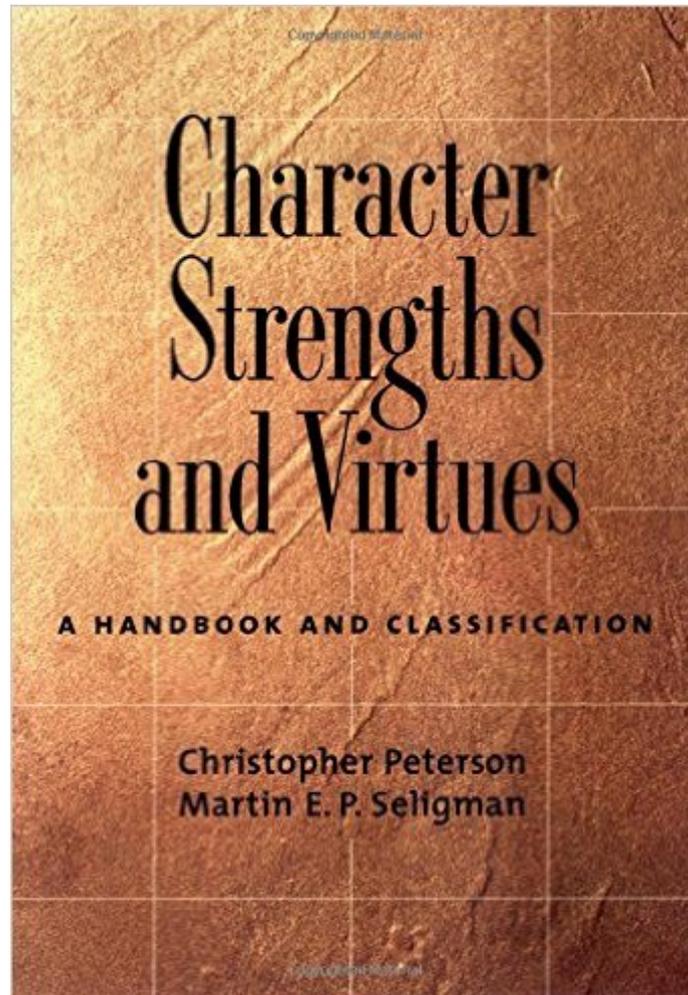


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Character Strengths And Virtues: A Handbook And Classification



Synopsis

"Character" has become a front-and-center topic in contemporary discourse, but this term does not have a fixed meaning. Character may be simply defined by what someone does not do, but a more active and thorough definition is necessary, one that addresses certain vital questions. Is character a singular characteristic of an individual, or is it composed of different aspects? Does character--however we define it--exist in degrees, or is it simply something one happens to have? How can character be developed? Can it be learned? Relatedly, can it be taught, and who might be the most effective teacher? What roles are played by family, schools, the media, religion, and the larger culture? This groundbreaking handbook of character strengths and virtues is the first progress report from a prestigious group of researchers who have undertaken the systematic classification and measurement of widely valued positive traits. They approach good character in terms of separate strengths--authenticity, persistence, kindness, gratitude, hope, humor, and so on--each of which exists in degrees. Character Strengths and Virtues classifies twenty-four specific strengths under six broad virtues that consistently emerge across history and culture: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Each strength is thoroughly examined in its own chapter, with special attention to its meaning, explanation, measurement, causes, correlates, consequences, and development across the life span, as well as to strategies for its deliberate cultivation. This book demands the attention of anyone interested in psychology and what it can teach about the good life.

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Customer Reviews

It sounds like a reference book, but the first 89 pages alone is worth the purchase. Who would have guessed that Confucianists, Taoists, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Greeks, Charlemagne, Ben Franklin and The Boy Scouts of America could reach a consensus on the definition of "good character"? Well, no one of course. However, now that all the key characters are history (OK--but it may not be long for the Scouts if they aren't careful), these authors have rather brilliantly assessed the central writings of each source and created a credible structure of 6 key virtues that are made up of a total of 24 subcomponents they call "strengths" that have been recognized across a span of 2500 years and many cultures. They tie this into youth development research, the history of philosophy, evolutionary psychology and a fascinating analysis of the rise and fall and rise again of the concept of "character" in psychology. Then--did you ever want to learn more about the virtue of "Wisdom"--such as its history, the measurement techniques, the research--this is the place to read about it. How about "Justice"? Wow, this is fascinating reading because these psychologists carry everything from history through various disciplines down to measurement. If you don't think this is new, consider the fact that psychologists have studied "insanity" for years. We can tell you if you are very insane, somewhat insane or have no symptoms. What is the positive half of that dimension? You want yourself and your children and those around you to be far far away from merely lacking symptoms--you want positive mental health. Fascinating topic. You want to read original sources? This book has 117 pages of references. That is about 2000 books and articles.

-The authors helped found the Positive Psychology movement, which hopes to supplement psychology's current medical model ("find what's wrong, then fix it") with a model for positive health ("find what's right, then encourage it"). Psychological health, which is not just an absence of disease, includes such things as character preparation, improved baseline happiness, realistic optimism, wisdom, and cognitive sophistication. The authors consider character and virtue indispensable for cultivating a good and positive life, and this book pioneers a method for classifying and evaluating them both.-The authors provide, and then develop, definitions and assumptions to support their scheme. Next, they develop a classification scheme for character and virtue similar to the successful multi-axis Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), which allows psychologists and psychiatrists to diagnose mental conditions in a reasonably productive and consistent manner. Classification helps recognize basic elements, helps understand past performance, and helps standardize and partially quantify a protocol for evaluating data (this may possibly allow character to be evaluated and developed more objectively than we can today, although wise subjective

evaluation will still definitely be necessary). Providing a framework for character and virtue is often better than saying "S/he seemed like such a good person," or "well, I just think that candidate's character is better."-The authors use examples of virtue and character from several different times and cultures for their scheme, and conclude that virtue and character based on an internal quality of mind (rather than external events like popularity or a promotion) can be developed and can lead to a better life.

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