

and philosophical relationships between economics and theology. But his brief comments (chapter 10) indicate there is more to Christian discussion of economics than the terrible Princeton Presbyterian gathering.

Ian's Harper's book is worth the purchase price on a number of grounds. He has the courage to write so personally, and writes clearly, making it engaging reading. Buy the book for someone you know who is thinking of studying economics, a church friend who thinks we would be better off without economists, or for an economist friend who would like an accessible account of what it is all about in the end. *Economics for Life* may not become a classic like Newman's *Apologia*, but it will benefit many readers.

**Reviewed by
Paul Oslington, Australian
Catholic University.**

Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being

By Martin E.P. Seligman

William Heinemann, Sydney
2011

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ISBN 978186412971

Martin Seligman's latest book seeks to develop a new theory of well-being. Much of *Flourish*, however, can be viewed as a sequel to his previous book *Authentic Happiness*. Seligman combines his views on what it means to flourish with self-help advice, an informative discussion of relevant research findings, and a discussion of his experience in teaching well-being in schools and the US Army.

The book also tells the story of Seligman's contribution to the development of positive psychology.

Positive psychology is a new branch of psychology which aims to achieve a scientific understanding of positive human functioning and develop effective interventions to help individuals, families and communities to thrive. Seligman's applications of positive psychology demonstrate that it involves a lot more than just being cheerful.

In developing his new theory of well-being, Seligman has dispensed with the word 'happiness' because its dominant connotation is inextricably bound up with being in a cheerful mood. This pulls the rug from under critics of 'authentic happiness', who claimed that he was attempting to redefine happiness by dragging in the desiderata of engagement and meaning. Seligman also sees a problem with 'life satisfaction' because mood may determine more than 70% of how much life satisfaction an individual reports. He makes the point that public policy aimed only at subjective well-being is vulnerable to the 'Brave New World' caricature in which governments promote happiness by encouraging people to use 'soma.'

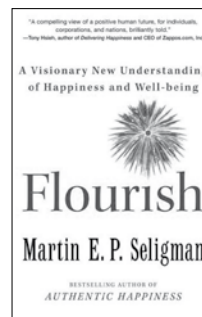
Seligman derives his new theory of well-being by borrowing one of the questions that Aristotle asked: What is the good that we choose for its own sake rather than because it makes a contribution to something else that we value? Aristotle's answer was happiness. Of course, what Aristotle meant by happiness was human flourishing rather than just positive feelings,

emotional well-being, or life satisfaction. To Aristotle, flourishing involved developing 'our truly human capacities.'

By modifying Aristotle's question slightly, Seligman comes more directly to the question of what it means to flourish. He asks: What are the 'elements' that free people will choose for their own sake? He comes up with five such elements: positive emotion, engagement (being in the flow), relationships, meaning (purpose in life), and accomplishment (PERMA).

Although I agree with Seligman's five elements, I find it difficult to accept that PERMA incorporates all the elements that individuals would freely choose for their own sake. Other elements that individuals could choose for their own sake include health, safety, security, hope and control over their own lives. It is good to be healthy, quite apart from the contribution that good health makes to positive emotions, etc. It is also good to be safe—individuals experiencing PERMA are in a fool's paradise if there is a high risk of criminals taking their lives from them. It is good to feel secure—to feel that PERMA may be ongoing. It is good to have hope—when we don't have much PERMA, we are comforted by the hope that our lives could get better.

We also seek to have control over our own lives. A slave who experienced a high level of PERMA would not fully flourish because slavery denies her the opportunity to develop her capacity for self-direction.



It might not greatly affect the well-being of a sheep, for example, to be denied opportunities for self-direction, but an adult human is the kind of creature that cannot be said to be fully flourishing if denied such opportunities. To flourish we need to accept responsibility for important personal decisions, irrespective of whether we obtain a sense of achievement from making good choices.

Since he bases his new theory of well-being on un-coerced choice, Seligman could easily respond to suggestions that PERMA does not include all the elements we choose for their own sake by telling critics to make our own lists. In my view, a theory of well-being based on un-coerced choice should recognise that because different individuals may have different values, they choose different things for different reasons and may give different weights to the elements they choose.

Seligman seems to have anticipated the argument that PERMA doesn't include everything that we choose for its own sake by suggesting in the final chapter that he 'would not remotely advocate that well-being should be the only influence on public policy.' Other factors he mentions are justice, democracy, peace and tolerance. He also suggests that he expects to see vigorous debate about how to combine wealth with well-being measures. Those comments suggest that his concept of well-being encompasses only psychological well-being, rather than all the goods that free people choose for their own sake.

By developing experimental programs to teach aspects of psychological well-being,

Seligman has posed a challenge to conventional thinking that happiness and well-being are solely the product of inherited personality characteristics and social environment. In his discussion of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Seligman suggests that since it was officially recognised as a disorder 30 years ago and people have become more aware of it, there has been an increasing tendency for those who suffer trauma to spiral downwards into PTSD. They tend to interpret symptoms of anxiety and depression as PTSD, making it a self-fulfilling prophesy. Seligman suggests that this can be avoided by promoting an understanding that 'far and away the usual response to high adversity is resilience—a relatively brief episode of depression plus anxiety, followed by a return to the previous level of functioning.' This discussion also raises the difficult question of how to provide appropriate monetary compensation via disability payments, etc. without exaggerating or prolonging symptoms of PTSD.

In his discussion of the treatment of depression, Seligman reports some encouraging results from simple exercises such as encouraging people to make more frequent use of their character strengths. He suggests, however, that the US National Institute of Mental Health has been reluctant to fund research to pursue such findings. This leads him to suspect bias in favour of more expensive therapies offered by the drug companies and the Psychotherapy Guild.

Seligman argues that teaching well-being in schools will reduce the incidence of depression

among young people and enhance learning abilities. At Geelong Grammar, Seligman and his colleagues gave teachers a nine-day course in using and teaching the necessary skills to ensure that they were appropriately qualified to teach well-being. A similar approach has been adopted in resilience training in the US Army. Sergeants are trained first and then train the soldiers under their command.

Unfortunately, the programs for teaching well-being that Seligman describes have not been conducted for long enough for the results to be reported in this book. I look forward to his next book to see how successful those experiments have been and for further refinement of his theory of well-being.

Reviewed by Winton Bates

Brain Trust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality

By Patricia S. Churchland

Princeton University Press, 2011
US\$24.95, 273 pages
ISBN 97806911377032

Patricia S. Churchland places a lot of trust in the evolution of the brain to determine how we ought to live. Her new book, *Brain Trust*, argues that morality is about empathy. The book is a fascinating walk through the evolution of the human brain: what circuitry has developed, when it developed, and Churchland's thesis on why.

Churchland aims to demonstrate that morality is not innate, universal or a matter of appealing to a higher authority, be it God or Reason. She claims converging data from neuroscience, evolutionary biology, genetics, and experimental