

# THE GOOD LIFE

## A Practical Introduction

**Tim LeBon**



CBT  
Psychotherapy

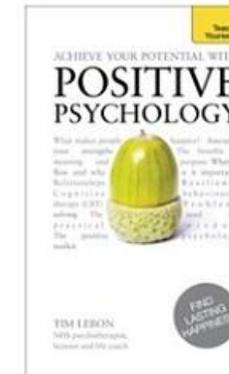
Philosophical Life Coaching  
Supervision

Offices in Pimlico and Fleet Street  
MA (Oxon) MPhil BABCP UKCP and MBACP

### Books by Tim LeBon

**Wise Therapy (Continuum, 2001)**

**Achieve Your Potential with Positive Psychology (Hodder, 2014)**



# Why Consider the nature of the Good Life?



**“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable.” *Seneca***

- Imagine that this boat represents your journey through life.
- If you don't know where you want the boat to go, other people or the winds of fate will take it somewhere.
- Its no better if you're steering but working on the wrong life goals
- Reflecting on the nature of the good life can help you know which direction to travel in.

# What is The Good Life for You?



- A Genie comes and says  
“Tell me your vision of your good life and I will make it happen”

You have 30 seconds to decide.

You can have a list of up to 5 ingredients of your good life.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# *My Definition of the Good Life*

- 1. Health for myself and family*
- 2. Successful career*
- 3. Leave the world a slightly better place*
- 4. Friendships*
- 5. Developing my character so I become the best version of me*

# 4 Theories of the Good Life

- We are now going to look at 4 theories of the good life.
- I'm not going to be arguing that any of them are *completely* right or wrong.
- Each has something to offer.
  
- So as we go through them, I'd like you to consider adding ideas from each theory to your own definition of the good life that you've just written down

# *Hedonism*

## *The Good Life = Happiness*

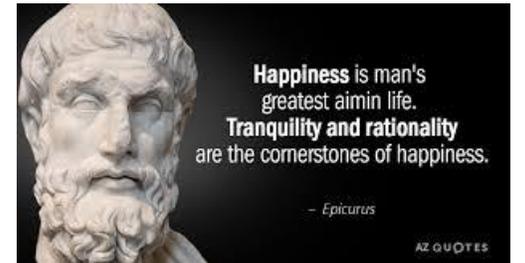
Hedonism states that happiness and the absence of suffering are the only intrinsic goods.

A view held by Epicurus and Jeremy Bentham.

Other things (health, money, fame, virtue) may also be good, but only in so far as they lead to pleasure or avoid pain.

- Hedonism advocates maximising happiness in the long term.
- The life of happiness is not necessarily one of sex and drugs and rock and roll.
- 

It's an attractive idea.



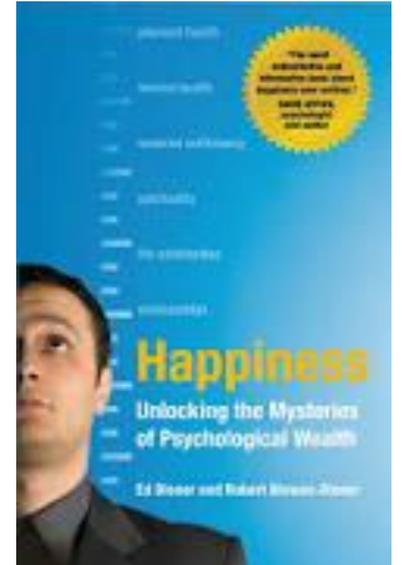
# Happiness as Subjective Well-Being

Psychologists measure happiness using Subjective Well-being

It has a precise meaning, including 3 elements

- a) Overall satisfaction with life +
- b) Positive affect (emotions) -
- c) Negative affect

There's a good case for adding all 3 to your definition of the good life.



# What Sort of Person do you Become if you are Happy?

Quiz: How many of these good things are associated with happiness?

- Longer Life
- Better health
- Higher achievement
- More wealth
- Better productivity
- More pro-social behaviour



See Fredrickson (1998) *What use are Positive Emotions?*  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3156001>

# *My Definition of the Good Life Including Happiness*

- 1. Health for myself and family*
  - 2. Successful career*
  - 3. Leave the world a slightly better place*
  - 4. Friendships*
  - 5. Developing my character so I become the best version of me*
- Overall satisfaction with life*
  - Positive emotions*
  - Absence of negative emotions*



**ALDOUS  
HUXLEY**  
**BRAVE  
NEW  
WORLD**

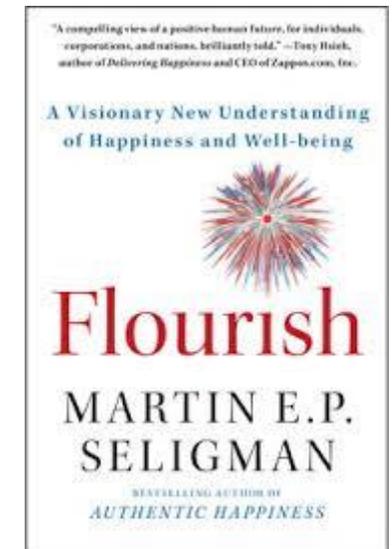
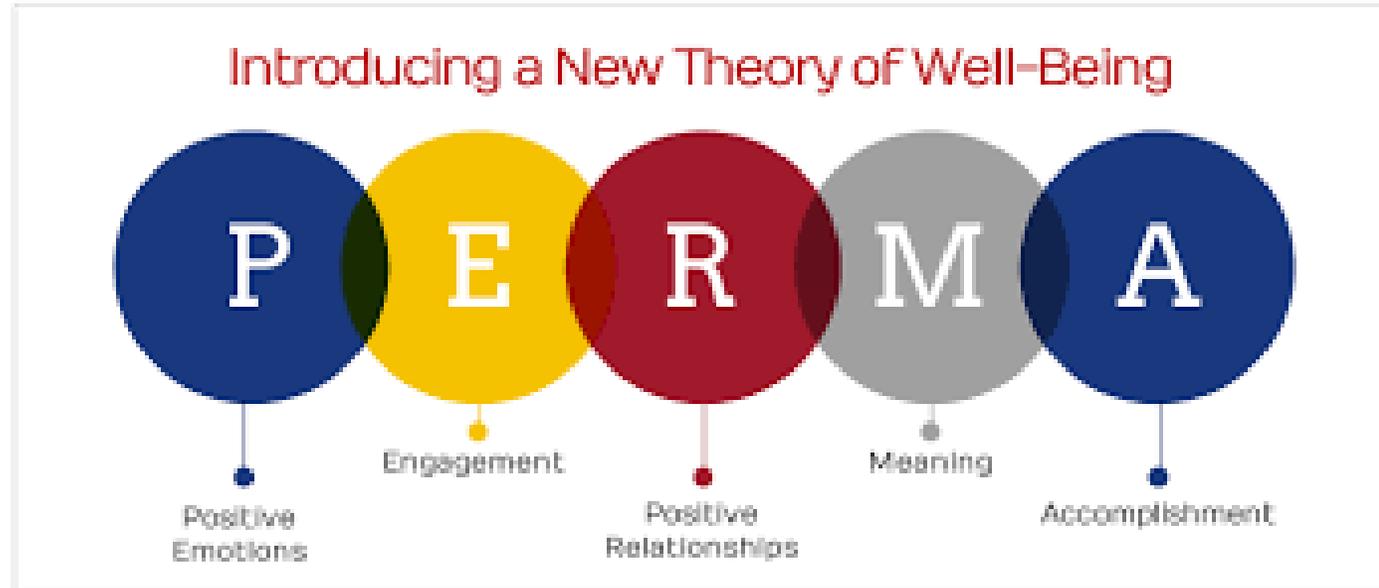


BUT I DON'T WANT COMFORT  
**I WANT GOD**  
**I WANT POETRY**  
I WANT REAL DANGER  
I WANT FREEDOM  
I WANT GOODNESS  
**I WANT SIN**

- JOHN THE SAVAGE  
(*BRAVE NEW WORLD* by ALDOUS HUXLEY)

- Happiness is good, but is it really the only thing that's good, is it the good life?
- Imagine a society where everybody is very happy indeed.
- The government engineers this happy society, for example by making them take daily happiness pills.
- Aldous Huxley envisages such a society in *Brave New World*.
- He considers it to be not a utopia but a dystopia.
- In *Brave New World*, John, ironically called the savage, is willing to trade happiness in return for other goods - like freedom and artistic accomplishment.
- If you agree that there are other things that matter than happiness then you might prefer theory 2, Martin Seligman's PERMA.

## 2) Seligman's PERMA Theory of the Good Life



# My Definition of the Good Life Including Happiness & PERMA

1. Health for myself and family

2. Successful career

3. Leave the world a slightly better place

4. Friendships

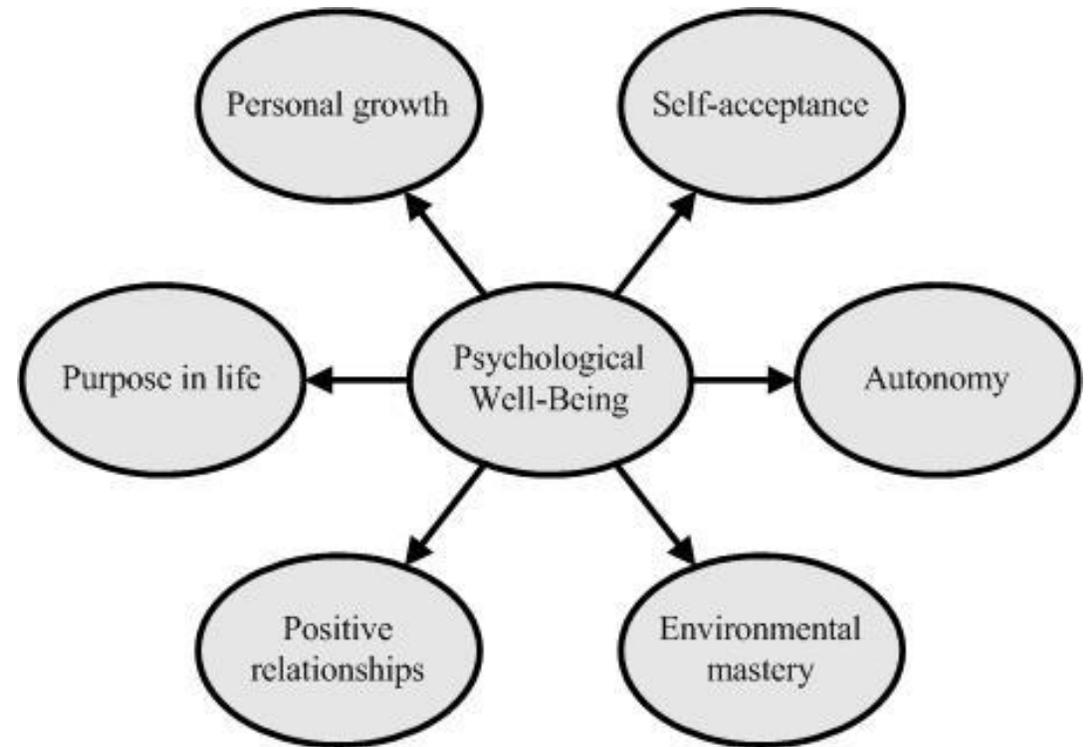
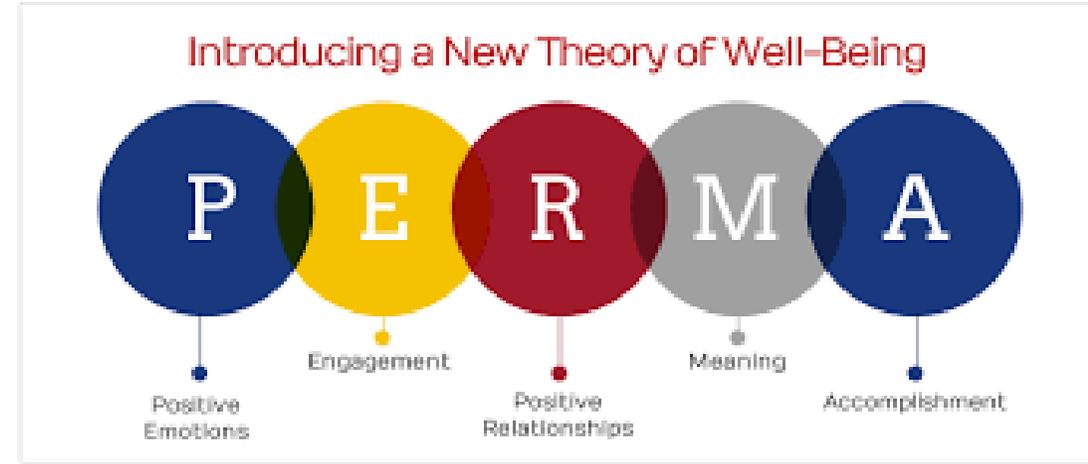
5. Developing my character so I become the best version of me

Overall satisfaction with life  
Positive affect (emotions)  
Absence of negative affect

Engagement (flow)  
Positive relationships  
Meaning  
Accomplishment

# Problems with PERMA as the Good Life

- Where are “few negative emotions” & “overall satisfaction with life” in PERMA?
- Why these five values?
- What about Carol Ryff and her Psychological Well-Being?
- How do you decide between them (and other theories)
- Is there a danger that we are promoting our own personal values into a universal theory of the objectively good life?



# 3) The Good Life as Satisfying your Subjective Values

Informed Preference Satisfaction Theory of Well-Being

Wise Therapy

Tim LeBon



- One response, which I took in my book *Wise Therapy*, is to acknowledge that the good life is partially subjective.
- It's not a case of one size fitting all, there is no universal list of values which are the good life for everyone.
- This doesn't mean that it's not worth exploring what makes life go well for you.
- Remember Seneca's boat analogy
  - Not everyone's boat need head to the same port
  - It's a very good idea to know where you want your boat to go
- According to this theory the good life is all about satisfying your carefully considered subjective values, the life you would choose when you think deeply about how you would like your life to be.



### 3) The Good Life as Satisfying your Subjective Values

- a) Clarify and reflect on your values
- b) Work towards satisfying them (SMART goals, problem-solving etc.)

As coaches we can help people towards the good life in two stages – values clarification and then implementation

#### 1. Values Clarification (also values reflection & refinement)

- In your **rocking chair** aged 80, what would you like to say about how you had lived?
- **My Best Day.** Think back to one of the best days of your life. What happened that makes you say it so good?
- If you only had **6 healthy months to live** how would you spend it. Why?
- The **Lifeline exercise**

Draw a line representing your life and an **X** where you think you are now on it. Reflect on it and on all the things you want to do between now and the end of your life

Birth -----**X**----- Death

# Your Lifeline

Draw a line representing your life and an **X** where you think you are now on it. Reflect on it and on all the things you want to do between now and the end of your life

Birth -----**X**----- Death

- What's on your bucket list?
- What sort of person would you like to be for the rest of your days?
- What positive differences would you like to make to the world?
- Add what's come up to your good life definition.

# My Definition of the Good Life Including Happiness, PERMA & Subjective Values

1. Health for myself and family

Overall satisfaction with life  
Positive affect (emotions)  
Absence of negative affect

2. Successful career

3. Leave the world a slightly better place

Engagement (flow)  
Positive relationships  
Meaning  
Accomplishment

4. Friendships

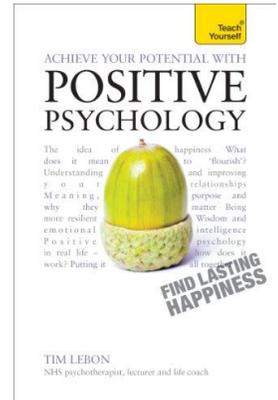
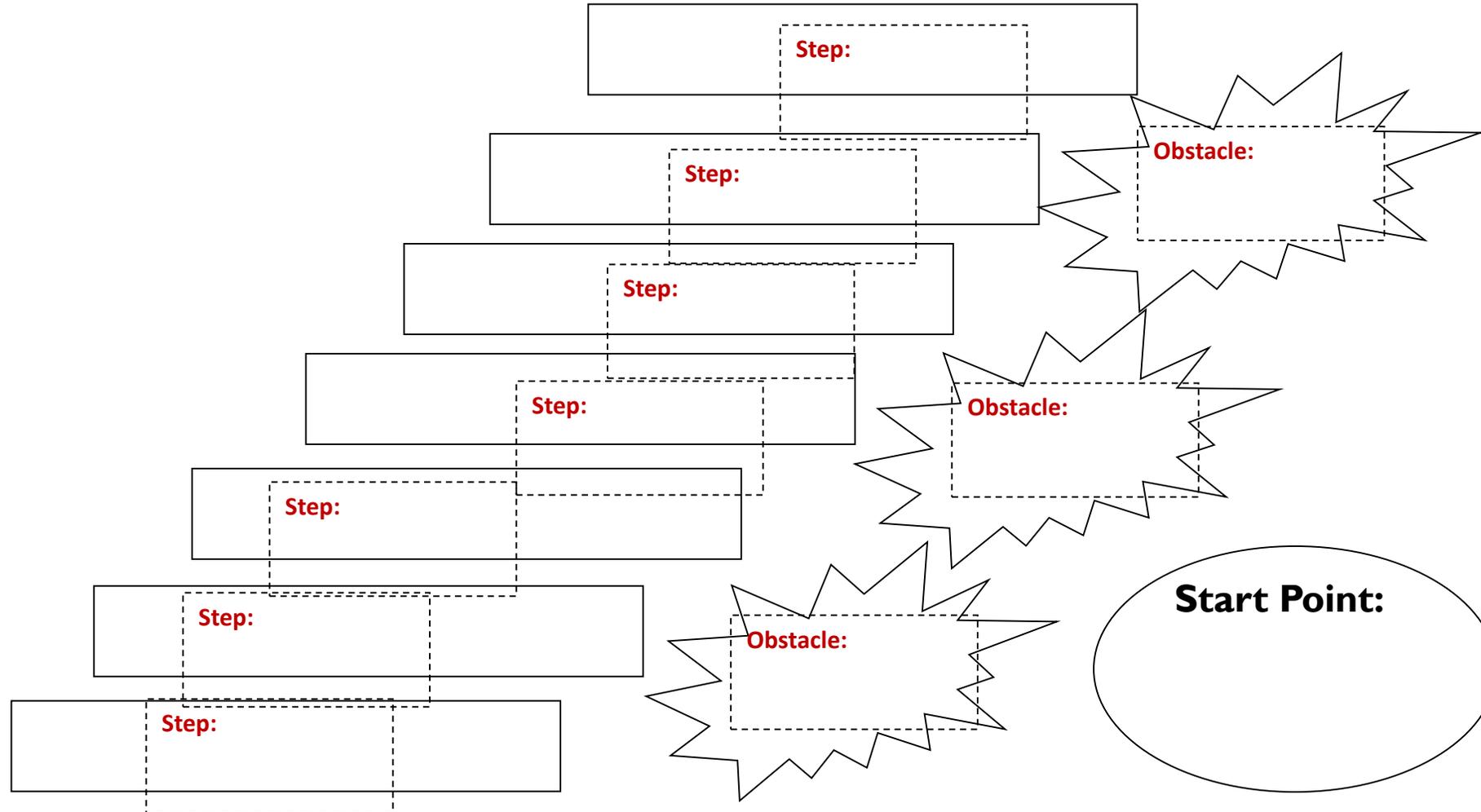
5. Developing my character so I become the best version of me

Subjective Values from Values Clarification  
Fulfilling my potential  
Being a good parent  
Being kind  
Travel

# Step-by-Step Plan

VALUE

**SMART Goal:**



# The Return of the Genie

Reflect on which values are most important to you.

*Put a \* against your top 5 values*



1. *Health for myself and family\**

2. *Successful career*

3. *Leave the world a slightly better place*

4. *Friendships*

5. *Developing my character so I become the best version of me*

*Overall satisfaction with life\**

*Positive affect (emotions)*

*Absence of negative affect*

*Engagement (flow)*

*Positive relationships*

*Meaning\**

*Accomplishment\**

*Your values from values clarification exercises*

*e.g. fulfilling my potential\**

*Being a good parent*

*Being kind*

*Travel*

# The Return of the Genie ... and Friends



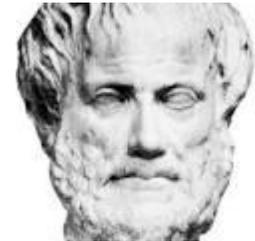
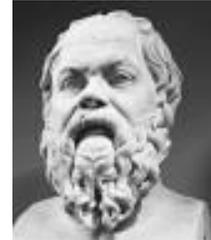
You look up and notice that the genie is not alone.

He has brought along some friends.

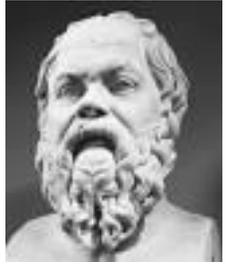
You recognise them as the Greek philosophers Socrates and Aristotle, and the Stoic Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

The genie clears his throat. “Before you make your final decision, “ , he proclaims, “I’d like you to consider a fourth theory of the good life. Which of you 3 eminent gentlemen will begin?”

Aristotle and Marcus both point to Socrates, such is the esteem in which he is held.



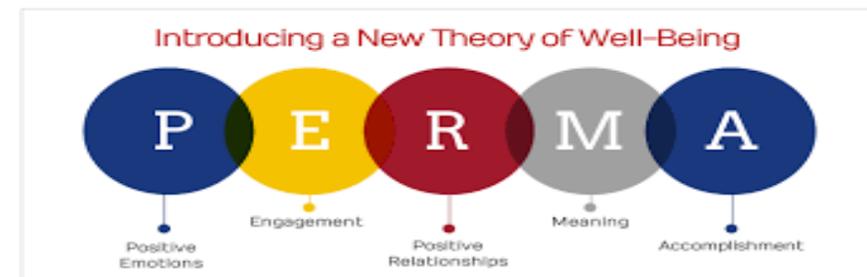
# Socrates and the Importance of Moral Wisdom



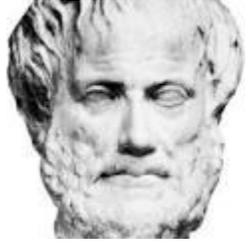
- “I’ve very much enjoyed your ideas about the good life and learnt a lot.”
- “I wonder though if you are missing the most important ingredient of the good life – wisdom”
- You need moral wisdom to avoid leading a bad life.
- Martin Seligman “Osama Bin Laden could have had PERMA”.



- All PERMA values can be positive or negative
- You need moral wisdom to ensure they are part of the good and not the bad life



# Aristotle, Practical Wisdom and the Virtues



- “I agree with you Socrates about moral wisdom. You also all need practical wisdom to work out what is the best thing to do in any situation. Should you be honest or kind? Should you do a job you love or one that pays well? Should you be in a relationship? You need practical wisdom to assess these and other situations well.”
- “As well as wisdom there are 3 other cardinal virtues we all need to live a good life
- Courage – to act well the face of danger or adversity
- Self-Control – to act well in the face of temptation or emotional disturbances
- Justice & Humanity – to act well in the face of our inclination to favour ourselves and those we like or are close to
- Can you honestly tell me you can reliably lead the good life without these excellences of character? So I think you need to add these to your definition of the good life.”

# Stoic Wisdom leading to Virtue & Serenity



- Finally Marcus Aurelius speaks.
- “We Stoics have developed a very practical philosophy which has helped many of us lead a good life. We agree with Socrates and Aristotle about the importance of the virtues. We also emphasise two other ingredients of the good life – accepting with serenity what you can’t control and using reason to guard against irrational judgements that might lead to negative emotions. These might be quite familiar to you as The Serenity Prayer and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, but we Stoics thought of them first!”

**STOIC MINDFULNESS & REASON**

**Paying constant attention to my judgements  
Ensuring my judgements are rational and ethical**



**STOIC WISDOM LEADING TO SERENITY  
What is and what isn't under my control?**

**STOIC VIRTUE & ACTION**

**WISDOM, COURAGE, SELF-CONTROL & JUSTICE**

**What virtue do I need in this situation?**

**What do I need to do?**

**What do I need to accept?**

# Theory 4. The good life is Cultivating the Virtues – Wisdom, Courage, Self-control & Justice

- The argument is that we need wisdom, courage and the like in order to reliably get the more external goods like happiness and friendship – and that if we don't have these virtues, these things might actually do us and other people harm.
- We should try not to be put off by the word “virtue”  
Think of this theory as saying that the good life means being an excellent human being, being a virtuoso at living and becoming the best version of you.
- So you might want to add these 4 virtues to your good life definition.
- But I see you hesitating. Me too!
- Is it really true that having the virtues will lead to happiness and the other things you value?

# A Virtuous Cycle?

- A Virtuous Cycle: The Relationship Between Happiness and Virtue
- [Pelin Kesebir](#) & [Ed Diener](#) (2013)
- “In line with the philosophical thinking on the topic, our review reveals virtue and happiness to be closely associated. It furthermore appears that happiness and virtue are bi-directionally related — with virtue leading to happiness and happiness leading to virtue, in a “virtuous cycle.”

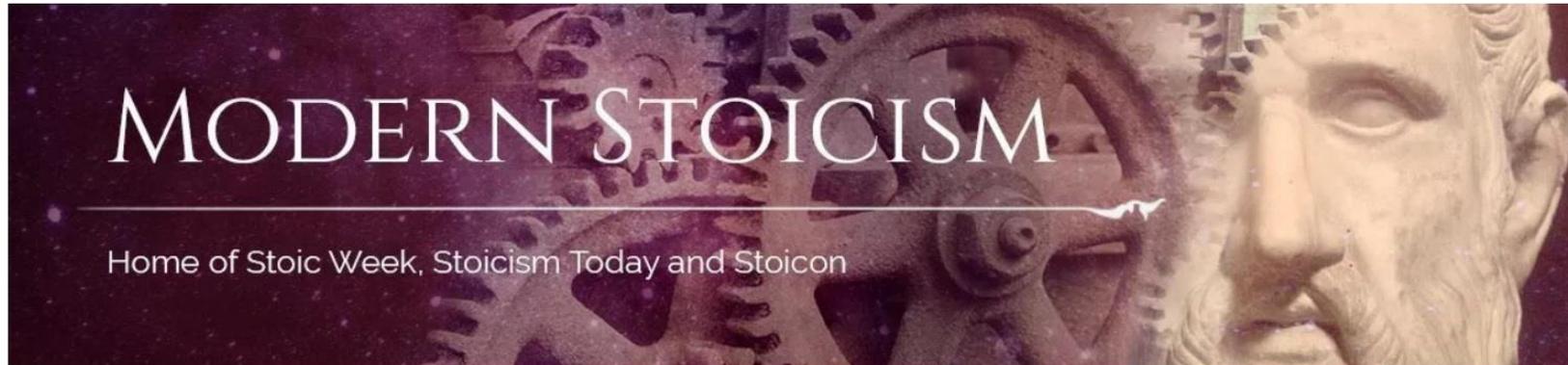
# Two Paths to The Good Life?



# Modern Stoicism

<http://www.modernstoicism.com>

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## Stoic Week 2017 Report (part 2) by Tim Lebon



A strong positive relationship between Stoicism and well-being has been documented in [previous Stoic Week reports](#). This year the emphasis has

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Please consider donating an amount of your choosing to help support Stoic Week. Thank you!

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# LARGE POSITIVE IMPACT ON BEING STOIC FOR EVEN JUST A WEEK

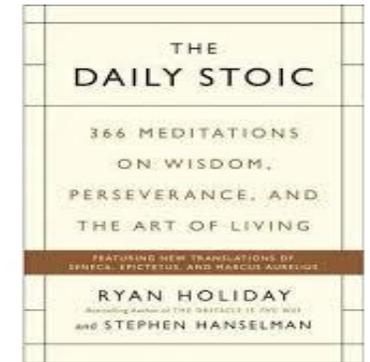
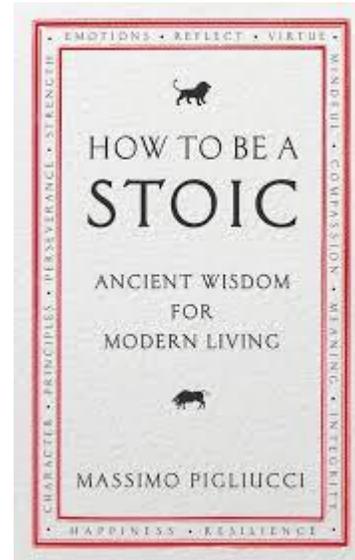
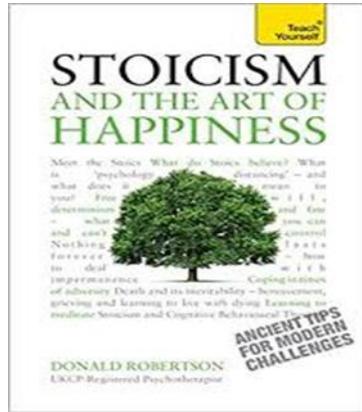
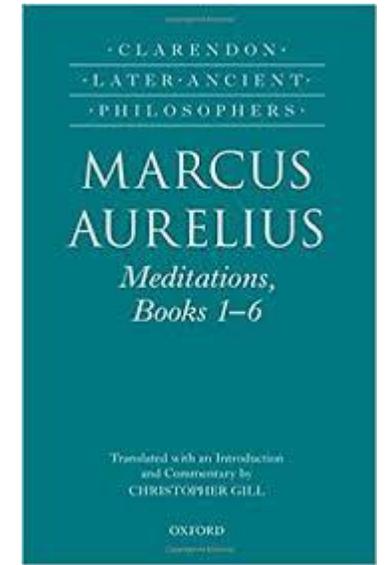
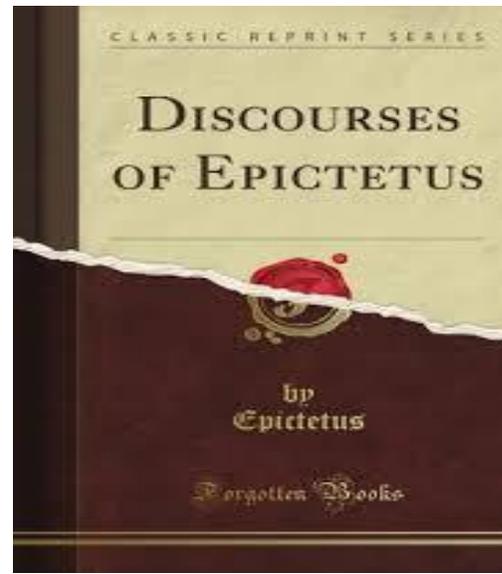
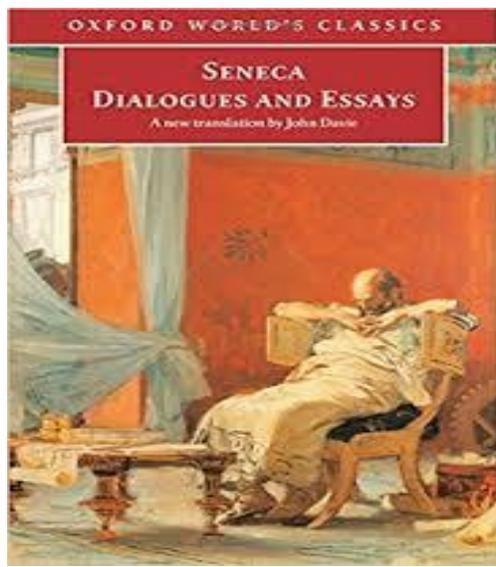
	<b>Stoic Week 2017</b>
<b>No of participants</b>	2870
<b>Increase in Flourishing</b>	10%
<b>Increase in Satisfaction with Life</b>	14%
<b>Increase in Positive Emotions</b>	11%
<b>Reduction in Negative Emotions</b>	14%
<b>Increase In Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours</b>	9%

# LARGER POSITIVE IMPACT ON BEING STOIC FOR A MONTH (and it sticks)

<b>Stoic Resilience Training 2017</b>	<b>After 1 month</b>	<b>3 months follow up</b>
No of participants	254	88
Increase in Flourishing	15%	15%
Increase in Satisfaction with Life	16%	15%
Increase in Positive Emotions	19%	11%
Reduction in Negative Emotions	20%	18%
Increase In Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours	13%	15%

# STRONG POSITIVE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STOICISM & WELL-BEING (at start of Stoic Week)

	Flourishing	Emotions (SPANE)	Life Satisfaction (SWL)	Average well-being
STOIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS	0.47 (.46)	0.43 (.42)	0.36 (.37)	0.48 (.42)



# Positive Psychology

## Best version of You

Topics include:-

What is the best version of me?

How do I develop wisdom, self-control, courage and compassion and self-compassion?

What can Stoicism bring to the show?

*Reading will be provided on a weekly basis.*

Weekly on Thursdays from **May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018**

City Uni, London

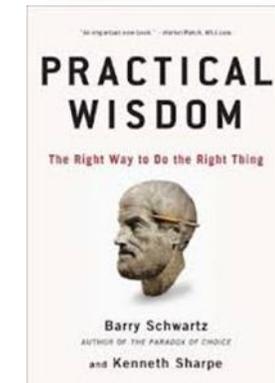
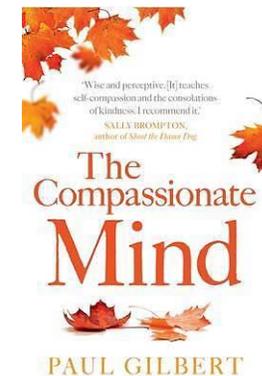
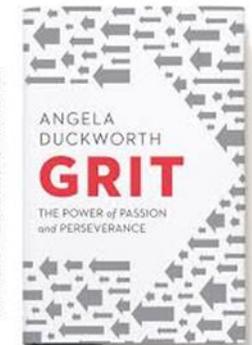
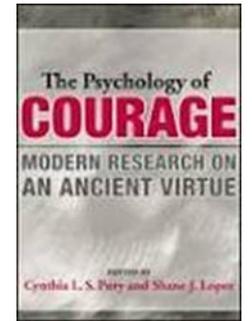
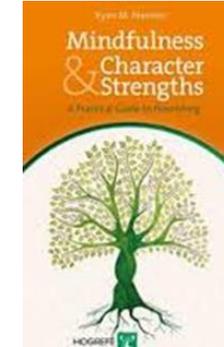
1830-2030

10 weeks

<https://www.city.ac.uk/courses/short-courses/positive-psychology-becoming-the-best-of-you>

STOIC WEEK in October 2018 – [www.modernstoicism.com](http://www.modernstoicism.com)

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# My Definition of the Good Life

## Including Happiness, PERMA, Subjective Values & Virtues

1. Health for myself and family\*
2. Successful career
3. Leave the world a slightly better place
4. Friendships
5. Developing my character so I become the best version of me\*

Overall satisfaction with life\*

Positive affect (emotions)

Absence of negative affect

Engagement (flow)

Positive relationships

Meaning

Accomplishment

Values from Values Clarification

Fulfilling my potential\*

Being a good parent

Being kind

Travel

Virtues

Wisdom\*

Courage

Self-Control

Justice

# Conclusions: So what is the Good Life?

- Happiness?
  - PERMA?
  - Subjective values?
  - Virtues – wisdom, courage, self-control & justice?
- 
- What is the most important thing you will take from this session?
  - How can you follow it up?



# THANK YOU

Email: [tim@timelebon.com](mailto:tim@timelebon.com)

Presentation will be on: <http://blog.timelebon.com>

Web: [www.timelebon.com](http://www.timelebon.com) Twitter: [@timelebon](https://twitter.com/timelebon)

## Tim LeBon



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Philosophical Life Coaching  
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