

Empathy for the psychological underdog: A positive psychological approach to Luke's Gospel

Author:
Eben Scheffler¹

Affiliation:
¹Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa

Correspondence to:
Eben Scheffler

Email:
schefeh@unisa.ac.za

Postal address:
PO Box 392, University of South Africa, Pretoria 0003, South Africa

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Taking the lead from Wisdom of Solomon 7:20, which clearly indicates that ancient authors did engage in the specialised 'scientific' (although contemporary) study of mental processes (διαλογισμούς ἀνθρώπων), it is argued that the author of Luke's Gospel paid special attention to the alleviation of human psychological suffering. Employing an approach recently being labelled as 'positive psychology', attention will be paid to general affliction (e.g. Lk 4:18; 6:21, 25), old age (Lk 1:5–80; 2:25–38), grief (e.g. Lk 7:11–17) and the emphasis on mental processes in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' exorcisms (e.g. Lk 4:35; 6:18–19; 9:38), as well as the psychological dimension involved in other types of suffering (e.g. poverty, sickness, enmity and social ostracism). The 'mental process', 'feelings' or 'empathy' that motivate the alleviation of suffering (in the behaviour of Jesus and his followers) will also come into focus in the discussion of the Lucan use of the terms οἰκτίρων (Lk 6:36), ἔλεος and σπλαγχνίζομαι (e.g. Lk 10:33, 37).

Introduction

When researchers call Luke 'den Psychologen unter den neutestamentlichen Schriftstellern' (Du Toit 1965:26 – 'the psychologist amongst the New Testament authors'), it by no means implies anachronistically that Luke had all the knowledge that the past 150 years of scientific psychology gathered – not even in embryo. On the other hand, we as present-day 'scientific' researchers should not be so arrogant as to think that ancient authors did not make a conscious effort to study the different spheres of reality, or that they did not do it intelligently. Gerhard von Rad (1970:30) drew attention to the fact that conscious study of reality formed part and parcel of the late Jewish wisdom tradition. According to Von Rad (1970:30) the book of Proverbs contains wisdom for ordinary life which only forms a small part of a comprehensive quest for knowledge (τῶν ὄντων γνῶσις = science) which even in ancient times had a much broader basis. Referring to Wisdom 7:18–20 (which dates between 100 BCE and 100 CE) he consciously employs present-day scientific terms:

In den späten Buch der Weisheit Salomos werden den einmal einzelne Fächer der damals gelehrten Naturwissenschaften aufgezählt; es sind dies Astronomie, Zoologie, Dämonologie, Psychologie, Botanik und Pharmazie (SapSal 7:18ff). Es ist kaum anzunehmen, dass alle diese Wissensgebiete den Lehrern erst in den spätesten Phase zugewachsen sind. (Von Rad 1970:30)

The relevant text from Wisdom can be seen in Table 1.

Interestingly, the term διαλογισμοί in verse 20 and verses 21–22 (cf. the reference to 'what is manifest'), has striking similarities with Simon's words to Mary in Luke 2:35: 'καὶ σοῦ [δὲ] αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία – ὅπως ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί. ('and a sword will pierce your soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare). Numerous other instances may be mentioned which reflect a similar psychological interest in people's 'thoughts'. Of the 14 occurrences of διαλογισμός in the New Testament, 6 occur in Luke's Gospel (2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46; 9:47; 24:38). Jesus is especially portrayed as knowing people's thoughts (5:22; 6:8; 9:47; 24:38).

On positive psychology

In what follows I hope to show that *positive psychology*, a psychological approach that has developed recently, provides an appropriate interpretative method of tapping into Luke's psychological insight.¹ In fact – to my mind – the Gospel in a certain sense can be regarded as providing rudimentary notions for this approach. But what is positive psychology?

An 800 page (A4, double column) volume appeared in 2005 in which various authors made various contributions on relevant themes from a positive psychological perspective (Snyder &

1. In my doctoral dissertation, *Suffering in Luke's Gospel*, I distinguished and discussed 'psychological suffering' as one of six dimensions of suffering that Luke emphasised (Scheffler 1993:90–96). Positive psychology, as a specific psychological approach, only appeared on the scene later (Butler-Bowdon 2007:254–259; Seligman 2002, 2005:3–9; Collin *et al.* 2012:200–201) and therefore this article comprises an extended refinement of the discussion in my dissertation.

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Lopez 2005).² According to Seligman,³ who is regarded as a major founder of this approach, (positive psychology aims at 'catalys[ing] a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life' (Seligman 2005:3).⁴

2. Because of its almost encyclopaedic nature, and for the purposes of this contribution, I confine myself mainly to this volume, although some other relevant psychological works will also be referred to.

3. Seligman once served a term as chair of the American Psychological Association, which testifies to the wider recognition of his work.

4. Interestingly, there also exist similar voices outside the 'school' of positive psychology who criticise 'biomania' and highlight *values, relationships* and the *ethics of care* (e.g. Allen 2013:105 referring to the work of Bracken *et al.* 2012:432).

TABLE 1: The translation of Wisdom 7:17–20.

Wisdom 7:17–20 (LXX)	Wisdom 7:17–20 (NRSV)
¹⁷ αὐτὸς γὰρ μοι ἔδωκεν τῶν ὄντων γνῶσιν ἀμευδίῃ εἰδέναι σύστασιν κόσμου καὶ ἐνέργειαν στοιχείων	¹⁷ For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements;
¹⁸ ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος καὶ μεσότητά χρόνων τροπῶν ἀλλαγῆς καὶ μεταβολῆς καιρῶν	¹⁸ the beginning, end and middle of times, the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons,
¹⁹ ἐνιαυτοῦ κύκλου καὶ ἀστέρων θέσεις	¹⁹ the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars (<i>astronomy</i>)
²⁰ φύσεις ζῴων καὶ θυμῶς θηρίων	²⁰ the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals (<i>Zoology</i>),
πνευμά των βίας καὶ διαλογισμοῦς ἀνθρώπων	the powers of spirits (<i>demonology</i>) and the thoughts of human beings (<i>psychology</i>),
διαφορὰ φυτῶν καὶ δυνάμεις ῥιζῶν	the varieties of plants (<i>botany</i>) and the virtues of roots (<i>pharmacy</i>)
²¹ ὅσα τέ ἐστιν κρυπτά καὶ ἐμφανῆ ἔργων	²¹ I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,
²² ἢ γὰρ πάντων τεχνίτις ἐδίδαξέν με σοφία	²² for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.

Note: In the English translation, items in brackets indicate the discipline being referred to.

TABLE 2: Themes considered in positive psychology and also present in Luke's Gospel.

Topic	Author	References	Comments
Happiness, μακάριος	Diener <i>et al.</i>	Lk 6:20–26	Not in Mk, Mt 13x, Lk 15x
Positive affectivity, χαρά, ἀγαλλίασις	Watson	Lk 1:14; 2:10; 8:13; 15:7,10; 24:25	χαρά 8x in Lk, Mt 6x, Mk 1x ἀγαλλίασις only in Lk (2x)
Hope, ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζω	Snyder	Acts 16:19	ἐλπίς not in gospels, 8x in Acts; Vb: Mt 1x, Lk 3x, Ac 1x
Wisdom, σοφία	Baltes <i>et al.</i>	Lk 2:40; 11:49; 21:15	6x in Lk, 1x in Mk, 3x in Mt
Humility, ταπεινώσις, ταπεινός	Tangney	Lk 1:48–52; 14:11	Concept 5x in Lk, 3x in Mt, not in Mark
Compassion ἔλεος, σπλαγχνίζομαι, οἰκτιρῶν	Cassel	Lk 1:50–58; 1:72; 6:36; 7:13; 10:33,37; 15:20	Noun: 6x Lk, 6x Mt; Vb: 3x Lk (all in <i>Sondergut</i> , see also Lk 1:78) 5x Mt, 4x Mk
Forgiveness, ἀφέσις†, ἀφίημι	Mccullough	Lk 1:77; 24:47; 5:24; 11:4; 17:4	Noun: 5x Lk, 1x Mt, 2x Mk Vb: 30x Lk, 16x Mk, 34x Mt
Gratitude, εὐχαριστῶν (Luk 17:16 BNT)	Emmons	Lk 17:16; 18:11; 22:17–19	4x Lk, 2x Mt, 2x Mk
Love, ἀγάπη, ἀγαπᾶω; ἀγαπητός;	Hendrick & Hendrick	Lk 11:42; 6:27–35; 7:47; 10:27	Noun: 1x Lk, 1x Mt, 6x Jn; Vb: 10x Lk, 7x Mt, 6x Mk, 27x Jn
Meditation, προσεύχομαι‡	Shapiro	Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1	18x Lk, 15x Mt, 11x Mk
Children, βρέφος, παῖς, παιδίον;	Roberts	Lk 1:17; 1:76; 2:43; 7:7; 9:47; 15:11–32; 18:17; 2:43; 7:7; 1:76	βρέφος 5x in Lk, not in Mt or Mk, παῖς 8x in Lk, 8x in Mt 6x in Ac παιδίον 13x Lk, 18x Mt, 12x Mk
Ageing §, προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις, ἐν γῆρει αὐτῆς	Williamson	Lk 1:18,36	γῆρας only in Lk, 1x
Multiculturalism, ἀλλογενής	Lopez <i>et al.</i>	Lk 10:25–36; Lk 17:11–19	ἀλλογενής only in Lk but concept prominent
Positive professional activity	Turne	Lk 3:12–14	Toll-collectors, shepherds and soldiers prominent
Positive ethics	Handelsman	Lk 6:27–45	Love of enemy, giving, compassion, forgiveness, no judgement

†, ἀφέσις does not always refer to forgiveness of sins as a pure religious act, but also to 'release', 'liberation' and even 'divorce'.

‡, To relate prayer to meditation is, of, course debatable. However, Luke often portrays Jesus as going to a lonely place in nature to spend time in prayer to God. Within Jewish context this most likely included meditation. The references given in the table are to these instances.

§, The word for old age (γῆρας) occurs only once in the New Testament (Lk 1:36), but the motif is often present and presupposed (as in the case of Simon in Lk 1:26), or expressed in a phrase by the mentioning of the years of the high age or the expression προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις (e.g. Anna in 1:36–37).

The fathers of traditional psychology (e.g. Wundt, Freud, Jung⁵) were medical practitioners working with a disease model that seeks to cure diseases by treating symptoms with special medicine-like treatment (e.g. psychoanalysis, behaviour therapy). Positive psychology focuses on the 'building of strengths' and does not deny focus, but also develops aspects that prevent mental illness and enhance the quality of life.⁶ Psychology should not merely help one to cope with the afflictions of life, but to enjoy life to the full.⁷ Seligman (2005) continues:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about positive subjective experience: well-being and satisfaction (past); flow, joy, the sensual pleasures, and happiness (present); and constructive cognitions about the future – optimism, hope and faith. At the individual level it is about positive personal traits – the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move people towards better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p. 3)

Seligman (2005:7) concedes that as far as traditional psychology is concerned positive psychology has affinities

5. For a brief overview of their approaches, see Collin *et al.* (2012:32–37; 92–99; 101–107).

6. The medical 'diagnostic' approach finds a classical expression in the *Handbook of abnormal psychology* (Eysenck 1973), whose various contributions all reflect that very approach (e.g. criminal behaviour, drug dependence, abnormal sexual behaviour, abnormalities of perception, motivation and learning etc.). In terms of the traditional approach the term 'normal psychology' could be an alternative term used, preventing the positive approach from completely denying psychological defects.

7. Cf. also Fueter's (1986:309–319) penetrating (and relevant for positive psychology without referring to the latter) discussion and distinction between the language of science or 'diagnosis' and the language of healing.

with the work of Allport (1961) and Maslow (1970, 1971 – the latter distinguishing the need for positive self-fulfilment as an ultimate goal in life).⁸ However, as I hope will become clear, positive psychology goes beyond the fulfilment of *any* personal individual human need.

The various contributions in the *Handbook of positive psychology* reflect approximately 47 issues on which positive psychology focuses, as well as several theoretical contributions on the subject. Many of these topics, or themes, are directly present in the Gospel of Luke, and nearly all are indirectly related to the Gospel. Table 2 contains a selection of themes that receive focused attention, directly traced in the Gospel of Luke (and/or Acts) or related to it.⁹

It is clear from the statistics above (column 4, Table 2) that in nearly all cases these themes feature more prominently in Luke's Gospel than in the other Gospels and Acts. Even so, it should be kept in mind that differences are to be expected between Luke's view on a particular topic and that proposed by positive psychology on the same topic. But there are surely also striking similarities. Given the status of the Lucan text (as scripture of a religion to which a third of today's world population belongs), it seems proper that the views of the Gospel could at least be accommodated in the discourse regarding a specific theme, especially since the concepts studied by positive psychology are in many instances (cf. Table 2) literally the same, a situation that did not exist in traditional psychology.

In what follows, attention will be paid to *ageing* and *compassion* (empathy and altruism included). But as already said, positive psychology addresses and does not deny negative mental states. We will therefore first turn our attention to some of these, briefly indicating the terrain, without any claim to complete treatment.

General affliction (Lk 4:18; 6:21, 25)

In Luke's programmatic Nazareth episode (4:18) the terms *αἰχμαλώτος* [captive] and *τρωσόμενος* [oppressed] (although being quoted from Isaiah 61) are best interpreted to refer, in view of the Capernaum episode that follows, to sickness and demon possession (Scheffler 1993:39). Despite these possible

8. For a brief overview of the approaches of Allport and Maslow, see Collin *et al.* (2012:138–139; 306–313) and Hjelle and Ziegler (1976:171–210; 249–286). To my mind Maslow's humanistic psychology is closer to positive psychology than Allport's trait theory (which focuses on individuality, but positively emphasises rationality, proactivity and heterostasis – 1976:207). Maslow's fifteen features of self-fulfilment define its overlap with positive psychology: self-fulfilled persons (1) perceive *reality* sufficiently and tolerate uncertainty, (2) *accept* themselves and others for what they are, (3) are *spontaneous* in thought and action, (4) are *problem-centred* instead of self-centred, (5) have an unusual sense of *humour*, (6) are able to look at life *objectively*, (7) are highly *creative*, (8) are *resistant to enculturation* but not purposely unconventional, (9) are concerned with the *welfare* of humanity, (10) are capable of deep *appreciation* of basic life-experiences, (11) establish deep satisfying *interpersonal relationships* with a few people, (12) undergo *peak experiences*, (13) have a need for *privacy*, (14) support *democratic* attitudes and (15) have strong moral and *ethical* standards.

9. Other themes investigated in positive psychology (not mentioned in the table), include: human strengths, resilience in development, the concept of flow, positive emotions, self-esteem, coping, emotional intelligence, (emotional) creativity, personal control, well-being (mindfulness), optimism, self-efficacy, adjustment, goal-setting, passion for knowledge, reality negotiation, authenticity (in social relationships), uniqueness seeking, personal relationships, empathy and altruism, moral motivation, toughness, positive affect, integrative science, social support, sharing the story, benefit-finding, meaningfulness, humour, spirituality, positive growth and constructivism (Snyder & Lopez 2005). Many of these themes overlap, but they represent different perspectives which all have one purpose: to enhance psychological well-being.

concrete references, the terms do not lose their general meaning of overall psychological suffering. According to Klein (2006:189), both these words '*sind geistig-geistlich zu fassen*' and the term ἄφεσις used in connection with them refer in this context not only to forgiveness but '*Entlassung*' (release, freedom). Captivity and oppression in this sense are taken to refer to psychological affliction caused, for instance, by sickness, demon possession, poverty or any other kind of suffering. This psychosomatic aspect is emphasised by positive psychology. Cassell (2005:443–444), a medical doctor writing on *compassion*, emphasises that, because a human being is a person and not only a body, there is a psychological dimension to any bodily sickness. For him it is a good doctor's task not only to treat a sick person's physical symptoms, but to do so with compassion.

In Luke's Gospel, the beatitudes (Lk 6:20–26) are best interpreted as referring to states of suffering rather than virtues, as in Matthew's Gospel. Luke's third beatitude (unique to him) in verse 21 (μακάριοι οἱ κλαίοντες νῦν – 'blessed are those that weep', cf. also the πενήσετε καὶ κλαύσετε 'mourn and weep' in the corresponding woe of verse 25) also seems to refer to a general state of psychological suffering, an '*Ausdruck der Bekümmernis*', ('an expression of worry' – Grundmann 1974:143). The psychological suffering could have been caused by the particular forms of suffering referred to in the other beatitudes, for example poverty¹⁰, hunger and persecution (or by any other condition for that matter). For all kinds of suffering are in the end interrelated, and affect a person psychologically, exacerbated by the fact that human beings think and ponder about them (Wolter 2008:249).

In this context Luke's peculiar narration of the raising of the widow's son in Nain (recalling the raising of the widow's son by Elisha in 2 Kings 4) can also be mentioned (7:11–17). The focus is not so much on the raising itself as on the widow's *grief* in losing her son. It is emphatically mentioned that 'he was his mother's only son' (μονογενῆς υἱὸς τῆ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ). Jesus' compassion towards her elicits the miracle and it is explicitly stated in verse 13: 'When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτήν) and said to her, "Do not weep"' (μὴ κλαῖε). After raising the son, it is also explicitly mentioned that 'Jesus gave him to his mother' (ἔδωκεν αὐτὸν τῆ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ). Jesus' psychological engagement with the mourning mother is clear.¹¹

Also unique to Luke is Jesus' concern for the women who *lamented* him on his way to the cross, when he ironically directs their attention away from his own *suffering* to theirs and their children (23:28). To my mind Ellis's (1974:266) observation that the women acted from religious obligation, underplays the sincerity of their feelings on a psychological level. The same holds also true for Grundmann's (1974:429) remark that Jesus '*ist über sein Geschick erhoben*' (cf. also 1974:429).

10. Poverty is generally regarded as a major theme of the Gospel. For a penetrating study of this dimension of Luke's emphasis on human suffering, see Scheffler (2011).

11. For a profound 'psychological' commentary on this passage, see Drewermann (2009:479–494).

Old age as a predicament and ageing well as an opportunity

In the *Handbook of positive psychology* Williamson (2005:676–686) wrote an article on ageing well in which he argues that ageing need not be regarded (by elderly people or members of society) as a burden to society, even though it increases the number of older people in it. On the contrary, by adopting certain attitudes (e.g. continuation of meaningful activities¹²) old people need not experience their age as a predicament or a disability, but even as a blessing and privilege.¹³

In all probability, this optimistic attitude was not prevalent in Luke's day where the handicaps of old age took their toll. Old people feature in Luke's narrative more than they do in any of the other gospels. Although ageing is primarily a physical process, Luke's positive interest seems to be in the *psychological* plight of old people.

The sub-discipline of developmental psychology makes a special study of the way old people experience the ageing process¹⁴. The investigation of life's phases by Erikson (who expanded Freud's five life¹⁵ stages to include the whole span of human life) seems to be relevant for Luke's emphasis on old age. Erikson distinguishes eight phases¹⁶ (a recently published book distinguishes 12¹⁷), the last of which (above 65 years) constitutes what Erikson calls 'maturity' (see Hjelle & Ziegler 1976:76). A happy old age is marked by 'ego integrity' and wisdom, whereas an unhappy one is marked by despair and disgust. Ego integrity 'arises from the individual's ability to glance back on his or her life in full perspective ... and humbly but assuredly affirm "I am satisfied"' (Hjelle & Ziegler 1976:76).

Luke introduces two sets of old people in his Gospel, *Zechariah and Elizabeth* (1:5–80) and *Simeon and Anna* (2:25–38). In the case of the former it is explicitly mentioned that they were 'advanced in years' (1:7). Because Zechariah was a law-abiding priest belonging to the middle class

(Jeremias 1974:104), they were not suffering in an economic or spiritual sense (the latter referring to being branded as a sinner, see Scheffler 1993:96–101). The old couple was *childless*, which, besides the psychological implications, was also (according to contemporary belief) regarded as divine punishment (Grundmann 1974:49). Zechariah's answer to the angel ('How should I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years [προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις].' – 1:18) re-emphasises their predicament. In this context, Elizabeth's pregnancy denotes an alleviation of acute suffering. Again old age is emphasised, this time by the angel who announced Jesus' birth to the younger Mary: 'Elizabeth ... who was called barren ... in her old age [ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς] has conceived a son' (1:36). Instead of a despairing old age, Elizabeth could therefore experience what Erikson calls 'ego integrity', and she expresses this in the words: 'The Lord has done this for me, now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered in public' (Lk 1:25). The disgrace, ὄνειδος μου ἐν ἀνθρώποις (Lk 1:25) testifies to the shamefulness of childlessness in contemporary society, and intensifies the psychological suffering of being old. To be old is one thing, to be old and childless was considered totally meaningless. Zechariah's utterance of the Benedictus as a whole (Lk 1:68–79) can, in a similar way, also be interpreted as an expression of his ego integrity.

Without going here into detail, the narration of *Simeon and Anna's experiences*¹⁸ in 2:25–38 also reflects empathy with their predicament as old people. As with the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah, their predicaments are ultimately relieved with ego integrity as a consequence, as expressed in Simeon's words '[n]ow you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations' (Lk 2:29–31). As far as Anna is concerned, it is explicitly mentioned that she was of great age (προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλῶν) '... a widow till she was eighty four'. Like Simeon, she was eagerly expecting the redemption of Jerusalem, and her giving thanks to God at Jesus' presentation amounts to ego integrity. By including these unique traditions, Luke did not merely show an interest in the ageing process, but also in the psychological alleviation of the affliction of old people. In our present-day world solving their problems in miraculous ways is surely not on the table. However, the evangelist's involvement should be shared, looking for appropriate modern ways of alleviating the psychological burdens of the aged.

Luke's emphasis on mental processes in his portrayal of Jesus' exorcisms (Lk 6:18–19; 4:35; 8:26–39; 9:37–43)

Luke transmits three of Mark's four exorcisms and does not add any from his *Sondergut* or Q. However, his enhanced psychological interest is reflected in the fact

18. For a more detailed discussion see Scheffler (1993:91).

12. To continue with what one can do best and which gives one joy seems, according to positive psychology, to be the apt strategy for the aged. But there should be a conscious decision to do just that and not to reflect negatively on the ageing process. H.H. Ellens ([SBL St Andrews] oral comm., July 2013) remarked during discussion time when I delivered this paper at the SBL in St Andrews: 'Traditional psychology asks the 'patient', "What is wrong?", positive psychology asks, "What are you going to do with the time left?"'

13. Lyrically expressed by the German novelist Hermann Hesse (2012:24): 'Wir alten stehen erntend am Spalier/Und wärmen uns die sommerbraunen Hände./Noch lacht der Tag, noch ist er nicht zu Ende./Noch hält und schmeichelt uns das Heut und Hier.'

14. See, for example, Kimmel (1974:343–381) for a penetrating discussion of the theories regarding ageing and mortality, the role of *disease* in the ageing process, *physiological* changes that come with ageing and changes in *intellectual* processes in ageing.

15. Freud's five stages are labelled *oral*, *anal*, *phallic*, *latent* and *genital* (Hjelle & Ziegler 1976:31–36).

16. Erikson, in his ground breaking book *Childhood and society* (1963) labels his eight stages, *infancy* (0–1 years), *early childhood* (1–2 years), *play age* (3–5), *school age* (6–11 years), *adolescence* (12–), *young adulthood* (20–25), *middle adulthood* (25–65) and *maturity* (65+). For a summary see Hjelle and Ziegler (1976:63–77).

17. Armstrong's (2007) stages are (1) prebirth, (2) birth, (3) infancy, (4) early childhood, (5) middle childhood, (6) late childhood, (7) adolescence, (8) early adulthood, (9) midlife, (10) mature adulthood, (11) late adulthood, (12) death and dying, (13) beyond death.

that, in three cases of *physical* healing (Peter's mother in law's fever in 4:38–39, the dumb man of 11:14 and the crippled woman 13:11), the sickness is ascribed to a demon, contrary to his sources).

Before paying brief attention to the *exorcisms* (the Capernaum demonic, the Gerasene demoniac and the epileptic boy) a comparison of his summary of the healing of the demon possessed in 6:18–19 with that of Mark (3:10–12) reveals a remarkable psychological interest (see Table 3).

Unlike Mark, Luke explicitly mentioned that the people were troubled by demons (ἐνοχλούμενοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων, 6:18b). Mark focuses on the demons falling before Jesus confessing him as the son of God. The actual healing of all the people is mentioned by Luke and not by Mark (καὶ ἰατο πάντα, 6:19). It seems, therefore that in Mark's view the actual healing of the demon-possessed persons, and their psychological suffering, was secondary to the fact that Jesus had authority over demons, whereas Luke has no interest in Mark's possible theological motif of the messianic secret. For him (Luke), the suffering of the psychological underdog is paramount and his view *rectifies* Mark's by stressing Jesus' alleviation of the suffering of *all* (πάντας) those who were sick and demon possessed.

In Luke's editing of at least two of Mark's four exorcisms his emphasis on the alleviation of psychological suffering also surfaces clearly. He made significant changes to his Marcan source to reflect Jesus' unconditional *compassion* for the persons who were demon possessed. Firstly, in Mark 1:26 it is stated that the unclean spirit convulsed (σπαράζων) the *Capernaum demoniac* before it came out. In contrast to this, in Luke 4:36 the casting out is pictured as a less painful process: the demon threw the man in the midst of them (ῥίψαν instead of σπαράζων), came out of him, but did him no harm (καὶ ῥίψαν αὐτὸν τὸ δαιμόνιον εἰς τὸ μέσον ἐξήλθεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ μηδὲν βλάψαν αὐτόν). This clearly indicates Luke's (and Jesus') empathetic concern. Second, in the exorcism of the *Gerasene demoniac* (Lk 8:26–39; Mk 5:1–20), Luke introduces the term ἐσόθη in Luke 8:36 to underscore the *deliverance* of the demoniac – in modern terms, psychological liberation or healing.¹⁹ After the healing, the healed boy's positive inclination towards Jesus is emphasised by the words '*sitting at Jesus' feet*' (Mk 5:15 has '*sitting there*') and he is also depicted as fully obeying Jesus (Lk 8:38–39, contra Mk 5:19–20).

19. For a relevant modern treatment of the concept '*Psychische Befreiung*' (psychological liberation) along with '*politische Befreiung*' (political liberation), inspired by the Christ event, see Moltmann (1973:268–315).

TABLE 3: Comparison between the demon possessed of Mark and Luke.

Mark 3:10–12
πολλοὺς γὰρ ἐθεράπευσεν, ὥστε ἐπιπίπτειν αὐτῷ ἵνα αὐτοῦ ἄψωνται ὅσοι εἶχον μάστιγας. ¹¹ καὶ τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα, ὅταν αὐτὸν ἐθεώρουν, προσέπιπτον αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκραζόν λέγοντες ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. ¹² καὶ πολλὰ ἐπέτιμα αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ αὐτὸν φανερὸν ποιήσωσιν. ... for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ¹¹ "You are the Son of God!" ¹² But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

By shortening Mark's version of the healing of the *epileptic boy* (Lk 9:37–43a; Mk 9:14–27), Luke retains the focus on the actual healing of the boy. As in Mark, the boy's suffering (clearly a grand mal epileptic attack, cf. Suinn 1975:391–392) is described in detail in Table 4.

However, Mark's version elaborates much more on the unbelief of the disciples and the (lack of) faith of the boy's father. If one compares Mark 6:5 with 9:23, Mark seems to see a close connection between faith and healing. Here too Luke plays down the close connection between faith and healing as he did with his creative reinterpretation of Mark's Nazareth episode in Luke 4, thereby emphasising that for Jesus there are no conditions and boundaries to God's mercy for, and compassion towards, those who suffer.

Of special significance is also Jesus' interpretation of the *coming of the kingdom* of God, not as an apocalyptic event (contra Mark and Matthew) but as happening here and now when psychological healing is affected: 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you' (Lk 11:20). This correlates perfectly with Luke 17:20–21 where the kingdom is explicitly described in psychological terms:

The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you. (Lk 17:20–21)²⁰

Compassion, empathy and altruism

In the *Handbook of positive psychology*, Cassell (2005:434–445) wrote a chapter on *compassion*, whilst Batson, Ahmad, Lishner and Tsang (2005:485–498) wrote on *empathy and altruism*. For the purposes of our interpretation of Luke, compassion can be regarded as an exchangeable term for empathy. Batson *et al.* (2005:486) define empathy formally as 'an other-orientated emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived well-fare of someone else'. Batson *et al.* (2005) emphasise that true empathy is basically

20. This text caused the Irish author George Bernard Shaw to comment: 'Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is among you" – ever since the Church has sought for it somewhere else.'

TABLE 4: The epileptic boy in Luke.

Luke 9:39	Luke 9:39
καὶ ἰδοὺ πνεῦμα λαμβάνει αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξαίφνης κρᾶζει καὶ σπαράσσει αὐτὸν μετὰ ἄφρονος καὶ μόνος ἀποχωρεῖ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ συντριβὸν αὐτόν.	Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him.

Luke 6:18–19
οἱ ἦλθον ἀκοῦσαι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰαθῆναι ἀπὸ τῶν νόσων αὐτῶν· καὶ οἱ ἐνοχλούμενοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων ἐθεραπεύοντο, ¹⁹ καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐζήτειν ἄπτεσθαι αὐτοῦ, ὅτι δύναμις παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐξήρχετο καὶ ἰατο πάντα. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

altruistic, leads to concrete action that benefits people who are suffering, and is not done for egoistic reasons. They quote Pilavin and Charng (1990:27) who contend on the basis of several studies conducted that:

There appears to be a 'paradigm shift' away from the earlier position that behaviour that appears to be altruistic must, under closer scrutiny, be revealed as reflecting egoistic motives. Rather, theory and data now being advanced are more compatible with the view that true altruism – acting with the goal of benefiting another – does exist and is a part of human nature. (Pilavin & Charng 1990:270 in Batson *et al.* 2005:490)

In Luke's Gospel, the notion of compassion and altruistic empathy is expressed by the terms ἔλεος (Lk 1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78), οἰκτιρῶν (Lk 6:36), σπλαγγίζομαι, (7:13; 10:33; 15:20; Ac 1:18) and ἐπιμελεσθαι (to care – Lk 10:34–35). Luke employs three characters (Mary, Zechariah and Jesus) to promote it.

In Mary's *Magnificat* (in all probability based on Hannah's Song in 1 Sm 2:1–10) it is God's *mercy* (ἔλεος) through the ages (1:50) that finds expression in the reversal of roles of the poor and the mighty in 1:51–53, and which would benefit Israel (1:54). Zechariah's *Benedictus* also refers to the *mercy* shown to Israel's ancestors (1:72), which also provides the basis for the salvation that would come from his son's follower, Jesus (1:78).

In a programmatic saying as part of the Lucan Jesus' sermon on the plain, which advocates action that benefits sufferers, Luke renders the Q-saying of 6:36 as 'be compassionate (οἰκτιρῶντες), as your father is compassionate (οἰκτιρῶν)', instead of the 'you must be perfect (τέλειοι) as your heavenly father is perfect (τέλειός) of Matthew 5:48. This notion of God as primarily merciful is not always consistent with (violent) images of YHWH (e.g. as a warrior, אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה – Ex 15:3) that can also be ascribed to

the Jewish and Israelite tradition, although it is not absent in the Old Testament either (cf. Ex 34:6–7)²¹.

Luke furthermore portrays a Jesus who is motivated by the same compassion which is ascribed to God and who expects his followers to be likewise motivated. In the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, it is stated that Jesus was moved with pity for the widow (ἐσπλαγγίσθη ἐπ' αὐτῆ, 7:13) and that he acted as a result of this pity or compassion, in *word* ('do not weep') and *deed* (the raising of the son).²² That he expected his followers to do likewise in a *multicultural* context (cf. the work on multiculturalism by Lopez *et al.* 2005) is nowhere more prominently communicated than in the parable of the good Samaritan (10:33–35). Contrary to the Jerusalem clergy, the Samaritan was moved with compassion (Σαμαρίτης ἐσπλαγγίσθη) and cared immediately and extensively for the assaulted man (money-wise included). To describe the compassion and the resultant deed as one action, which emphasises their unity, Luke also uses the expression ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος (the

21. Exodus 34:6–7 reads: 'YHWH, a God merciful and gracious (יְהוָה רַחוּם וְרַחֲמָנִים) slow to anger (אֲרֵרָךְ אַפַּיִם), and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (וְרַב־יְהוָה אֱמֶת וְאֱמוּנָה), keeping steadfast love (וְנֶצֶר חַסֵּד) for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹן וְחַטְאָה), yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' The text is clearly contradictory (not so according to Fensham 1970:229), portraying God as both merciful and forgiving, as well as punishing. The first part can be regarded as the 'default' ancient Israelite view of God, into which other (even contradictory) aspects were accommodated. Jesus' view of God, according to Luke, mainly emphasises the 'default' position, although punishment is not absent for loveless behaviour (Lk 12:48; 16:19–30). Interesting are the diverse receptions of this text in the rest of the Old Testament where, in some cases, reference is only made to YHWH's grace – cf. Numbers 14:18 (grace and punishment); Deuteronomy 5:9 (grace and punishment); Nehemiah 9:17 (only grace); Psalm 86:15 (only grace); 103:8 (anger only temporary); 145:8–9 (only grace); Jeremiah 32:18 (focus on grace); Joel 2:13 (only grace); Jon 4:2 (only grace); Nahum 1:3 (focus on punishment).

22. Jeremias (1980:158) speculates regarding the omission of σπλαγγίζομαι in the healings of the leper (5:12 contra Mk 1:41) and the feeding of the 5000 (Lk 9:11 contra Mk 6:34): '... er vermied is beide Male, offenbar weil er sich an dem Affekt Jesu stiess.' However, feeling is not absent in Luke's rendering (he expressed his willingness to heal the leper) and uses ἀποδέχομαι ('welcome heartily') in the feeding episode. The fact that he retains σπλαγγίζομαι in Luke 7:3 testifies to the fact that he actually *wants* to portray a Jesus with compassion and the use of it to describe the actions of the Samaritan and the forgiving father (which indirectly refers to Jesus' own actions – cf. 15:1, 20) integrates too well with Luke's view.

TABLE 5: The requirements of compassion and their presence in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30–37).

Requirements for of compassion (Cassel 2005)	The parable of the good Samaritan
1. Compassion is experienced and/expressed with regard to the suffering of others, not the self or the family.	1. The Samaritan meets a <i>stranger</i> while traveling.
2. Compassion is experienced with regard to <i>serious</i> suffering, not simple needs.	2. The suffering is serious – the victim was half dead (ἡμιθανῆ).
3. The sufferer towards whom the compassion is felt, is a <i>victim</i> , the suffering not being self-inflicted or perceived to be self-inflicted.	3. The man fell amongst robbers and was assaulted by them (λιησταῖς περιέπεσεν, πληγῆς ἐπιθέντες).
4. Compassion is generated by people <i>imagining</i> themselves in the predicament of the victim(s). [†]	4. The man <i>saw</i> the man, and was then moved with compassion (ιδὼν ἐσπλαγγίσθη).
5. The compassion felt or rendered is <i>unconditional</i> , the victim most commonly is <i>unaware</i> of it and plays no conscious part in the onset of the compassion.	5. The robbed man was half dead, probably <i>unconscious</i> and did not call on the Samaritan.
6. There occurs an <i>identification</i> with the victim, since the predicament is perceived as one's own possible fate.	6. The compassion felt by the Samaritan is not elaborated upon but can be presupposed. He approached the victim (προσελθὼν).
7. Compassion varies amongst people, not all show it (a process of 'dis-identification' can occur) and those who show it, do so to <i>varying degrees</i> .	7. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side (ἀντιπαρῆλθεν).
8. There is a <i>private</i> and <i>social</i> element in compassion: the <i>feeling</i> of the compassionate man towards <i>somebody</i> in society.	8. The compassion of the Samaritan constitutes the private element and the assaulted traveller the social element.
9. The <i>social stance</i> of the compassionate may play a role in the identification process.	9. The clergy avoided the man (the law forbade the touching of corpses).
10. The compassionate are willing to make <i>sacrifices</i> , to deny themselves pleasure in the action of care.	10. The Samaritan went out of his way to take the man to an inn and paid for everything, even future expenses.
11. Compassion is not a mere feeling, but is (if possible) expressed in <i>deeds</i> of care.	11. The Samaritan's deeds of care are described in detail (treating the wounds and taking to the inn).
12. Compassion is an overriding feeling that crosses national borders, recognising the common human condition.	12. The <i>pointe</i> of the parable: a Samaritan (not a fellow-Jew) cares.

[†]. According to Cassel (2005:437) compassion can be learned. He quotes Rousseau's *Emile*: 'Make him (your pupil) understand well that the fate of these unhappy people can be his, that all of their ills are there in the ground under his feet, that countless unforeseen and inevitable events can plunge him into them from one moment to the next. Teach him to count on neither birth nor health nor riches. Show him all the vicissitudes of fortune.'

one who has shown mercy) to refer to the Samaritan in 10:37. The parable ends with the call that the listener should do likewise (καὶ σὺ ποιεῖ ὁμοίως). In the following table, Cassel's (2005:n.p.) essential 'requirements for compassion' are listed and their remarkable²³ presence in the parable of the 'compassionate' Samaritan is indicated (see Table 5).

Similar expressions of compassion can be found even when the terms are absent, as for example in the account of Jesus' healings (cf. above), his concern for the lamenting women, his healing of the high priest's ear during his arrest (22:51) and his acceptance of the penitent robber who was crucified with him (23:39–43), as well as his prayer for his crucifiers (23:34). Most of these motifs are unique to Luke's Gospel.

Conclusion

In the *Handbook of positive psychology* contributors endeavour to reflect scientifically on virtues which, up to now, were mainly reflected upon in the realms of philosophy and religion. In line with the endeavour of present-day psychology to be an objective science, positive psychology has sought to provide precise definitions and measurements. This has been done with limited success. To the amazement of those philosophers and theologians who, from the start, regard measurement as impossible and who regard knowledge about matters such as love, forgiveness, humility and compassion as a matter of faith, or at least personal conviction, positive psychologists have indicated that these virtues exist and are part of human nature. On the other hand positive psychologists also admit that there are aspects of these concepts that escape human measurement. For how can wisdom, humour and ethics be fully measured? It seems therefore that, besides individual reflection and meditation on these virtues, mutual discussion and reflection on them as well as experiencing them in mutual and interactive relationships, is also the way to appropriate them and simultaneously gain more profound insight into them. Surprisingly this leaves space for religion and spirituality, which as such is also consciously recognised by positive psychology (see Pargament and Mahoney's contribution on the discovery and conserving of the sacred – 2005:646–659).

There is some irony in the fact that, whereas biblical scholarship is often preoccupied with technical issues like the sources of texts, as if their understanding depends on a precise reconstruction of their origin and function in ancient contexts, psychology and spirituality would engage in cultivating the treasures which exegesis often neglects – perhaps in an endeavour to gain intellectual respectability. To my mind, positive psychology has therefore a large contribution to make in the endeavours of biblical scholars who want to engage in psychological biblical criticism.

Of course Luke, like other ancient texts, is not replete with insights on positive psychology. However, to my mind, especially Luke's Gospel can be regarded as a religious

²³Remarkable, since Cassel refers nowhere to the parable and most probably made his analysis without considering Luke's Gospel.

text which, if properly reflected upon – also with the aid of positive psychology – has much to contribute to the motivation and fostering of thoughts, virtues and feelings that make for worthwhile living, as it has indeed to some extent done through 2000 years of Christianity.

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