

## Reading-guide.doc, for Jon Haidt's Flourishing class

Emails to send out before each class with reading guide and behavioral assignments.

\*\*\*\*\*

### C1.Introduction

Assignment sent out before class:

If you are getting this email it is because you are registered for Psyc 403. Welcome to Flourishing! Here is some important information:

1) I don't want us to lose the whole 2.5 hour session just to introductory remarks, but on the other hand I don't want to assign you much reading before the first class. So I'm asking you to do three simple things to prepare for class:

A) Click on the link below and take the "strengths survey." Be sure you are at a computer with a printer; you will need to print out your completed survey and bring it to class. Please fill it out carefully – the issue of strengths will be a major theme of the course  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=26794443440>

B) Look at your printed survey and at your top strengths. Think of a time in your life when you clearly used one of your strengths. Jot down a few notes about the event. You won't be handing in any of this. But everyone will be asked to introduce themselves by telling a brief story (like, 1 minute) about a time when they used one of their strengths. This is a much better way to get to know each other than just saying our names and where we are from.

C) Print out the 5 pages from the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius, attached to this email. Aurelius offers a lot of advice about how to live, and how to manage your mind in a difficult world. Underline anything that seems like particularly good advice to you.

2) We will meet as planned at 9:00 on Wednesday. But for the rest of the semester I would like us to shift the time of the course by 15 minutes, so that we meet 9:15-11:45. This will give us all a bit more time in the morning, and help us miss Charlottesville rush hour (8:40-9:05). We'll take a vote on this shift at our first meeting, and if 75% of the class is in favor, we'll do it.

3) The syllabus is now posted on our webpage on toolkit. (I'll have printed copies for you.) If you have not ordered your books (from Amazon, or wherever), then please do so today!

I am looking forward to seeing you all on Wed. at 9:00 in Gilmer b001 (in the basement, the cognitive psych area).

\*\*\*\*\*

### C2.PositivePsych

**Notes on the readings:** All should be easy and straightforward introductory material to positive psych, and to the great truths.

–Franklin: Franklin’s autobiography was written in 4 parts, at four different times of his life. The last quarter is all about the many things he founded, and various historical events. It is the least interesting psychologically, and you can skip it entirely. In my edition, the text runs from p.16 to 157. With those page numbers, the most important parts are p. 78-99, where he presents his attempt to achieve moral perfection. Be sure to read that section very closely. The first half of the book (p.16-77 in my edition), about his adolescence and young adulthood, is charming, and useful for getting a feel for Franklin’s lifelong pursuit of self-improvement. You may skim this section if you prefer, but do spend at least half an hour with it.

–Seligman: gives an overview of positive psych, and how he came to start it.

–Keyes and Haidt: The introduction to “Flourishing” gives a brief introduction to positive psych, and then gives a preview of all the chapters. This may guide you to chapters you want to read, beyond those assigned. I have posted a Word file of this paper on our web page, for those whose books have not arrived yet.

–Haidt, sage and scientist: This is the introduction and first chapter of my book. The chapter lays out why it is so hard to change yourself, and offers a few general pointers for self-improvement at the end. (If anything was confusing or annoying about this reading, please let me know!)

–Burns: read the introduction, and Part I (that is, up to p. 49). This is a very accessible mass-market book, from a man who was a student of Aaron Beck (the founder of cognitive therapy). We won’t be talking about this book next week, but I want you to get a good start on it, because we’ll be reading most of the rest of the book for the following week. [INTRO AND CH.3 MATTER, CH. 1 AND 2 CAN BE SKIMMED]

### **TO DO BEFORE NEXT CLASS:**

Now that we’ve looked at our strengths, Franklin calls on us to look at our weaknesses as well and to think about the ideal self we might aim for. Franklin’s goal of “moral perfection” may be too ambitious, but your assignment for next class is to be too ambitious. After doing the readings for this week, take stock of who you are, and of who you could become. Imagine your ideal self, living in an ideal way, about 10 years from now. Your assignment for next class is to write up such a vision of yourself, and some preliminary thoughts about how to get there. (It is from this vision that you will draw one or two specific changes you want to make for your final project.) Specifically, you should hand in a short paper 1-3 double spaced pages that has 2 sections. 1)My ideal self, 2)My plans for getting there. Don’t worry about this paper; the grading of it will be minimal. It is really an exercise for you that will get you started on your final project. You can improve it as the semester goes on!

Here are some suggestions, or things to think about.

–How will you even think about this project? As a list of virtues to cultivate? As a list of specific habits to break? As a list of conditions of your life to achieve?

--You might want to imagine the kind of job or life you would have, but these elements should only provide context for your vision of yourself. Don’t focus on them. They may be relevant because Seligman urges us to design a life that draws on our strengths.

–How could you know if you made progress? Franklin made up a “little book” in which he allotted one page for each of the virtues. Could you do this? Can you think of any other ways? Our discussion in class will begin with the readings, and then turn to these “ideal self”

statements. In addition, or along the way, we will discuss a question raised by both Franklin and Seligman: What is the relationship between virtue and happiness? What does Franklin say it is? How does Seligman link the two? What do you think the relationship is?

[FOR NEXT YEAR:

–STEER THEM AWAY FROM “MARRIED WITH 3 KIDS, A DOCTOR” AND MUCH MORE TOWARDS A CHANGE THEY WANT TO MAKE IN THEMSELVES, A FRANKLIN PROJECT

--PERHAPS FOCUS ON SELF-CHANGE, ASK TO REFLECT ON OR WRITE ABOUT PAST EFFORTS AT CHANGE, WHEN WERE YOU SUCCESSFUL, WHEN NOT?]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **C3.Appraisals**

The assignment to do before next class is to catch at least 10 distorted thoughts, and to argue with yourself to try to change the emotions these thoughts create. With that in mind, here is the reading, with a few comments:

1)Burns. Start with this, so that you can quickly begin looking for distorted thoughts. Read all of parts I, II, IV, and VI. (You can skip III and V if you like. I may assign part VI when we cover prozac). Some of you will not have the distortions related to depression, but the later chapters include distortions related to anger, guilt, shame, and anxiety. Notice that Burns does not just try to intervene in your thoughts; he asks you to change your behavior too. I have uploaded two short files that might help you catch thoughts. The first is one I found on the web, called “claiborn.how-to-use-a-dtr”. You should print this out, it may help you to actually record thoughts, and dispute them. The second is a pdf file of the summary of Burns’ 10 distortions. It’s the same text as in your book, but you might appreciate having a 1-page summary to carry around with you.

2)Seligman, chapters 5 and 6. Focus especially on the section “learning to argue with yourself”, and “your disputation record,” for that’s the exercise for this week.

3)Epictetus: Read as much of the introduction as you like. As you read the main text, mark it up heavily. Underline anything that seems to you to be a piece of psychological insight, or a piece of useful advice. You’ll see that much of what he says is similar in principle, though not always in technique, to what you are reading about cognitive therapy. Think about how Epictetus’ approach to life and to self-improvement differs from Franklin’s.

4) Haidt, “The Sage and the Scientist”, Chapter 2. I’m trying to finish writing this chapter now, but I’ll post it in its nearly complete form on Saturday.

You won’t have to hand anything in on Wednesday. I just want everyone to monitor their thoughts, do a kind of checkup once you understand the perspective of cognitive therapy and attributional style. If you look closely, you will probably find some distorted thoughts. Draw on all the readings to challenge these thoughts, and force yourself to think different thoughts. We’ll talk in class about the range of distortions people found, and the effects if any of disputing them.

Also, you should check out [www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com). This is the official website for the book. All of the scales that are contained in the book can be taken online, which has the benefit of automatic scoring, and of comparing your scores to people of your sex, age, region of the country, etc. Register yourself on the site. You should take the “optimism” test, which is the beginning of Seligman’s chapter 6

anyway.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **C4.Happiness**

The readings for this week are about happiness: how to think about it (Nozick, a philosopher); how we evolved to have it, yet have it be somewhat elusive (Buss); what correlates with it, and how to measure it (Diener); and a theory about the most important psychological states that lead to well-being (autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in the paper by Ryan and Deci).

Here are a few questions. Please come to class prepared to answer any of them, I'll call on people at random, so you might want to sketch out brief answers to them

Nozick:

- 1)What kind of life is a truly satisfying life? What SHOULD we want? What do YOU want, and why?
- 2)Suppose you faced this choice: if you choose option A, then tomorrow your life would become wonderful, full of happiness until you are 80, at which point you have 1 year of misery, feeling that your life was a mistake and a failure, and then you die unhappy. If you choose option B, you become miserable tomorrow, and until you are 80 you feel like a wretched failure. Then, at 80, you achieve a kind of epiphany, find meaning, and feel that your whole life was deeply worthwhile. Then you die. Whichever option you choose, your memory of choosing is wiped out, and you just live out the life that you chose without knowing why it is happening. Which option would you choose? Why?

Buss:

- 3)From an evolutionary point of view, what is the role of happiness and unhappiness? Why is it so hard for people to be happy?
- 4)What are 3 specific things you can do to use evolutionary thinking to make yourself happier?

Diener

- 5) what are three specific ways you could measure your own levels of well-being over the course of this semester?

Ryan and Deci:

- 6) Find 3 connections between Ryan/Deci and Buss. How is Ryan/Deci grounded in evolutionary thinking?
- 7)When you face tasks that you do not want to do, what can you do to make yourself more intrinsically motivated?

ALSO you should hand in a piece of paper with a tentative proposal of what you are going to work on for your final project, what method you will use, and what kind of evaluation or measurement you will use. This will be ungraded, it's just to get you started on the project. Be sure to read the final paper guidelines on our web page first. If you want my feedback after class, or by email, then email me your proposal by tuesday eve. If you don't know what you want to do, just list some possibilities, some things you'd like to change or develop. It's OK if you don't finalize your project until right after our class on meditation, and the 3 presentations we'll have in that class.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **C5.meditation**

Class next week is on ways of calming and improving consciousness. We've already covered cognitive therapy. Now we do the other two proven methods: meditation and prozac.

Start with Buddha and his characterization of our mental life. You'll notice many similarities to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. You'll also notice that Buddha strongly emphasizes the importance of regular practice – meditation – as the way to improve our mental life. Mark any passages that particularly move or inspire you, or that you can recognize as true psychological insights. What is Buddha's ideal way of living? How does it compare to Nozick's analysis of happiness?

The Shapiro review article suggests that meditation is a magic tonic. It seems to improve most aspects of human functioning, including several that people in the class are working on: spirituality, happiness, anxiety, self-esteem, empathy, gratitude, acceptance, letting-go, forgiveness... It appears to be one of the most powerful non-pharmacological methods known for changing the self. Can meditation be separated from any religious context and just used on its own? [need better questions]

The Nolen-Hoeksema article is on two ways of responding to setbacks and losses: rumination and distraction. Distraction is good, rumination seems to be destructive, to dig people deeper into their holes. Figure out your own style. Try to catch yourself ruminating. What can you do to break out? Can you find a way to distract, or does trying to distract just call attention to the thought?

The Kramer chapter from "Listening to Prozac" presents the case of Tess, whom Kramer treated for depression, but whose personality changed and blossomed in the process. She becomes "better than well." What does Prozac and the changes it causes tell us about the mind? (That's what Kramer means by "listening to prozac"). Should "cosmetic psychopharmacology" become an important and freely available tool to help people flourish? Should it be available to anyone who wants to try it, even if they have no diagnosable mental illness? Please come to class with at least a preliminary opinion, or a list of questions that you would need resolved before you could reach an opinion.

Finally, I have loaded a short chapter from Seligman's book "What you can change and what you can't". This is not assigned, but you might find it helpful to find out what the research says is changeable, and what things seem very resistant to change by any known method. Seligman categorizes things by the "depth of change" that is needed.

\* \* \* \* \*

The "do" assignment for Wednesday is to meditate at least 3 times, for a minimum of 10 minutes each time. It's best to do it at a set time each day. Most people do it in the morning, before breakfast, or in the evening, as a way of clearing the mind of the day's concerns.

For the most basic, easy to follow directions for beginning meditation, go here:  
<http://www.mkzc.org/beginzen.html>

If you want to learn more, or read about a variety of other techniques, go here:  
[http://1stholistic.com/Meditation/hol\\_meditation.htm](http://1stholistic.com/Meditation/hol_meditation.htm)

This page has a lot of information about different types of meditation. But the place to start is on the right side of the screen, “Four elements basic to traditional meditation”, and then lower down “simple meditation.”

I have uploaded 3 MP3 files that will guide you through 10 minute meditations. It is a good idea to start by using these guided meditations, but then eventually you should learn to meditate on your own. I also have some CDs with more meditations, and with Jon Kabat-Zinn talking about meditation, for those who want to go further. I’ll bring them to class.

The important thing is just to get started. Just try calming the mind, and focusing on a single thing for 10 minutes. The most widely recommended thing is to focus on your breath as it enters and leaves your nose. Sit with your spine straight, but you don’t need to do any fancy lotus positions. I can’t bend my knees too far, so when I meditate I just sit on the front edge of a chair, so that my spine is balanced over my hips. I use a timer on my palm pilot to tell me when 12 minutes have gone by.

[additional notes:]

Specific reading advice:

–note connections to last 2 classes: cog therapy, and happiness.

<http://www.how-to-meditate.org/>

has pages on LKM, and other stuff

For next week, if anyone feels ready to move on to a more advanced practice, here is a page on loving kindness meditation, a form of meditation that aims to make people more loving and compassionate towards others, and towards themselves.

<http://www.buddhanet.net/metta.htm>

You can click on “loving-kindness instruction” on the left side, and you can then get an overview of the practice, either to read or to listen to as a realaudio file. Or you can click on “loving-kindness instruction” on the original screen and read more about it, particularly in “part I”, then “beginning practice of loving kindness.”

\*\*\*\*\*

## **C6.Hedonics**

The topic for class this week is pleasure, broadly construed, and its relationship to happiness. There are so many pleasures. How can we understand them, manage them, and improve our lives with them? Start with the short Gibran reading, and compare what Gibran says about pleasure to

what Nozick says about happiness.

The four academic papers are:

1) Dan Kahneman, a recent Nobel Prize winner in economics (though he's a psychologist), gets us started by framing it as an economist would: what exactly is it that we are trying to maximize? Remember Ed Diener's call for a national well-being index? Kahneman suggests that it's not just people's overall reports of SWB, but rather their happiness at each moment, summed over moments. This method often yields a different answer when compared to people's conscious, overall reports. Why is that? What do you think we should try to maximize? Does the "satisfaction treadmill" get us off the "hedonic treadmill"?

2) Wrznievski, Rozin & Bennett then take us into three of the major domains in which people find pleasure: work, leisure, and food. They begin by linking back to Rich Ryan and Ed Deci on intrinsic motivation, which is particularly important for understanding why some people love their jobs. They suggest that the greatest happiness comes from approaching work as a calling, from having passions in leisure, and from savoring food the way the French do. But can one do all three? When work is a calling, it tends to produce very long workweeks, which can crowd out other sources of pleasure. Is one of your top goals in life to find a job that is a calling? Might that have some negative ramifications?

3) Kubovy then takes us on a guided tour of "higher" pleasures, the pleasures of the mind. He suggests that pleasures are defined more by the pattern of emotions than by any one emotion itself. Is there a way to use his approach to make ordinary activities into pleasures of the mind?

4) Sheldon and Lyubomirsky then address the million dollar question head-on: can we do things to make ourselves happier? Is our set-point our destiny? No. They propose that circumstances and intentional activities can combine with the set point to give us a potentially wide set-range of happiness levels. (It is their work and theory that Seligman drew from when he gave that formula in *Authentic Happiness*). What other activities can you do?

We'll start class by discussing the Kahneman paper and the hedonic treadmill. Then we'll work through the other three. For all four of these papers, make a list of what you can take away and apply to your own life. Are there ways you can arrange your life to get more pleasure? More fulfillment? More happiness? Are there specific things you can do? How do these four papers modify the idea of a set-point for human happiness? Can they help you get off the treadmill? Come to class with at least one idea for an intentional activity that might raise your happiness level.

ALSO: here are the topics that are being approached by more than one person. You may want to contact each other to share ideas and methods and readings.

Forgiveness: Annie Bobiak, Scott Bottoms,

Gratitude: Jess Ellis, Jen Silvers, Kimberly Schloss, maybe Mathew Klein.

Relaxation, anxiety reduction, or loosening up: Thais Rogatko, Mike Spagnola, Christian Wilton

Reducing sensitivity, e.g., to criticism: Ashley Reedinger, Kim Finneran

I encourage you to work together at the early stages of the project in particular, although you should not work together on the final paper. There is no reason for competition, and the class is not graded on a curve in any way. I didn't hand back your proposals since I wrote all my comments by email, but those of you who turned in a handwritten form may want yours back; just ask in class next week.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **c7.being nice**

We'll start by discussing the Wrzesniewski reading from last time on work as job, career, or calling. I think this will be very helpful to you as you all think about what kind of work you want to do after college. Then we'll get into the topic for today: the constant injunctions we get from the sages to be nice, kind, forgiving, etc. Why do so many sages tell us to be this way, to NOT follow our instincts to vengeance, tit-for-tat? I don't mean to equate Dale Carnegie and Jesus Christ, but look at how they both urge us to treat other people, and think about the mechanisms behind their advice. There are similarities and differences – what are they?

Then we'll get into the academic readings; we'll start with the Fredrickson reading on the “broaden and build” model of positive emotions, which is one of the most important ideas in all of positive psychology. How are positive emotions different from negative emotions? How can you trigger positive emotions strategically, in yourself and in other people, to make your relationships work better? Then we'll look at two strengths that are virtues in many religions, particularly Christianity: gratitude and forgiveness. If these really are strengths that make your life and relationships go better, what are the mechanisms? Do these three academic readings illuminate or explain the advice from Jesus and Dale?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **c8.love and social support**

The Sage reading and the four scientist readings this week are all about the crucial importance of relationships for human flourishing. In fact, Reiss & Gable suggest that relationships are by far the most important single factor in human well-being. So the questions for this week are why, how, and what can you do about it. More specifically, please come to class prepared to answer the following questions. (Please write out your answers. You won't hand them in, but I will call on people).

- 1) What kinds of relationships matter? Gibran's portrayals of passionate love and friendship seem so entirely different. What does Gibran say that each one does for us? List at least 3 other kinds of relationships and write out what each one does, what role each kind of relationship plays in flourishing.
- 2) What are the mechanisms by which relationships affect mental AND physical health? What are the positive and negative processes? (See especially Reis, and Taylor).
- 3) How do individual differences play into relationship processes and relationship satisfaction? Do men and women need different things? People with different attachment styles, and with

different affective styles (frontal-cortex righties vs. lefties)? Are some born for good marriages, while others are headed for divorce?

4) What can you do to improve your own odds of having good relationships? Be sure to make a list of all the advice you can extract from these articles, either for yourself, or for people in general.

In fact, Question #4 is a question that you should try to answer in every single week. The second half of your final paper will be on your ideal future self, and how to get there, and it must be based heavily on the readings from the course. So it's probably a good idea to be maintaining a long list of ideas as we go through the course.

Finally (to repeat): As you watch *Amelie*, catch connections to topics we've already covered in the course. Think about what makes *Amelie* happy, and what *Amelie* does to make other people happy. Also, notice any effects that the movie has on you, particularly in the hour afterwards.

And remember that the Baumeister article is only the first 7 pages of it, although you are welcome to read more. There is also a long article by Sternberg as an optional reading, which discusses his triangular theory of love. I recommend it to you, although we won't be discussing it.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **C9.work and engagement**

It is often pointed out that sharks have to keep swimming to stay alive. That's the only way they can get enough oxygen into their gills. It sometimes seems that humans are similar – we must be constantly pursuing goals to be happy or fulfilled. All of the readings this week are about how people pursue goals, and how a sense of meaning and other benefits accrue to us as we pursue goals. The big ideas are that flow, engagement, and vitality result when we have the right fit with a task, and when we become part of something larger. The biggest idea of all, I think, is in the Nakamura chapter: that meaning emerges gradually out of a sustained relationship with a domain. If you throw yourself into an activity (a job, family, church....) and become fully engaged with it, over the course of years, and are engaged socially, materially, and intellectually, then a sense of meaning in life somehow comes into being.

Here's what you should do for next class. (All the readings are fairly short)

- 1) Read the Gibran passage on work. Bear in mind his famous phrase “work is love made visible”
- 2) Read the seligman chapters, and think about the differences between pleasures and gratifications. What are the pleasures and gratifications of being a college student? What would you like to have in your future work?
- 3) Read the Emmons chapter on personal goals. **MAKE A LIST OF YOUR OWN STRIVINGS AND GOALS**, and then code them using his system.
- 4) Watch *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control*. Write down ways that these four quirky men and their lifelong obsessions illustrate the ideas of gratification, strivings, and love made visible.

- 5) Read the Nakamura/Czikszenmihalyi chapter. Apply it to the men in Fast, Cheap. This chapter is very subtle, and I think it will make most sense if you read it right after watching the movie. How does meaning emerge in the extended relationship between person and object?
- 6) Read the Ryan chapter on vitality. What exactly is the relationship between work and vitality? Think about your own fluctuations in vitality. What causes your levels to rise and fall? How can you plan your day to get more vitality, drawing on physiological and psychological interventions?
- Note: I have uploaded 2 pages of quotes from my quote file on work; these illustrate many of the themes for today, but this reading is optional.
- You can switch the order of steps 4 and 5 above. It should work either way, just be sure to do the two steps within 24 hours of each other.

So the basic questions for discussion might be

- what kinds of goals should we pursue? are all goals equal?
- How should we pursue goals, to get the maximum benefit
- what is the role of goal attainment? Is the benefit really all in the striving, in the journey?
- what is the “meaning” we are after when we ask what is the “meaning of life”?
- what kinds of lives are meaningful?
- MAKE A LIST OF YOUR GOALS BEFORE READING EMMONS. Then code them with his system.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **C10: Growth by adversity**

One of the great truths is the “adversity hypothesis”, stated most succinctly by Nietzsche: *What does not destroy me makes me stronger*. Below are some other statements of it, from around the world and across eras.

--*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.* (New Testament, Romans 5:3-5)

---*Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant* (Horace)

---*When heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man, it will exercise his mind with suffering, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him to poverty, place obstacles in the paths of his deeds, so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent.* (Mencius, ancient China)

--- *Sweet are the uses of adversity; / which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, / wears yet a precious jewel on its head* (Shakespeare, As you like it, II.i.)

---*The things which hurt, instruct* (Franklin, Poor Richard)

The readings for today present the scientific research on this hypothesis. Why do people often emerge from tragedy and failure claiming to be better people, sometimes even being grateful for these bad events. In its strongest form, the adversity hypothesis says that we cannot truly flourish without a strong dose of adversity.

As you do the readings, think about the role adversity has played in your life.

- 1) Think of three specific setbacks or difficulties that led to growth, or to a positive turning point. What are the specific mechanisms by which you grew? How did the adversity help (or hurt) you?

2)The readings invite us to take a “narrative” view of our lives, and of the way we retrospectively make a story (perhaps not a “true” story, but it becomes our story). Suppose you were designing the ideal life for your child, to help him or her flourish as an adult. When, and what kinds of setbacks and traumas would you want him or her to experience? What personality traits, “personal resources”, or demographic traits would influence your decisions?

3)Can you make positive turning points more likely for yourself in your future? What can you do to maximize your own growth from the adversity that surely lies in your future?

4)How can writing about adversity help? By what mechanism?

Please write out short answers to these questions before class. I will call on people to answer each question.

**To Do:** Write a “growth narrative” for yourself. Building on what we read last week, about narrative, meaning making, and post-traumatic growth, and also on this weeks readings about awe, elevation, and peak experiences, think about a time in your life when you grew. Ideally this would be a story about a time that involved some setback, problem, trauma or failure AND that also involved a profound moment of awe, elevation, or insight. But that might be too much to ask for. So be sure that your story involves either PTG or else PPEG (post-peak-experience-growth). Write it out – force yourself to impose coherence and narrative structure on an experience that changed you. (This should be good for you!) You will hand this in, but it will be basically pass/fail. (I’ll note any extraordinary work, or anyone who basically blew it off, but otherwise I’ll just record that you handed it in). If there are personal details that you don’t want to write out, feel free to be vague and incomplete in your description of the event. [PROBABLY A GOOD ASSIGNMENT, BUT ONLY 2 HAD PEAK EXPERIENCE, MOST HAD TURNING POINT AFTER ADVERSITY. NEXT TIME ASSIGN THIS AS PART OF ADVERSITY.]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **C11: Growth by awe and beauty**

This week’s topic is an area of the emotional realm that has hardly been touched by experimental psychology, but it has been written about for millennia by mystics, philosophers, and poets: the heights of emotional and spiritual experience that sometimes come over us as we witness certain things, particularly things that are beautiful. But there are many forms of beauty, or of excellence more generally: excellence in skills, talents, performance; excellence in shape or form; excellence in virtue. And there are many emotions here; awe, elevation, admiration, aesthetic rapture, peak experience. Let’s try to get them straight, and understand their role in moral and spiritual growth.

1)Start with the Maslow book. Maslow describes a constellation of experiences and changes that he labeled a “peak experience” (see appendix A). He also speculated about the role of peak experiences in giving us the religions and religious practices that we now have. Think about your own life. Have you ever had anything like this? Think back to the discussion last week about turning points. Have positive emotions and peak experiences played a role in any turning points in your own life? [see the “do” assignment below.]

2)Read the 2 articles I wrote, on Elevation and then on Awe. What are the differences between elevation and awe? Think about your own experiences of these emotions: what exactly do YOU feel in your body? Do you want to do anything in particular after these emotions? How exactly

do these experiences change you (if at all)? In other words, please critique my writings on these emotions and suggest any new avenues, new responses that you can think of.

3) Last, read the chapter posted from the Bhagavad Gita. Look at the change in Arjuna after his awe experience. What did his “cosmic vision” do to him? How does Arjuna's experience compare to Paul's on the road to damascus?

DO: [in 05, assigned writing a change narrative, but it was all adversity turning points. Not good for awe day. In future: assign amelie on this day?]

\*\*\*\*\*

**C12: growth by virtue:** What is morality, and how does it develop? Can we become better?

The course is organized around the question of how to make yourself a better person, but so far we have mostly talked about how to become a happier, more well-adjusted person, with fewer weaknesses. This week we turn directly to the question of how to become a morally better person. But before we can do that, we must first figure out: 1) what is virtue, 2) where does virtue come from, or how does it develop? Only then can we consider question #3: how can I make myself a more virtuous person.

Please keep those three questions in mind as you read for next class. A few comments:

1) Aristotle: this is probably the most famous work in moral philosophy, the foundation of much later thinking. In this chapter of the Nichomachean Ethics Aristotle lays out his idea that virtue consists in the mean between too much and too little of a trait or quality. He also lays out the important idea that virtues are habits that must be cultivated through practice.

2) Damon is, in my opinion, the very best researcher in moral development. He gives us an overview of several leading theories of moral development, and raises the main question in the field: how much of morality is innate, and how much is learned, or figured out by the child?

3) Haidt and Joseph: In this paper I try to push a nativist approach to morality (at least 4 intuitions are innate), but also make it link up with a cultural psychological approach: virtues are social constructions, but they are constrained and guided by the innate intuitions. In this way I am trying to build on Aristotle, but bring him up to date with what we are now beginning to discover about innate knowledge.

4) Piliavin: This is to my knowledge the best review of the diverse and confusing research on the question: does doing volunteer work actually “pay off” for the volunteer? What are the benefits for engaging in organized volunteer work. Is virtue its own reward?

DO: outline your whole final paper. Don't hand it in, but do come talk to me if you think it will help.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Activity for Class ... possibly to do along with Virtue: Pleasurable vs. Philanthropic Activities - Which Brings More Happiness?**

Martin E. P. Seligman, University of Pennsylvania

Description: Have students brainstorm and write down what activities they have participated in during the last week that were pleasurable and philanthropic. Have them reflect on how those activities differ, how each type of activity made them feel afterward and how long those feelings lasted. After the discussion, instruct students to notice when they participate in activities that are pleasurable and/or philanthropic over the next 3 to 5 days. They should address the following questions in their papers:

A What were the specific differences in each type of activity?

A What type of emotions did you feel during each type of activity?

A How long did the generally positive emotions experienced during each type of activity remain with you afterward?

Note: Some students may not feel as though they participate in philanthropic activities. Although likely to be false, this belief may hinder students from completing this activity successfully. Some have argued that assigning philanthropy tends to neutralize the altruistic qualities of the activity, so it may be necessary to assign or suggest some simple philanthropic activities to students who have trouble with the concept. Some suggestions may include:

A Helping someone younger with homework

A Paying someone's toll

A Holding the door open for someone behind you

A Letting someone in front of you in line at a restaurant or store

A Doing chores around the house that are not normally yours or that you weren't asked to do

A Serving in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter

These are only suggestions and might help students more accurately recognize philanthropic activities in their lives.

Assignment [from Jon]: Over the next week, including spring break, notice the activities that you do that are philanthropic (charitable, helpful), and those that are pleasurable. Be on the lookout for opportunities to do each kind. Be sure to take at least one opportunity of each type, and notice what happens as you do it, and afterwards. Write up a 1-2 pg (double spaced) reflection on the questions Seligman gives above. (You might find connections to this week's readings, or back to the hedonics readings.) Hand in for next class. You can start with just a short description of what you did for each activity, and then write a commentary.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **C13: Strengths, Choice, Wisdom**

For our last class with readings, we finish up by doing three separate important topics.

**1)Strengths.** We started the course with this topic, and we end with it too. Read Seligman chapters 8-9. Some of this is just a paper version of the Strengths inventory, which you can skip.. --take the VIA strengths test on the web (on the authentic happiness page). Write down the 5 strengths it tells you are your signature strengths. **HAND IN TO ME:** a piece of paper that lists those 5 strengths from the web survey, and the top 5 or so that you picked on our first day, from

the short questionnaire version. **Is there a difference? Which list rings truer to you? What is the best way to assess strengths?**

–Read Seligman Ch. 10, on using the strengths at work. If you have a specific career plan, assess its potential for employing your strengths and avoiding your weaknesses. List 3 alternative career paths that seem most likely to use your strengths.

**2) Choice.** We take it as an axiom in America that more choice is good. Schwartz agrees that some choice is usually better than no choice, but he argues that once we have a few choices, the addition of more choices becomes bad for us. Yet we don't realize this, and we choose to put ourselves into situations with too much choice. Furthermore, there is a personality trait such that "maximizers" are at high risk of suffering in choice situations, while minimizers are somewhat protected. (You can skim many of the details of the studies, but be sure to understand what each study shows).

–**Are you a maximizer or a satisficer?** (Score yourself on his scale: read the items and mark your score on each from 1-7, reversing the appropriate ones)

–**What changes can you make to improve your environment,** or the way you approach choice, to make yourself happier?

**3) Wisdom:** Aristotle and others (including Barry Schwartz) say that wisdom is the "master virtue." If you don't have it, you can't be virtuous. If you have it, you have most of virtue.

–How does Sternberg say that **wisdom develops?** How can you link this story to our discussion of **virtues and moral development** in childhood?

–Let's end our discussions on a grand note: On Sternberg's account, **has your time at UVA made you any wiser?** Jefferson and the faculty would like to think so. But Springsteen says "we learned more from a three minute record, baby, than we ever learned in school." Staying close to Sternberg's account, what aspects of classes and experience outside of classes contributed to your wisdom?