

“Psychologie positive et personnalité : Activation des ressources”

Firouzeh Mehran (Ed.)

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I was not very familiar with “positive psychology” when I began to read this book. I learned a lot! This book reviews many major theories in the domain and brings its own creative contribution.

The book has four sections:

- Personality theorists who figure as precursors for positive psychology
- Actual trends in positive psychology
- Concepts from positive psychology
- Applying positive psychology to clinical practice

The book doesn't limit itself to psychological thinkers. I was pleased to find references to existentialist philosophers. The reading of this book shows how personal development seems to be closely related to values. This is quite interesting because this trend seems to gain space nowadays, in what is called by many the third wave of Behavioral Therapy. The author shows very well throughout the book how positive psychology insists on human choices and responsibility toward these choices. This will be striking for those readers who are used to conceptions where patients are primarily perceived as sick or victims.

As to precursors of positive psychology, we find names like Maslow and Roger. It is extremely interesting to revisit these authors. They both insisted on human potential and on the natural tendency for personal growth. One realistic consideration is that development isn't always an easy road. Difficult aspects of life have to be integrated. It isn't “la vie en rose”. Another important point is the development of internal control (autonomy) over external control. It assumes greater likelihood for personal fulfillment of fundamental needs. The author makes an interesting link between positive psychology and Cognitive Therapy, underlining that cognitive techniques such as identifying alternative thoughts or problem solving, help to modify maladaptive strategies into adaptive ones.

The second section of the book bears on actual trends in positive psychology. For example, there are chapters on Csikszentmihalyi and Snyder. They both emphasize the importance of involvement in significant actions. Life meaning is better expressed in the process of moving towards chosen valued goals, which give opportunities for self-reinforced actions. Also, contact with moment to moment experience favours the choice of meaningful goals more than endless reflections (greater freedom from the tyranny of the mind – e.g., John-Kabat-Zinn).

In the third section, the author makes very interesting choices. She presents themes from positive psychology, which again, may sound unfamiliar to many psychotherapists, at least in the context of more traditional psychotherapeutic interventions. I read with a lot of pleasure and interest chapters on compassion, gratitude, and humour. Compassion, strikingly, allies many spiritual and psychotherapeutic traditions. In that context, the author who is of Persian origin devotes an original and refreshing chapter to Jalâl-od-Dîn Rûmî, a wise mystic from the Eleventh Century. Clues for a rich and fulfilling life aren't a recent discovery!

In the last section we recognize the experienced clinician who is used to working with personality disorders. She proposes a well-balanced intervention between corrective experiences (empathy, compassion) and the teaching of constructive tools that promote the clients' potential. Most often, personality disordered clients have been either traumatized or deprived (or both) in a significant way and have consequently developed dysfunctional coping

strategies in order to survive. The author takes account of both aspects in a creative way. This is illustrated in the case of «Perle» (Pearl): we witness the blossoming of a woman who discovers her personal worth and changes significantly in her life.

This book is an excellent introduction to positive psychology and probably the only one of its kind that has been written in French. I think it proposes an excellent opportunity to learn about this fascinating aspect of human psychology, and more specifically in the context of the treatment of personality disorders. For example, skilfully introducing humour in therapy sessions dealing with harsh issues can only benefit the client and the therapist – Dr Mehran opens up that refreshing perspective throughout her book.

Pierre Cousineau, Ph.D.
Private practice
Montréal (Québec) Canada