# The dialectics of emotion

*The darkest hour of the night comes just before the dawn*
Thomas Fuller

**Learning objectives – at the end of the chapter you will be able to…**

- Interpret the relationships between 'psychology as usual,' PP, and 'second wave' PP
- Understand the dialectics of thesis-antithesis-synthesis
- See the reciprocal co-dependency of dichotomous terms
- Critique the pursuit of optimism, self-esteem, freedom, forgiveness and happiness
- Find potential value in pessimism, humility, constraint, anger and sadness
- Appreciate the ambivalent nature of the good life via principles of Buddhist aesthetics
- Understand the significance and value of engaging with the 'dark side' of life

List of topics…

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| • Dialectics | • Freedom – restraint |
| • Second-wave PP | • Righteous anger |
| • Contextuality | • Happiness – sadness |
| • Optimism – pessimism | • Love |
| • Self-esteem – humility | • Taoist / Buddhist aesthetics |

## Introduction

The origin story of positive psychology (PP) is by now a well-worn tale: disenchanted by the way 'psychology as usual' seemed preoccupied with dysfunction, Martin Seligman used his ascension to the APA presidency to inaugurate the new field of PP. Rather than deal in the currency of human failings, the promise of this new movement was to create a forum where scholars could explore the 'brighter sides of human nature' (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p.4), from pleasure to fulfilment. Its emergence provided the definite sense of a movement within psychology towards ostensibly 'positive' phenomena (even if this territory had already been explored by fields like humanistic psychology; Resnick et al., 2001). Thus, in counterpart to fields like clinical psychology that endeavour to alleviate the 'negative' states of mind of mental illness, PP might enquire into 'positive' mental states that constitute mental health. In this way, psychology as a whole could be brought into balance. However, in spite of its success, or even *because* of it, PP has drawn flak from critics who have queried its fundamental concepts, and have even questioned whether it ought to exist at all (McNulty & Fincham, 2011). What are we to make of these developments?

To understand this apparent movement towards, and then away from, the 'positive' within psychology, I would like to introduce a term that is central to this chapter: dialectic. This refers to the dynamic 'tension of opposition between two interacting forces or elements' (Merriam-Webster, 2014). This tension describes the mysterious way in which binary opposites – positive and negative, light and dark, up and down – while being diametrically opposed, are yet intimately connected and dependent upon the other for their very existence. Indeed, this notion is the very premise of this book as a whole: just as the dark is inextricably connected to the light, so are seemingly 'negative' experiences bound in complex ways to positive ones, with

flourishing arising from their mysterious interaction. However, the term dialectic does not simply refer to a static relationship between opposites, but to the way in which many phenomena change and evolve through a process of dynamic movement between these opposites, as elucidated by the German idealist philosopher Hegel (1812). An example of this might be the development of ideas. Say that an argument is advanced, perhaps that human beings are fundamentally good. In Hegelian terms, this proposition would be the thesis. People might identify flaws in this, and respond with the counter-argument that people are inherently bad; this retort would be the antithesis. However, this counter-argument may then itself be found to be flawed. This does not mean though that people would collectively revert to the original thesis. Rather, what might emerge is a subtle *synthesis* that incorporates aspects of both arguments – e.g., suggesting that people have the potential for good and evil – creating a higher unity that transcends and yet preserves the truth of both extremes (Mills, 2000).

We can use this model to understand the emergence of PP: if 'psychology as usual,' focusing on the negative, is the thesis, then PP, embracing the positive, represents its bold antithesis. However, as indicated above, this may not be the end of the dynamic... In its infancy, in its role as antithesis, the PP movement differentiated itself by strongly emphasising the positive: positive thoughts, emotions, and so on. The message was that ostensibly 'negative' phenomena were undesirable, whereas 'positive' qualities and outcomes were necessarily beneficial[1]. Let's refer to this initial embrace of the positive as 'first wave' PP.  However, since boldly claiming the academic spotlight in these early years, PP has begun to be assailed by murmurs of dissent, its initial lively optimism punctured by astute critiques from inside and outside the field. In these critiques, we can discern the process of flaws being found in the antithesis. However, as we saw above, this is not the end of the story. Acknowledgment of flaws does not mean we must revert to the original thesis (psychology as usual). Rather, we can hopefully arrive at a new mature synthesis that takes an altogether more nuanced approach to the notions of positive and negative – we might call this the 'second wave' of PP (Held, 2004), or 'positive psychology 2.0' (Wong, 2011). And, one characteristic of this emergent second wave is an embrace of the dark side of life (i.e., seemingly 'negative' experiences and mental states); while the first wave of PP felt uncomfortable with this dark side, rejected it in favour of the 'brighter sides' of life, this second wave views it in some strange way as being potentially inherent to flourishing. As elucidated in the introduction, although this 'dark side' can cause us distress and discomfort (which is why we tend to avoid it), engaging with these challenges can bring great potential for growth, healing, insight, and transformation; thus, the dark side contains the seed for a potential positive outcome, even when the path towards this outcome is testing.

**Practice essay questions…**
- Evaluate the notion that in certain circumstances, ostensibly positive emotions can be detrimental to wellbeing, while apparently negative emotions can promote flourishing.
- Conceptually, one can no more hope to eradicate the negative (thereby only having the positive) than one could manage to get rid of down (thereby only having up): Discuss.

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[1] From here on, for aesthetic reasons, the terms positive and negative will not be enclosed in quotation marks. However, given that this whole chapter is problematizing and bringing into question the notions of positive and negative, please read all instances of these as if surrounded by appropriate scare quotes!

In this chapter we shall explore the critiques levelled at first wave PP, and examine the emergence of the second wave synthesis. As we shall see, second wave PP means appreciating how *emotions[2] themselves* exist dialectically. Just as, in a macro-sense, psychology as a field is evolving through its own positive-negative dialectic, in a micro-sense we can see this dialectic playing itself out in our own emotional experience. Perhaps we feel unhappy; this is our thesis. Consequently, we endeavour to find happiness; this is our antithetic response. However, as Wong (2011) so astutely identified, there are potential downsides to 'seeking the positive' – positive qualities can sometimes be detrimental to wellbeing, whereas negative processes may at times promote our flourishing. Thus, in time, a synthesis may emerge in which we discern that the good life cannot be found by just eschewing negative emotions, or pursuing positive ones, but involves appreciating the nuances of the whole spectrum of our emotional experience.

We will trace these ideas out over three parts here. Part 1 explores the notion that 'positive can be negative': apparently positive qualities can hinder our flourishing under certain circumstances. Conversely, part 2 enquires whether 'negative can be positive': engaging with the dark side of life (i.e., processes we usually regard as negative) might actually be conducive to wellbeing. These sections represent the process of finding flaws in the antithesis position (i.e., our desire to avoid the negative and seek the positive). Finally, part 3 seeks to establish a synthesis, looking at how some of the most precious experiences in life – like love – inherently involve both positive and negative components; here we shall also explore ways in which we might appreciate this subtle synthesis, based on the aesthetics of Eastern philosophies. However, before we dive into these sections, let me emphasise that in constructing these paradoxical titles – positive can be negative, and vice versa – I am not trying to depict an Alice in Wonderland version of mental life, in which black is white, up is down. Rather, I am just suggesting that phenomena which appear to be negative may, from a different perspective, not be so harmful after all. Our initial appraisal of the valence of a particular state of mind or affairs may be incomplete or inaccurate, and, considered in other lights, contrasting judgments may be reached. As part of that, experiences that one might at first interpret as being part of the darker side of life may actually turn out to herald potentially beneficial outcomes, or be unexpected sources of value, meaning or beauty. Let's illustrate this with an old Buddhist parable, entitled 'Maybe':

> *There was an old farmer, who had toiled away on his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbours came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically. "Maybe," the farmer replied. The next morning, the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbours exclaimed. "Maybe," replied the old man. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbours again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "Maybe," answered the farmer. The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they*

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[2] Emotions can be defined comprehensively as 'episodes of coordinated changes in several components (including at least neurophysiological activation, motor expression, and subjective feeling but possibly also action tendencies and cognitive processes) in response to external or internal events of major significance to the organism' (Scherer, 2000, pp.138-139). However, I am also using the term emotions generously here as a synecdoche to cover all subjective experience, including related concepts such as affect and feelings, as well as cognitive constructs like self-esteem. It will be clear in the context of the text whether I am using the term in the narrow sense (as defined as above) or the broad synecdoche-sense.

> *passed him by. The neighbours congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out in the end. "Maybe," said the farmer …. [Can this labyrinthine process ever end?]*

Here, the initial negative appraisal becomes relativized when placed in a broader context (i.e., the passage of time and subsequent events). Let us refer to this notion of situating an appraisal in a broader context as 'contextualisation' (Garrett & Schmidt, 2012). The story above is an example of 'temporal contextualisation' – the meaning of a current event being altered by perspectives at other points in time. This type of contextualisation is reflected in the notion of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), in which some people who have experienced traumatic events report that these events have led to subsequent shifts in aspects of life that are ultimately viewed as being positive (e.g., closer relationships with loved ones). There is also 'spatial contextualisation' – considering the event from a different perspective in the current moment. For example, what if a person makes a self-determined act which they feel is integral to their flourishing (say, going travelling alone), but this act causes pain to others (the family they are leaving behind). Is this act good or bad? Well, it depends on the context – from whose perspective we are looking at it. As such, one of the messages of this book is that phenomena that may appear at first to be dark (i.e., negative) in nature may in fact become an unanticipated source of light. Conversely, qualities or situations that at first may seem desirable might have their downsides.

Moreover, the range of potential contexts, temporal and spatial, is theoretically infinite and inexhaustible: another can always be found. Thus meaning is always 'deferred', as Lacan (2006) put it. That said, this does not imply moral relativism (i.e., no way of assigning value to phenomena) – ultimately, we can judge situations and behaviours by the extent to which they contribute to the overall wellbeing of as many people as possible (even if making such utilitarian judgements is difficult in practice). Moreover, recognition of contextuality does not render us incapacitated in terms of trying to appraise phenomena; we just do our best with the knowledge we have, while retaining the humility that comes from knowing that we are neither omniscient nor faultless in our judgements. So, having introduced some key ideas, we can begin by exploring potential problems with 'the positive.'

**Positive can be negative**

We turn first to the idea that apparently salutary emotions may actually be damaging to our wellbeing in certain circumstances. We'll begin with some 'individualistic' examples, such as optimism, self-esteem, and freedom, then explore a few prosocial ones, including forgiveness and altruism. (Needless to say, this is far from a comprehensive critique of the vast scope of qualities of interest to PP, but rather a brief foray into a small selection.) Following that, we'll turn to the more unsettling notion that happiness *itself* might be contentious. At this point, you might be thinking, surely these qualities cannot be *un*desirable? Well, this chapter is not about being contrarian and disavowing these; rather, we can just gently point out that in particular contexts and from certain perspectives, these outcomes might be detrimental to an individual themselves and/or to those around them. And, it is when we begin to appreciate these nuances – to cease simplistically categorising particular qualities as positive or negative – that we have begun to embrace the second wave of PP.

Let's start with optimism. Over the centuries, the dangers of excessive or unrealistic optimism have been critiqued and even lampooned, perhaps most famously by Voltaire (1759), who used the fictional Dr. Pangloss to mock Leibniz's assertion that we live in the 'best of all possible worlds.' Even in PP, optimism was recognised from the start as potentially problematic. As Seligman acknowledged in 1990, one must be careful not to be a 'slave to the tyrannies of optimism,' but must be 'able to use pessimism's keen sense of reality when we need it' (p.292). This insight has since been borne out in empirical work, which reveals a diversity of problems associated with undue optimism, many relating to under-appreciation of risk and subsequent maladaptive risk-taking (e.g., smoking; Weinstein et al., 2005). Such actions consequently implicate optimism as a mortality-risk: a seven-decade longitudinal study suggested that children who were 'cheerful' (optimism plus a sense of humour) had shorter lives than their conscientious peers (Friedman et al., 1993). Contrariwise though, other studies have found that optimism predicts longevity (Giltay et al., 2004). So, is optimism undesirable? As with everything, context is key; unfortunately, however, context has thus far been under-appreciated in PP. As such, the task going forward is to elucidate the contextual factors that make optimism (and other qualities analysed here) beneficial or otherwise; for now, we might heed Peterson's (2000, p. 51) advice that 'people should be optimistic when the future can be changed by positive thinking but not otherwise.'

There are shades of optimism in our second quality, self-esteem (almost like an optimism of the self). But, surely one would not wish a person to be afflicted with low levels of this barometer of self-worth? Well, no: generally, wellbeing is better served by high rather than low self-esteem. For example, a prospective study found that adolescents with low self-esteem subsequently had relatively greater criminality, worse economic prospects, and poorer mental and physical health in adulthood (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). However, this does not render high self-esteem unproblematic. As with optimism, high self-esteem is associated with perceived invulnerability and subsequent health-risk behaviours (Gerrard et al., 2000). Inflated assessments about one's capabilities also lead people to making commitments that exceed their capacities – particularly if their ego is threatened – leading potentially to failure; if one's self-esteem is contingent on achieving these goals, dependent upon extrinsic validation, such experiences of failure can be damaging (Crocker & Park, 2004), particularly if one has been ennobled by one's culture to regard success as a birth-right (a claim often levelled against Western societies). Going further, there are still darker sides to high self-esteem: in combination with noxious qualities like narcissism, the resulting brew is linked to higher levels of aggression, particularly when inflated self-appraisals are threatened (Baumeister et al., 1996). As with optimism, self-esteem is not an unqualified good; as ever, the devil is in the contextual detail.

Turning to freedom – or 'self-determination' in the clinical language of academia – how can this possibly be unwanted? Most thinkers regard freedom as integral to wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Rightly so, given the torments that can arise if freedom is denied, revealed most painfully in unforgivable crimes such as slavery. However, can one have *too much* freedom? The troubling consequences of a life without restrictions have been elucidated by existentialist thinkers. Dostoevsky (1880, p.589) argued that freedom from religious proscriptions would lead to the erosion of morality ('everything is permitted'). Going further, Kierkegaard (1834) argued that this sense of unlimited possibilities, 'the dizziness of freedom,' was profoundly debilitating, leading to ontological 'dread': even though we are 'thrown' into situations not of our own making (we do not choose the context in which we are born), and though our knowledge is

imperfect, we must nevertheless continually make choices that irretrievably determine the course of our lives, and assume responsibility for the consequences. It was for this reason that Sartre (1952) said people are 'condemned to be free' (p.399). These insights have been captured in psychology with the work of Schwartz (2000), who suggests that 'excessive' freedom can be experienced 'as a kind of tyranny' (p.79). He uses this notion to critique the ideology of 'rational-choice' economic theory – which holds that people are best served by having a diverse array of options – that underpins our consumer-capitalist society. He cites Iyengar and Lepper's (1999) work showing that a greater diversity of consumer choice is associated with *lower* levels of subsequent satisfaction with the chosen item, arguably due to greater scope for regret over the unselected options. While such troubles may be a luxury afforded by contemporary affluence, it still reinforces the existentialists' perceptive linking of freedom and anxiety.

What about 'prosocial' qualities, such as forgiveness and altruism; are these not 'non-zero-sum' goods (win-win), beneficial to both giver and recipient? Usually, yes. Starting with forgiveness, this is generally beneficial to wellbeing; for instance, forgiveness-based therapies have been used successfully in cases such as treating posttraumatic stress disorder in the aftermath of spousal abuse (Reed & Enright, 2006). However, in certain contexts, forgiveness can be harmful – notably, if it means that a person tolerates or acquiesces to a destructive situation that they might otherwise be emboldened to resist or change. Here we are indebted to McNulty and Fincham's (2011) seminal work on the need for a 'contextual' approach to PP, who make their point through a summary of studies on abusive relationships. Longitudinal surveys of couples suggest that people who make benevolent 'external' attributions for their partner's abuse (explaining it away as a consequence of situational factors, such as work stress) and/or are more forgiving of such transgressions are at greater risk of on-going abuse. Needless to say, these studies are not about 'victim-blaming,' but trying to help victims to hold aggressors accountable; the real issue of course is the injurious behaviour of their tormentor. Nevertheless, such studies do make the point that the merits of prosocial qualities do depend on context.

Away from the highly-charged arena of abusive relationships, it seems difficult to imagine how acts of beneficence such as altruism and kindness could be problematic. In most circumstances, such behaviours do serve the wellbeing of both the protagonist and the recipient (Post, 2005). However, it is possible for these to conflict with *other* prosocial goods in ways that ultimately undermine wellbeing. In one experimental set-up, Batson et al. (1995) found that altruism could potentially undercut the moral principle of justice. Participants were encouraged to feel empathy for a (fictional) terminally ill child ostensibly on a waiting list for pain-relieving drugs, while control participants received no such encouragement. The former were more likely to allow the child to skip ahead of other (equally deserving) children on the list, even though they knew this was wrong (they acknowledged that their choice violated principles of justice and could erode social cohesion). This is a good example of the broader concept of the *ethical dilemma*, in which competing goods – *both* of which are valued – are in opposition, such that the fulfilment of one necessarily impedes the other. A salient example of this today, bedevilled as we are by the fear of terrorism and the rapid development of technology, is the competing goods of self-determination, safety, and privacy (Harris, 2011). Each is recognised as being valuable to flourishing, yet in extremis, each impedes the others and must be curbed. That the balancing of these goods is continually being tested, in the courts of law and public opinion, shows how near-impossible this balancing act is.

Above all these particular qualities, we can now turn to perhaps the ultimate concern of PP: happiness itself. Given that the pursuit of this ephemeral goal has been valorised by the finest thinkers throughout the centuries, from Aristotle's (350 BCE) Nichomachean Ethics to Thomas Jefferson's American constitution, what problem might there be with this most valued of ends? Although this is a vast, complex terrain, we can touch upon three issues, relating to defining, seeking, and accepting happiness. First, in terms of defining happiness, PP is developing a nuanced understanding of the different forms of happiness, from the pleasure of hedonic 'subjective' wellbeing (Diener et al., 1999) to the fulfilment of eudaimonic 'psychological' wellbeing (Ryff, 1989). These distinctions are not new, with analysis of such subtleties being common currency in classical Greek philosophy, for example, where Aristotle describes eudaimonic happiness as 'an activity of the soul that expresses virtue,' in contrast to mere hedonic pleasure which he condemns as a 'life suitable to beasts' (McMahon, 2006). As such, qualitative distinctions have long been present in discourses around happiness, with some forms of it being seen as deeper, more fulfilling, or in some inchoate way as simply better than others. This point was pithily captured by John Stuart Mill (1863, p.9), who said it was 'better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.' On this reading, pursuing hedonic happiness would arguably be disadvantageous if it hindered one from seeking qualitatively richer states of wellbeing.

However, this last point can itself be critiqued from the perspective of our second issue here, seeking happiness, as some argue that the very act of pursing this elusive goal renders it ever more distant. To quote Mill (1873, p.100) again, 'those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness.' Or, as (possibly) expressed by Thoreau, 'Happiness is like a butterfly: the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it comes and sits quietly on your shoulder.' This same insight can be found in Buddhism, where the desire for happiness is seen as the root of unhappiness: the very act of resisting the present and wishing for a 'happier' state of mind is what creates the dissatisfaction one hopes to alleviate. Or, expressed in the modern terminology of self-regulation theory, Carver and Scheier (1990) suggest that dysphoria stems from a discrepancy between expectations and reality; yearning for happiness actually widens this discrepancy, thus increasing dissatisfaction (a theory borne out in empirical studies; Mauss et al., 2011). This yearning may be exacerbated through cultural pressures that turn happiness into something approaching a social norm; ironically, critical theorists accuse PP of perpetuating this very process, creating a 'tyranny of positive thinking' (Held, 2002). For example, Barbara Ehrenreich (2009) has written powerfully about her experience of being diagnosed with cancer, and of feeling a certain cultural pressure to disavow her feelings of anger and despair. The charge is that happiness becomes expected, obligatory even, which may engender a climate of implicit blame and stigmatisation towards those who fail to achieve this goal, with unhappiness seen almost as a moral failure (Ahmed, 2007).

**Reflection...**

Have you ever felt pressure to be happy? When you are feeling low, is this feeling compounded by the thought that you shouldn't feel that way? Does PP contribute to a culture in which there is an expectation to be happy? If so, how might we reconfigure PP so that it doesn't add to this oppressive cultural weight?

The third issue concerns, almost perversely, the unforeseen pitfalls of actually believing oneself to be happy. We may be fortunate enough to enjoy positive states of mind, whether through our genetic inheritance (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), our socio-cultural position (Prilleltensky, 2008), or our own efforts through practices like meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The danger with these small mercies, however, is that these may lull us into believing that life is as good as it could be. We risk becoming tranquilised, acquiescent to a social context that conspires to undermine collective wellbeing through iniquities such as societal inequality. In this way, we may be beguiled by happiness into the myopia that Marxist theorists call 'false consciousness,' i.e., a state of mind that prevents us from acting in our own interests (Jost, 1995). This is what Marx (1844, p.244) had in mind when he called religion the 'opium of the people.' This is often taken as a criticism of religion, but his real target was society, and the desperate conditions in which many people are forced to live. Marx saw dignity in religion, calling it 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world.' His issue, however, was that the comforts provided by religion meant people were pacified into inaction; Marx thus urged people to relinquish these comforts in order to realise their full potential as human beings: 'The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness,' empowering people to overcome social conditions that *need* illusions. It may be that our apparent happiness dissuades us from taking action to really forge a better world. Perhaps we *need* to feel discomfort – to let ourselves become aware of the darker side of life – in order to propel us into creating the best life we can for ourselves, a question which leads us into the next section...

**Negative can be positive**

Thus far we have shone a critical light upon topics conventionally embraced within PP, showing that qualities generally regarded as positive may be problematic in some ways. In terms of the dialectical movement within psychology, if 'psychology as usual' is the thesis, and first-wave PP the antitheses, then this critique represents the process of finding flaws in the antithesis, which is the prelude to the synthesis (second wave PP). However, before we discuss this synthesis in the third part of the chapter, we have not finished 'troubling' the antithesis: we can do this by not only destabilising the concept of positive, but by finding redeeming features in qualities often regarded as negative, in embracing what appears to be the 'dark side' of life. This is a somewhat unorthodox route to take, certainly within PP; however, the terrain is expansive, mysterious, and certainly worth investigating. There are many potential areas we can explore; indeed, this book as a whole is devoted to this enquiry. So, rather than pre-empt the surprises offered by subsequent chapters, we will content ourselves here with analysing the obverse qualities of those critiqued above, thus lending symmetry to the chapter. So, having considered the pitfalls of optimism, self-esteem, freedom, forgiveness and happiness, we can briefly extol the potential virtues of their antonyms (of near versions thereof) – pessimism, humility, restrictiveness, anger, and sadness. Again, the aim is not to argue that black is white and turn these negatives into unalloyed goods, but just to show that we may find unanticipated value in these unexpected places.

We began above by noting the pitfalls of optimism, at least to the extent that it is 'excessive.' Naturally, we can invert this questioning and consider the value of its counterpart, pessimism. So, without engaging in unnecessary repetition – we don't need to revisit the link with risk-taking – we can explore what other qualities it may offer. We might, for example, appreciate the connection between pessimism and proactive coping, or as Norem (2001) puts it, the 'positive

power of negative thinking.' Norem is not advocating a trait-like downward cast of mind that sees a cloud in every silver lining. Rather, this is strategic anticipatory fault-finding and problem solving, heeding the advice of Benjamin Franklin – 'He that lives upon hope will die fasting – and prudently scanning the horizon for storms to thus be better prepared should inclement weather strike. A neat example of this is provided by the astronaut Chris Hadfield (2013) in his account of the training programme at NASA, in which his trainers devised countless simulations of 'bad-news scenarios' to enable him to practice dealing with every conceivable mishap. He articulates of the value of cultivating a pessimistic mindset, crucially though, only with regard to circumstances that he personally has the power to affect. This is the key difference between the strategic pessimism exhibited in pro-active coping, and 'pure' pessimism, which simply assumes the worst. Whereas the latter may lead to apathy and even despair, the former can be empowering: one feels emboldened through cultivating the ability to deal with life's challenges. As Hadfield put it, on-going repetition of such contingency planning enables one to forge 'the strongest possible armor to defend against fear: hard-won competence' (p.54).

In Hadfield's cautious and un-hubristic philosophy, we can discern the second of our inverse virtues: humility. Although not strictly an antonym of high self-esteem (whose true opposites are perhaps insecurity or self-pity, neither of which one could realistically advocate), it is often treated as such (Rowatt et al., 2002). Etymologically the term derives from the Latin *humilis* (i.e., lowly, humble, or literally 'on the ground'), and it is frequently taken as meaning having a low opinion of oneself, as revealed by the contemptuous derivate 'humiliation' (being reduced to lowliness). However, Rowatt et al. argue that it in fact involves a 'genuine modesty' that is of great value, characterised by 'respectfulness, willingness to admit imperfections, and a lack of self-focus or self-serving biases' (p.198). Perhaps Tangey (2005, p.411) best captured the quiet virtue of humility by describing it as a 'forgetting of the self.' Notwithstanding the critique of altruism above, many virtuous prosocial acts stem from such self-abnegation (Worthington, 2007). However, the impact of humility on the protagonist themselves may be even more profound. Buddhism holds that an overweening sense of self, and a lack of due humility, is the root of much suffering, generating noxious states like greed (wanting to reward the self) and hatred (for that which threatens the self). As the Buddha said, 'One dwells in suffering if one is without reverence and deference' (Lamotte, 1981). Consequently, the grace of 'self-forgetting' is that it can be a salve for these self-created poisons. Going further, humility can be a doorway to transcendent experiences of great significance. Highlighting the value of humility in the context of medical training, DasGupta (2008, p.981) argues that it can render one receptive to the gifts the present moment may offer, giving us the opportunity to become spiritually 'transfigured' as we open up to possibilities in the world and encounter new dimensions of ourselves.

This absorbing idea that the present-moment can bestow unexpected boons if one is sufficiently receptive also pertains to our third inverse quality, restriction. We saw above that an 'excess' of freedom can perhaps be debilitating. However, we are not often given to imagining that limiting our freedom can be beneficial. Strangely enough though, such restrictions may paradoxically be liberating. Returning again to Buddhism, we encounter the insight that placing restrictions on choice can actually *create* freedom: one is alleviated from the burden of having to choose, and is thus able to simply be present in the moment (Wright, 2008). It is for this reason that monastic life is strictly regulated by rigid routines, governing everything from sleep patterns to food intake. In restricting the body thus, the mind is liberated from the myriad of inconsequential but incessant choices that otherwise dominate daily existence ('Should I eat now, or in 10 minutes?

Or later? Pizza? Unhealthy. Tofu? Disgusting. Maybe, pizza…'). People are thus ennobled to 'step out of ordinary thought processes' and engage in the 'non-conceptual and focused' attention that is so valued by meditators (Wright, 2008, p.14). The creation of such routines is not only beneficial in a spiritual context. Developing forces of habit that are strong enough to withstand the whims of our passing mood is central in other areas, from education to physical health. For instance, regular exercise requires us to commit to a pattern of activity regardless of whether we happen to feel like doing it at the time (Aarts et al., 1997). It is only by restricting our fleeting inclinations, and restraining our ability to make short-sighted choices, that we can pursue long-term goals – like health or obtaining qualifications – that are vital for flourishing.

So, in certain lights, we can find virtue in pessimism, humility and restriction. However, such analyses, while perhaps counterintuitive, are relatively uncontentious. What about more explicitly 'dark' qualities, like anger? Anger is often presented as a destructive emotion – for instance, Beck (1999) presents it simultaneously as a manifestation of hate, a form of 'warped' thinking, and a root cause of evils such as war. But… is it always? In some respects, anger is the opposite of forgiveness: while both can be a response to being wronged, the former constitutes a form of acceptance, whereas the latter implies a lack of it. The question is, *should* certain things be tolerated, accepted or forgiven? As the saying goes, 'If you're not angry, you're not paying attention'! (This quote apparently first appeared as a car bumper-sticker in the 1970s! Not that this undermines the potency of its polemic; wisdom can be found in the most unlikely of places.) These sentiments have led to a re-evaluation of anger in some quarters, led by Tavris (1989), who argues that it is fundamentally a *moral* emotion, a response to an ethical/moral value being breached. This of course does not mean all incidents of anger are justified or proportionate. Far from it. As Aristotle (350 BCE) recognised, 'Anybody can become angry – that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power.' Thus, as Haidt (2003) acknowledges, expressions of anger may often be both selfish and antisocial. However, 'the motivation to redress injustices can also be felt strongly in third-party situations, in which the self has no stake' (p.856). Here we are getting close to the idea of anger as a moral reaction.

Thus, even if one has no 'ties to the victimized group,' one can, and arguably *should*, feel outrage at iniquities such as oppression, and so 'demand retaliatory or compensatory action' on behalf of the victims (Haidt, 2003, p.856). Moreover, being among the victimised does not render one's anger selfish; on the contrary, it can lend it even greater moral force. These considerations raise searching questions about the nature of wellbeing, and about the role of PP. We enquired above whether happiness could be a state of false consciousness, a fortuitous state which tranquilises us into accepting a societal status quo that is in fact profoundly invidious. Indeed, critics of PP have argued that in promoting 'happiness' activities that enable and even encourage individuals to accept this status quo, PP has not only often ignored the structural causes of suffering – from oppression to inequality – but may even be complicit in upholding it (Ehrenreich; 2009). We can ask, with so many people worldwide suffering untold torments, *should* we be happy? Should we even *want* to be happy? Are we in fact not closer to the spirit of wanting humanity to flourish if we are angry, despairing, protesting at the state of the world? And it is here that we can really view anger as integral to flourishing, but crucially, not in an 'I'm all right' individualistic sense, but flourishing in a collective way. The great social movements of recent years, from civil rights to environmentalism, have been propelled by a righteous anger that the world should *and can* be better than it is (Siegel, 2009). One must not necessarily wish this kind of dysphoria away. As

Ahmed (2010, p.223) puts it, a 'revolutionary politics' – i.e., movements to change the world for the better – must 'work hard to stay proximate to unhappiness.' Perhaps, then, a second-wave PP will make room for anger as a moral emotion, recognising it as a vital motivational spur that compels us to agitate for a better world for all.

| Research and practice case studies… |
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| The moral force of righteous anger has rarely been expressed more powerfully than by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights leader who was assassinated in 1968. Preaching with almost unmatched eloquence, he articulated a vision of struggling for a better world, crucially though, without letting one's vision becoming poisoned by hate. As expressed in a sermon in 1958: '*As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to make you hate him. Always avoid using violence in your struggle, for if you succumb to the temptation of using violence, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness… So violence is not the way.*' King realised that this meant taking the hard road: '*Honesty impels me to admit that such a stand requires willingness to suffer and sacrifice, so don't despair if you are persecuted for righteousness' sake.*' However, echoing the point made above, King argued that one must not be lulled into settling for an easy, pleasant life: '*The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and to avoid pain.*' What then should we aim for? King was clear: '*Over the centuries men have sought to discover the highest good… I have an answer… It is love*' (in King, 2007, p.344-345). These quotes perfectly encapsulate the dialectical message of this chapter and this book. |

And yet … what if the world cannot be changed, or at least cannot change as profoundly or as quickly as we would like… what then? There is the risk then that anger hardens and becomes hate, which *is* destructive, afflicting not only its target, but being a corrosive inside the holder, as Martin Luther King recognised. As the Buddha said: 'Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.' For this reason, the Dalai Lama (1997) urges compassion, of course for those suffering, but more challengingly, also for those causing this pain (partly to unburden oneself of hate, but also on the grounds that such people, too, will ultimately be greatly pained as a result of their actions). One might ideally feel compassion even while fighting for a cause, as the Dalai Lama has shown in his struggle with China for Tibetan independence (Thurman, 2008). Even as we cultivate compassion though, in the face of an implacable situation, anger may give way to sadness. Now, one would not *wish* sadness upon people, for it can truly be a heart-breaking state of mind. And yet, it may also be a profoundly *true* experience, and one that we must not chastise people for feeling. In many ways, sadness may be the right, genuine response to a phenomenon, the very condition of caring. For instance, for most bereaved parents, intense experiences of grief are not a manifestation of disorder, but are an expression of love, and indeed a 'way to maintain a connection to a beloved deceased child' (Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014, p.6). As we asked above in relation to anger, *should* one feel any differently in such a situation, or would one even *want* to? Would not happiness, or other positive states of mind, be profoundly inappropriate?

However, there is currently a danger – in PP, and in society generally – of states such as sadness becoming viewed, not as appropriate and genuine reactions to a troubling world, but as dysfunctions to be alleviated. This danger, for our purposes here, is twofold. First, the encroachment of medical discourses in many areas of life means that we risk pathologising states like sadness, thereby condemning the dark side of life. For instance, Thieleman and

Cacciatore (2014) discuss the construction of the recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and the controversy over whether prolonged grief should be defined as a psychopathology ('persistent complex bereavement-related disorder'). Of course, therapeutic help should be given to people that want assistance to deal with such experiences; however, we enter troubling territory if we pathologise these dimensions of human existence. As Horowitz and Wakefield (2007, p.225) put it, sadness is 'an inherent part of the human condition, not a mental disorder.' Unfortunately though, we see a creeping medicalization of existence, where ordinary aspects of being human are treated as diseases to be medicated away (Szasz, 1960). This is troubling on multiple levels. It alienates sufferers themselves, making them feel estranged from their suffering, and from humanity, as if there is something wrong with them. There can be more severe consequences too, such as the involuntary deprivation of freedom in psychiatric care (Matthews, 2000). As such, there are real ethical issues involved in the conceptualisation and treatment of 'unwanted' mental states, and PP must be wary of colluding in discourses that pathologise or otherwise condemn negative experiences such as sadness.

Even aside from these more extreme worries, there is a risk – milder and yet potentially more insidious and corrosive – that PP contributes to a culture in which states such as sadness are just seen as somehow wrong. As we saw above, cultural expectations of happiness can have damaging consequences, from the 'tyranny of positive thinking,' to the possibility that *seeking* wellbeing may actually foster unhappiness. Of course, it is to be welcomed that PP provides interventions that enable people, *if they wish*, to alleviate their distress and generate wellbeing. However, it is vital that PP does not imply that dysphoric states are inherently wrong. For one thing, this may well compound such distress, leading sufferers to feel bad about feeling bad. In Buddhism, this is known as the 'two arrows'; the initial distress (the first arrow) is wounding enough, but tormenting oneself over feeling distressed is a second arrow that exacerbates the suffering (Bhikkhu, 2013). Moreover, such states may bear important messages, in which one may find value: they may show us how much we care, be a source of inspiration, or a font of meaning and even transcendent beauty. Or they may not, and may simply be distressing; but we need *that* to be ok, as simply another dimension of human experience that we allow ourselves to feel. In meditation, there is a wonderful metaphor designed to encourage people to listen to, and even value, ostensibly negative emotions, namely, the notion of respectfully welcoming these into the mind as if inviting guests into one's house. Even if these guests from the dark side are unexpected, or even unwanted, they may serve some purpose which we, in our current state, are unable to fathom or appreciate.

| Art links… |
| --- |
| The metaphor of respectfully 'welcoming' emotions into the mind was captured beautifully by the 13th Century Persian mystic-poet Rumi (1995, p.109) in this timeless verse:<br><br>*This being human is a guest house.*<br><br>*Every morning a new arrival.*<br><br><br>*A joy, a depression, a meanness,*<br><br>*some momentary awareness comes* |

> *as an unexpected visitor.*
>
> *Welcome and entertain them all!*
> *Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,*
> *who violently sweep your house*
> *empty of its furniture,*
> *still, treat each guest honorably.*
> *He may be clearing you out*
> *for some new delight…*
>
> *Be grateful for whoever comes,*
> *because each has been sent*
> *as a guide from beyond.*

**The aesthetics of dialectics**

We have painted a nuanced picture in which ostensibly positive qualities can be detrimental to wellbeing, while apparently negative ones may in fact have unanticipated virtues. Does this undermine the case for PP, since its stated aim was to redress the 'negativity' of 'psychology as usual' by focusing on more positive dimensions of existence? If these concepts are contentious– if 'positive can be negative,' and vice versa – does this not invalidate the very premise of PP? I would argue no. If PP is the antithesis to 'psychology as usual,' if flaws are then discerned in this antithesis (as the two sections above have highlighted), this does not compel us to scurry back to the thesis, back to psychology as usual. Rather, in this dialectical process, the next stage is ideally *synthesis*, in which the truths of both thesis and antithesis are preserved, while the flaws in their respective positions are overcome. And, I suggested, a second wave PP was beginning to emerge which represented just such a synthesis. In this, there is a movement away from a Manichean perspective – from a simplistic binary view that un-reservedly views negative emotions as undesirable and positive ones as salutary – towards a more nuanced appreciation of the complexities of the good life. And it is this notion of *appreciating* these complexities that I shall focus on in this final section. First, I will argue that if we understand dialectics as the dynamic interplay between opposites (leaving aside for now the Hegelian notion of thesis-antithesis-synthesis), then human experience is inherently dialectical. I will do this by considering, as an example, perhaps the most elevated and sought-after of human emotions: love. I will then finish by drawing on aesthetic principles at the heart of Eastern philosophy that might offer us a model for how we can learn to appreciate these complexities.

Firstly then, let us consider the notion that human experience, including its most elevated states, is inherently dialectical (using this in a general sense to mean the interplay between opposite). This point has been recognized by scholars at the forefront of developing the second wave of PP (which remains concerned with flourishing, but appreciates its ambivalent and complex nature). As Ryff and Singer (2003, p.272) put it, the good life involves an 'inevitable dialectics between positive and negative aspects of living.' Likewise, Resnick et al. (2001) emphasise that

dialectical opposites are conceptually co-dependent: the notion of 'positive' depends on the existence of 'negative' for its very meaning. As such, a key message underlying this second wave – and likewise this book – is that since the dark side (negative) is an inevitable dimension of life, our task in PP is to embrace it and allow it to be part of our experience of life. Going further, Lazarus (2003) suggested that many emotional states are 'co-valenced.' This means not only that it is difficult to characterise particular emotions as either positive or negative – since this appraisal depends on context, as this chapter has emphasised – but that specific mental states inherently involve complex, intertwined shades of light and dark. Lazarus offers various examples of this dialectical phenomenon. For example, hope involves a tantalising and fragile mix of yearning for a desired outcome, a degree of confidence that this outcome has at least some chance of occurring, and a gnawing anxiety that it will not. Perhaps nowhere is the dialectical nature of emotions revealed most strongly than by that most valorised of emotional states – love.

There are many ways of looking at love, a word that encompasses a multitude of emotional relationships. Drawing on distinctions elaborated at least as far back as classical Greece, Lee (1973) differentiates between six different 'types' of love: *eros* (romantic, passionate), *ludus* (flirtatious, playful), *storge* (filial, fraternal), *pragma* (rational, sensible), *mania* (possessive, dependent), and *agape* (unconditional, selfless). Such differentiations make us wary of generalising about love; nevertheless, arguably most, if not all, of these types – with the possible exception of *agape* – involve a dialectical blend of light and dark. There are many ways of viewing this dialectic, but all are essentially variations on the idea that, as C.S. Lewis (1971) so memorably put it, 'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.' Love can be troubled and even ended by the vicissitudes of fate in all manner of ways, from heart-wrenching partings to the slow erosion of feelings over time. Even in the midst of love, one can be threatened by the fear of its loss, giving rise to complications in one's expressions of love, from anxiety to jealousy to anger. Spitzberg and Cupach (1998) – whose book '*The Dark Side of Close Relationships*' shows we are by no means the first to explore this murky territory – even go so far as to claim provocatively that 'love and hate are indeed impossible to disentangle' (p.xiii). While this may not apply to all forms and instances of love – *storge*, *pragma* and *agape* all stand out as probable exceptions – it remains that love invariably encompasses, as an integral component, a spectrum of negative feelings that can be troubling to varying degrees.

However – and here is where we truly enter into dialectical thinking – the vulnerability we feel when we love is not an aberration of love, but the very condition of it, the 'price tag' as it were. Love thus not only has an inevitable dark side, but this darkness is *inextricably* linked to the more beautiful and elevating dimensions of love. This is not to justify the complicated expressions noted above, such as anger or jealousy; these are indeed perversions of love, examples of 'love gone bad.' But the vulnerability that may potentially underlie these is, as Lewis (1971) recognised, the condition we have to enter into in order to be in love; they are inseparable, two sides of the same coin. This is because love, to an extent, means placing our heart and our fate in the hands of the 'Other,' whose actions cannot be controlled, and whose reciprocal love cannot be willed. This 'insurmountable duality of beings' creates what Levinas (1987, p.88) calls 'the pathos of love': Love thus means entering into 'a relation with alterity, with mystery.' Indeed, as Bauman (2013, p.7) phrases it, any attempt to 'tame' this mystery, to 'make the knowable predictable and enchain the free-roaming – all such things sound the death-

knell to love'; thus, love means embracing the 'caprice of fate – that eerie and mysterious future, impossible to be told in advance.' Love is thus fundamentally dialectical, a transcendent blend of light and dark, joy and terror, safety and fear. As Bauman eloquently phrases it, 'to love means opening up to that most sublime of all human conditions, one in which fear blends with joy into an alloy that no longer allows its ingredients to separate.' Or, in the immortal poetry of Khalil Gibran (1927), 'When love beckons to you, follow him; though his ways are hard and steep. And when his wings enfold you, yield to him; though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.'

| Try me!... |
| --- |
| Music can be a powerful way of evoking complex emotions, creating mood-states that can be hard to categorise as either positive or negative, but which seem to involve mysterious blends of joy and sorrow. One particularly evocative song is the Simon & Garfunkel classic '*7 O'Clock News/Silent Night*.' As an exercise, please listen to this song, ideally at the following weblink: http://vimeo.com/23100818. You could either listen mindfully with your eyes closed, or watch the accompanying video (a thoughtful photo-montage). You may find that the juxtaposition of words, melodies and photographs serve to create a poignant emotional state. After listening, take a few moments to reflect on how the exercise made you feel, and what it teaches you about the complex dialectics of emotional experience. |

Love teaches us that reaching some of the most profound, elevating experiences in life means taking risks; as King (2001, pp.53-54) puts it, flourishing does not mean being a 'well-defended fortress, invulnerable to the vicissitudes of life,' but appreciating and even embracing the complex and ambivalent nature of existence. Given this thought, do we have any models of how we might cultivate this kind of appreciation? Here, I would like to proffer one potential resource, namely, the aesthetics of Eastern philosophy. Whilst there are a dizzying array of different traditions and schools of thought under this umbrella, these share in common a deep appreciation of dialectics, as indeed does Eastern culture as a whole (if one might be permitted such a sweeping generalisation[3])(Schimmack et al., 2002). This appreciation is encapsulated in one of the archetypal symbols of the East, the Yin-Yang motif associated with Taoism, shown below. As Sameroff (2010, p.9) points out, this is the ultimate dialectic symbol, capturing in stark, beautiful simplicity the way that opposites – light and dark, positive and negative – are in a dynamic 'mutually constituting relationship.' It is beyond the scope of this chapter to do justice, in any way, to the richness and profundity of Taoism, and Eastern philosophy more generally. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to provide a sense of the dialectical nature of Taoism, before exploring various aesthetic principles based on this philosophy which may provide a guide for how we might go about appreciating the dialectical nature of existence.

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[3] That said, at the risk of being self-contradictory, please see chapter 6 for consideration of why such generalisations about 'The East' are problematic.

The scriptural basis for Taoism is the *Tao Te Ching*, attributed to a sage/mystic named Lao Tzu (1963), who may have lived in the 6th Century BCE in China (although his existence is disputed) (Oldstone-Moore, 2003). The *Tao Te Ching* is a mysterious hybrid: partly treatise of governance, partly a mystical elucidation of the 'Tao,' which Oldstone-Moore describes as a 'Nameless, formless, all pervasive power which brings all things into being and reverts them back into non-being in an eternal cycle' (p.6). (That said, the *Tao Te Ching* is emphatic that the Tao cannot be captured in words. As Verse 1 puts it, 'The name that can be named is not the eternal name.') The Tao is seen as operating through the dynamic interaction of Yin (negative, passive) and Yang (positive, active). Thus, the very essence of Taoism is the dialectical 'mutual dependence of opposites' (e.g., the idea that 'positive' only makes sense if juxtaposed with 'negative,' and light only exists as a concept because there is also darkness). As expressed in Verse 2: 'When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, There arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, There arises the recognition of evil.' The key teaching of Taoism is thus the importance recognising the dialectical nature of existence, and moreover, living in harmony with it: 'Mastery of the world is achieved by letting things take their natural course' (Verse 27). Or, in the words of Inada (1997, p.118): 'The enlightened or illumined (ming) life knows nothing positive or negative as such but everything in terms of fluid naturalness.'

Although appreciating the full mysterious profundities of Taoism would take at least a lifetime to master, we can nevertheless grasp some measure of its wisdom by considering an especially effective vehicle for communicating its ideas: *aesthetics*. We shall here focus on one particular 'branch' of Taoist-influenced aesthetics, namely Zen art. (When Buddhism was transmitted into China in the 5th Century C.E., it mingled with the indigenous Taoist traditions to create *Ch-an* Buddhism, which was then pronounced *Zen* on its subsequent migration to Japan.) In Zen, the practice and appreciation of art, from painting to poetry, is elevated into a spiritual experience: at its highest, its art is a vehicle for expressing the spiritual insights of Zen; contemplation of this can ideally engender deep appreciation of these insights (in a way that discursive analysis would struggle to convey), thus facilitating spiritual development (Inada, 1997). In varied ways, Zen art attempts to communicate the dialectical character of existence, as well as associated notions such as the fragile, fleeting nature of beauty, and indeed of life itself. A wonderful elucidation of Zen aesthetics is provided by Parkes (2011), who identifies key concepts, including: *mono no aware* (the pathos of life), *sabi* (rustic patina), *wabi* (austere beauty), and *yūgen* (profound grace). We shall end here by briefly considering these, trying to get a sense for how these principles might help us find appreciation and even beauty in the dialectical nature of existence.

Firstly, *mono no aware* encapsulates the pathos (evocation of compassion or sorrow) derived from an awareness of the fleeting, impermanent nature of life. This is captured in the opening lines of the epic traditional folktale, *The Tale of the Heike*: 'The sound of the *Gion shōja* bells echoes the impermanence of all things… The proud do not endure, they are like a dream on a spring night.' Crucially, it is this very impermanence that endows these fleeting phenomena with their beauty; as expressed by Yoshida Kenkō (1283-1350 CE), 'If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino… how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty' (cited in Keene, 1967, p.7). This concept illuminates the terrifying power of phenomena like love: it is its very fragility that makes it so potent and poignant. However, in Zen, this type of aesthetic sensibility is *encouraged* as a profound sensitivity, one that allows us to be 'touched or moved by the world… inextricably intertwined with a capacity to experience the sadness and pathos that emanates from the transitory nature of things' (Woolfolk, 2002, p.23). From a Buddhist perspective, the act of clinging resolutely to phenomena that are intrinsically subject to change is a fundamental cause of suffering. Much of Buddhism is thus about cultivating a deep, profound acceptance of impermanence, and allowing ourselves to appreciate the flux of life without seeking futilely to arrest or capture it in its flow. To return to love, appreciating the transiency of life only serves to *enhance* our feelings of love. Thus, allowing oneself to cultivate the pathos of this 'tragic sense of life,' rather than seeking to deny or escape from these truths, may actually be a doorway to some of the most elevated and transcendent states of existence.

Interestingly, this aesthetic sense of the transitoriness of life is counterbalanced by the second term, *sabi*, which captures the strange beauty of aged or ancient phenomena, the rustic/rusty patina that lends these gravitas and significance. Whereas *mono no aware* reflects the fleeting nature of phenomena, *sabi* reminds us that in this process of changing, a certain desolate beauty is nonetheless retained. *Sabi* thus distils the notion of aging well, in the sense of 'ripe with experience and insight,' together with the evocative sense of 'tranquility, aloneness' and 'deep solitude' that accompany the passage of time (Hammitzsch, 1979, p.46). The appeal of *sabi* is captured well by Tanizaki (1933) in his classic exposition of Zen aesthetics *In Praise of Shadows*. He describes preferring a 'pensive lustre to a shallow brilliance, a murky light that, whether in a stone or an artifact, bespeaks a sheen of antiquity… We love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colors and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them.' More obliquely, a haiku by the 17th Century poet Bashō captures the lonely beauty of *sabi*: 'Solitary now —; Standing amidst the blossoms; Is a cypress tree.' Our sorrow at the passage of time might be transmuted if we could see it through such eyes.

The evocative concepts of *mono no aware* and *sabi* are augmented by *wabi* – 'austere' or 'understated' beauty. Here, appreciation of the impermanence of existence is reflected in the idea that we do injustice to life if we only value that which appears perfect and complete. Rather, we should endeavour to see the grace in all seasons, as it were. As Kenkō asks, 'Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, at the moon only when it is cloudless?... Gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration' (cited in Keene, 1967, p.115). This means we do not abhor phenomena for being imperfect, but rather value their unique gifts. This aesthetic emerges in the art of the tea ceremony, where flawed utensils are more prized than 'perfect' ones; reaction to these is then illustrative of a person's understanding of life. As the 17th Century Sen no Rikyū put it, 'There are those who dislike a piece when it is even slightly damaged; such an attitude shows a complete lack of comprehension' (cited in Hirota, 1995,

p.226). This profound notion may be relevant as a model for cultivating deep acceptance of life, and for not embarking on the 'quest' for happiness which, as suggested above, may be somewhat self-defeating. As Hirota (1995, p.275) puts it, '*Wabi* means that even in straitened circumstances no thought of hardship arises. Even amid insufficiency, one is moved by no feeling of want. Even when faced with failure, one does not brood over injustice… If you complain that things have been ill-disposed – this is not *wabi*.'

Finally then, we turn to *yūgen*, translated by Parkes (2011) as profound grace, and described as the most 'ineffable' of aesthetic concepts: in philosophical texts it means 'dark' or 'mysterious,' alluding to the unfathomable depths of existence, and to the fundamental inability of the mind to comprehend these depths. Kamo no Chōmei (1212) characterises *yūgen* thus*:* "It is like an autumn evening under a colorless expanse of silent sky. Somehow, as if for some reason that we should be able to recall, tears well uncontrollably.' With *yūgen*, it is as if one is penetrating to the heart of existence, accessing the kind of profound, transcendental state described by Maslow (1972) as a 'peak experience' and by Wong (2009) as *chaironic* happiness. Deeply profound and moving, such moments go far beyond mere hedonic pleasure or even eudaimonic meaning, but shake the very core of our being. We have surpassed all concepts, entering the realm of awe, in which we are rendered speechless, powerless and even terrified by the mysterious power and grace of the universe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). And, as such, this is perhaps the place to end this chapter: in discussing the dialectics of emotion, the fundamental point concerns the value of transcending narrow human constructs and categories (such as light and dark, positive and negative), and learning to appreciate the complex, nuanced nature of existence. As such, although in tentatively dipping our toe into Zen aesthetics here we are barely scratching the surface of a deep ocean of wisdom, it may be enough to begin to cultivate an appreciation of the strange, mysterious, dialectical beauty of life.

**Summary – this chapter has…**
- Explained the emergence of second wave PP
- Introduced the concept of dialectics, including the idea of thesis-antithesis-synthesis
- Explored how seemingly positive qualities may be detrimental to wellbeing
- Examined the way ostensibly negative qualities can promote flourishing
- Shown how the dark side of life is inextricable entwined with its light side
- Discussed Taoism, and Buddhist aesthetic principles
- Used these principles to cultivate appreciation for the ambivalent nature of the good life

**Resources and suggestions…**
- For a clear explanation of the concept of dialectics, please visit www.csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/dialectic.htm
- For more on Buddhist aesthetics, please visit www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-aesthetics/

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