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***Notes of a Psychology Watcher***

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**To Teach is to Learn Twice:**

*A few years after I began teaching, it occurred to me that being a teacher - not being a student - provides the best education. "To teach is to learn twice," wrote Joubert, in a simple-sounding maxim that could have several different meanings. It could mean that one first learns when getting up the material one is about to teach and then tests and relearns it in the actual teaching. It could mean that being a teacher offers one a fine chance of a second draft of one's inevitable inadequate initial education. It could mean that learning, like certain kinds of love, is better the second time around. It could mean that we are not ready for education, at any rate of the kind that leads to wisdom, until we are sixty, or seventy, or beyond. I favor this last interpretation, for it accounts for the strange feeling that I have had every year of my adult life, which is that only twelve months ago I was really quite stupid.*

--- Joseph Epstein

**Teaching and Learning Positive Psychology: Other People Matter**

In 2006, the MPA Program Committee invited Dr. Christopher Peterson (1950 – 2012) to talk at Madonna University on the emerging field of Positive Psychology. Dr. Peterson (1950 – 2012), was the Arthur F. Thurnau professor of psychology and former chair of the clinical psychology at University of Michigan. Dr. Peterson was well-known for his psychological research in health and optimism, learned helplessness, and in the classification and measurement of human strengths and abilities. He won the 2010 Golden Apple Award – the most prestigious teaching award at the University of Michigan.

Back to 2006 at Madonna University, when Dr. Peterson walked up to the podium to give his lecture at the MPA conference, he said, “I have heard of Madonna --- but I didn’t know she had a college.”

Dr. Peterson’s wit, humanity and wisdom runs through his teaching, research, and writings.

To get some sense of Dr. Peterson’s values, scientific sense, and virtues, I recommend you turn to two of his elegant books:

* Peterson, Christopher. *A Primer in Positive Psychology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
* Peterson, Christopher. *Pursuing the Good Life. 100 Reflections on Positive Psychology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Chris dedicates *A Primer in Positive Psychology* to his parents “with love and gratitude…who taught me to love learning, to work hard, and to get along with others.”

His book starts to fill in the period table of elements that makes up the science of positive psychology under the following chapter headings:

* **Pleasure and Positive Experience**
* **Happiness**
* **Positive Thinking**
* **Character Strengths**
* **Values**
* **Interests, Abilities, and Accomplishments**
* **Wellness**
* **Positive Interpersonal Relationships**
* **Enabling Institutions**
* **The Future of Positive Psychology**

Each chapter provides guidelines from research findings about how to live when you are alive --- deepening our sense of pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

Since 2008, Chris has written a blog titled “The Good Life,” for the *Psychology Today* Web site, discussing the elements of what makes life worth living. Chris writes that his readers have told him they like blogs that have research findings, are terse, sprinkled with a bit of humor, and offer practical implications about pursuing the good life. The 100 reflections are taken from Chris’ *Psychology Today* blog, revised and updated for this book.

There are eleven broad categories of reflections:

**Part I: Positive Psychology and the Good Life**

**Part II: Positive Emotions and Experiences**

**Part III: Positive Traits and Talents**

**Part IV: Positive Relationships**

**Part V: Enabling Institutions: Families**

**Part VI: Enabling Institutions: Workplaces**

**Part VII: Enabling Institutions: Schools**

**Part VIII: Enabling Institutions: Sports**

**Part IX: Enabling Institutions: Geographical Places**

**Part X: Rants**

**Part XI: Pursuing the Good Life**

In the first reflection, Dr. Peterson lists what we have learned in recent years about the psychological good life (I quote):

* Most people are happy.
* Happiness is a cause of good things in life and not simply along for the happy ride.
* People who are satisfied with life eventually have even more reason to be satisfied, because happiness leads to desirable outcomes at school and work, to fulfilling social relationships, and even to good health and long life.
* Most people are resilient.
* Happiness, strengths of character, and good social relationships are buffers against the damaging effects of disappointments and setbacks.
* Crisis reveals character.
* Other people matter mightily if we want to understand what makes life most worth living.
* Religion matters.
* Work matters as well if it engages the worker and provides meaning and purpose.
* Money makes an ever-diminishing contribution to well-being, but money can buy happiness if it is spent on other people.
* As a route to a satisfying life, eudemonia trumps hedonism.
* The ‘heart’ matters more than the ‘head.’ Schools explicitly teach critical thinking; they should also teach unconditional caring.
* Good days have common features: feeling autonomous, competent, and connected to others.
* The good life can be taught.

In another reflection, Chris asks the question: “Is positive psychology bullshit?” (I meet people who ask the same question but leave out “positive”). To answer, he quotes from Harry Frankfort’s (2005) essay “On Bullshit.” Frankfort defines bullshit not as a lie but as an indifference to truth. Because Positive Psychology is based on research published in peer-reviewed journals, this scientific focus exempts it from the BS category. Chris is quick to point out we should all develop a BS detector for anyone who promises the secret to happiness or bliss in six easy steps.

The following are some of reflection titles, quotes, and delightful digressions, aimed to lift our spirits:

* **What Do You Think About in the Shower?**
* **Who Most Enjoys the Small Things in Life?**
  + “I’d like to live as a poor man with lots of money.”

--- Pablo Picasso

* **Fast Food and Impatience**
* **There Are No Saints**
  + “There are two kinds of people in the world, those who believe there are two kinds of people in the world and those who don’t.”

--- Robert Benchley

* **Resilience**
  + “Inside the ring or out, ain’t nothing wrong with going down. It’s staying down that’s wrong.”

--- Muhammad Ali

* **Other People Matter**
  + “I say that in every positive psychology lecture I give and every positive psychology workshop I conduct. It sounds like a bumper sticker slogan, but it is actually a good summary of what positive psychology research has should about the good life broadly construed. It is in the company of others that we often experience pleasure and certainly how we best savor its aftermath.”

--- Christopher Peterson

**Bibliography**

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