achieving flourishing. And flourishing is understood to be in terms of an acronym PERMA that stands for Positive, Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life and Accomplishment.

So, positive psychology is the study of flourishing. Naturally, well-being is a reflection of flourishing, but it is not only personal well-being it is a relationship as well as meaning in life as well. It also aims at studying the conditions to flourish, conditions and processes that contribute to flourishing and optimal functioning of people groups and institutions.

So, here you see evolving from the humanistic psychology, positive psychology, not only focuses on people, it also focuses on flourishing groups and thriving communities, evolving institutions. Naturally as the emergence of the field itself is result of this process this is not and this is very different from treating illness.

It is based on the fundamental insights that treating mental illness is not same thing as promoting mental health. It is very solution focused, it is not merely corrective and limited to offering solution only when things go downhill, but it is telling people what should be the attitude, what activities they can carry out, what interventions can be done to not only attain flourishing, but also retaining flourishing.

In the recent review they have identified 51 types of 51 different interventions systematically studied in the positive psychology. So, when this special issue of American psychologist about positive psychology appeared it attracted major reactions, lot of positive reactions almost everybody welcome this move of a field of psychology to study the things of life which makes it worth living looking at the potential of human being, looking at the possibilities of the human nature all that was widely appreciated.

It was also critiqued on being very ethnocentric.

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## Positive Psychology: Concerns about Ethnocentrism

“ Current efforts in positive psychology are deconstructed to reveal an adherence to the dominant Western conception of self and its accompanying vision of the good life as personal fulfillment”.

Christopher, J. C., & Hickinbottom, S. (2008). Positive psychology, ethnocentrism, and the disguised ideology of individualism. *Theory & psychology, 18*(5), 563-589.

So, there are large number of scholars who pointed out this this aspect, and Christopher and Hickinbottom have captured the essence of many scholars who have mentioned about the ethnocentric perspective not being inclusive nature of the positive psychology, feel as was

reflected in that particular issue in that special issue where 15 articles on different aspects of the positive psychology was published.

So, what Christopher and Hickinbottom write that; “current efforts in positive psychology are deconstructed to reveal an adherence to the dominant Western conception of self and its accompanying vision of the good life as personal fulfilment.” So, they pointed out that there are many cultures which can have different notion of self which is very different from the notion of self held by the liberal or neoliberal society of the Western world.

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## Can there be One Universal Positive Psychology?



Vision of the world



Notion of Self



Conception of Happiness and Good Life

Essentially they questioned that positive psychology cannot be universal or the way it is presented cannot be universal because of three things. Number 1: vision of world is different in different cultures, what is the vision of world that is we are going to look at in the second in the next slide.

Notion of self is itself is different which arises from the world view or vision of the world. Notion of self what is self, that itself is different that understanding itself is different in different cultures. As a result of that the very conception of happiness and what makes good life also differs.


So, how can there be a universal positive psychology? Or if at all there is a need and there can be a universal positive psychology we need to do more thorough job, we need to have more cultural perspectives, we need to have examining the basic assumptions of the current formulations of

positive psychology, more thoroughly using cultural lenses to make it more inclusive. So, that it can become more generalizable or if I may use this word more universal.

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## Worldview: Two Tier and One Tier View

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**Greek:**

**Zen** (the life of necessity): Necessary for biological survival

**Euzen** (the good life): Life of the citizen beyond the necessities, uniquely human.

**Balinese**



**Sekala**: the ordinary realm of everyday life; and

**Niskala**: the spiritual world, a deeper level of reality that is invisible to the untrained but ultimately determines what occurs in everyday life.

**Indian**

The **Para Vidya** refers to higher learning or learning related to the Self or the Ultimate Truth that is transcendental knowledge.

The **Apara Vidya** refers to "Lower knowledge" of this world, the empirical knowledge.



So, first thing we look at the world view. This notion of Christopher and Hickinbottom is based on the work of Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor in 1989 wrote a very interesting piece on modernity and emergence of self. And he talks about two types of world view prevalent in the world. What is world view? World view is basic assumptions, belief, values about how this world is and how it works.

So, Taylor points out that different cultures have different world view and they can be merged and they can be summarized in a one in a term called one tier world view or single tier world view and two tier world view. One tier world view suggests that world is what is visible, human being is what is visible, what is experienced, what is empirical, what is objectively verifiable. And the happiness and responsibility of the life is particularly is solely lying in the individual inner situation.

It is on the individual where the responsibility of his or her happiness lies that is the one tier world view. But two tier world view which was prescribed by most of the cultures particularly before

modernization and so, called enlightenment in the 16-17th century it talks about two world views it talks about two world two tier world view.,

Greeks, Balinese and Indians these three example can point out this aspect. Greek they used to believe in having a life of necessity which is the necessary biological survival situation that is one world and there is another world the world of called Euzen which is good life which is life of citizens beyond necessities, life of the citizen which make society worth living. That makes the essential human nature of the humanity.

These cultures are talking about more objective reality which is more based on biological, survival or social needs and also a transcendental aspect of the world. These cultures also believe and many culture still hold that belief that it is that transcendental reality which imbues the value and meaning to the mundane so, called mundane reality.

So, Balinese and Bali is greatly influenced by Indian culture as well they talk about Sekala and Niskala. Sekala is again is a reflection of the ordinary realm of everyday life experiences and Niskala is the spiritual world that is deeper level of reality that is invisible to the untrained, but ultimately determines what occurs in daily life.

And what is sadhana? Sadhana is the process of un-revelling that what Balinese called Niskala and Indians called Para Vidya. Indian say Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya, Para Vidya refers to the higher learning Para is beyond, Aparā is which is not beyond which is immediately accessible through our senses. So, Para refers to higher learning related to self or ultimate truth that is transcendental knowledge.

So, here the self is used and professor S.K. Chakravarti used it beautifully he wrote that small self with a small s and self with capital S. Self with a small s is born by our identity, about our physicality, about our social circle and governed by individual ego whereas, self with the capital S is the real self where nature all the creatures and the whole cosmos is included.

Realizing that thing, realizing that inherent oneness, what is called non-duality underneath diverse form of nature, knowledge of that is called Para Vidya. That governs the so called mundane life which is perceptible through our senses and this culture believed that what is life is much beyond my sense perceptions.

But studying that also is important because we have to do the agriculture, we have to set up temples, we have to construct things, people have to build their family, society has to have norms, there has to be exchange of things, business has to be developed. So, Apara Vidya is also important, but that Apara Vidya is in a very tentative way we are calling it “lower knowledge” it is not considered lower in Indian tradition, but it is suddenly not considered ultimate. It is not considered that about which ratio of Upanishad says that knowing which nothing else is left to be known.

There is a story in the Upanishad where a where a child comes, where a boy comes after receiving education from his guru he comes back to see his father and father was working in a garden and just by while working in the garden he looked at his son he asked: ok, so have your education is completed? He said yes, and then father asked, but have you got something have you come to. So, he says that boy we are Brahmins by definition Brahmins means those who know the Brahman, those who know the ultimate reality, those who have the access to Para Vidya.

So, we are Brahmins and we are supposed to have the knowledge of Brahman and that is what is the ultimate knowledge. So, have you known something that after knowing which nothing left is to be known. That aspect of Para Vidya is the ultimate realization of human potential that is why it is called self-realization.

But that self-realization has as S capital because that is the real self-Brahman is the real self-atman is Jeevatman is, but a sense of self which is result of the result of the sense of separation arising from ignorance. This aspect of the world view what Charles Taylor calls two tier world view is present, was present, has been present in most of the cultures before modernization.

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## So what is the self of positive psychology



Positive psychology is based largely on dominant Western, and particularly American, ideologies of 'individualism' or 'liberal individualism.' Encompassed within these terms is:

(a) a **Cartesian distinction** between an internal subjective world of values, experiences, beliefs, and meanings and an external objective 'real' world of abstract facts;

(b) a **notion of a fixed, essential self** that is separate from others and the world it inhabits; and

(c) because **meanings and values are subjective**, persons should be free to determine both the meaning of and the means to pursue the good life, or 'happiness,' in whatever manner they choose so long as they do not interfere with the ability of others to do the same.

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But what is the world view being prescribed in the existing literature of positive psychology that is reflected in the form of definition of self-basic assumption of self is reflected in their work. So, positive psychology is currently largely based on dominant Western and particularly American ideologies and Christopher and Hickinbottom write that it is clear that it is based on Cartesian distinction.

What is Cartesian distinction? That is the thought given by that great scientist that subjective world and objective world are different. Realm of science is to deal with the objective world objective reality. Anything which is not in the objective reality, anything which is not objectively verifiable is not the matter of science. So, it is not the matter of knowledge. It can be a matter of belief.

Notion of fixed and essential self is also evident in the writings of positive psychology. Thirdly, it talks about meaning and values are subjective in nature and person should be free to determine both the meaning of and means to pursue the good life. And Christopher and Hickinbottom point out different questionnaires, different psychometric assessment tools to study well-being to study even flourishing.



And then this suggest they point out that though these questionnaires are having element of other orientation, if they have the element of including so, called others, but what gives meaning to life is largely understood to be the choice of human being.

There is no great meaning as such universally it is human being and depends dependent on his tendency or her tendency to find something meaningful or not. So, the means to pursue the good life or 'happiness' in whatever manner they choose, that is the basic assumption and they should choose as long as and they can choose anything as long as that do not interfere with the ability of others to do the same.