

*Discurso de investidura como Doctor "Honoris Causa" del
Excmo. Sr. D. Martín E.P. Seligman*

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I want to thank you for bestowing on me one of the greatest honors of my professional life. To have a doctorate from this ancient University that has contributed so much to the culture of Spain and the world is for me a dream come true.

Quiero dar las gracias por conferirme uno de los mas grandes honores de mi vida profesional. Es para mi un sueno recibir un doctorado de esta Antigua Universidad que tanto ha contribuido a la cultura de España y del mundo.

When I was President of the American Psychological Association, I had an encounter with CNN that may sum up why you have chosen me for this honor.

Cuando fui presidente de la Asociación Americana de Psicología, tuve una entrevista con la CNN que puede resumir por que me han elegido para este honor.

Their reporter asked to interview me about the "state of psychology today." "But," she warned me, "this is CNN, so you only get a sound byte."

El periodista me pregunto sobre el estado de la Psicología hoy día. Pero me advirtió que esto es la CNN así que usted obtendrá solo un "sound byte."

"How many words do I get?"

"¿Cuántas palabras tendré?"

"One," and the cameras rolled.

"Una", y la cámara empezó a filmar.

"What, Professor Seligman, is the state of Psychology today?"

Profesor Seligman, cual es el estado de la Psicología hoy día?

"Good!"

"¡Bueno!" respondí.

"Cut. That won't do. We'll have to give you a longer sound byte."

Corten. Eso no es bastante. Tendremos que darle un "sound byte" mas largo.

"How many words do I get this time?"

Entonces cuantas palabras tengo ahora?

“Two”
Dos

“What, Dr. Seligman, is the state of psychology today?”
¿Cuál es, Dr. Seligman, el estado de la Psicología hoy día?

“Not good!”
“¡No bueno!”

“Cut. I can see you’re not comfortable in this medium. We’ll have to give you a real sound byte: three words.”

Corten. Me doy cuenta que usted no se siente cómodo en este medio. Tendré que darle un ‘sound byte’ real: tres palabras.

“What, Professor Seligman, is the state of psychology today?”
Entonces, Profesor Seligman, ¿cual es el estado de la Psicología hoy día?

“Not good enough!”
“¡No bastante bueno!”

Please pardon me, but I must continue in English.
Perdónenme ahora, pero continuo en Inglés.

In what ways has Psychology of the last century been good and not good? And how might Psychology of the next decade become good enough?

Before World War 2, in the USA, Psychology had three missions:

1. to cure mental illness
2. to make the lives of normal people happier, more fulfilling, and more productive, and
3. to identify and nurture high talent, genius.

In 1946 and 1947 the mission was subverted: The Veterans Administration Act was passed and psychologists found that they could get reimbursed for treating Neurosis in Omaha. That’s what legions of practitioners then did. Then the National Institute of Mental Health was created (In spite of its name and its charter, it has always been the National Institute of Mental Illness, only remotely concerned with health, and mistakenly equating the notion of health with the absence of disease), and academics, such as I, found we could get grants if our research was about curing mental illness. That’s what legions of psychological scientists then did.

Good. As a result of this \$30 billion investment, two great things happened: First there are now fourteen of the major mental illness that can be relieved by specific forms of psychotherapy or drugs, and two of them are actually curable; whereas in

1947 no mental illness was treatable—it was all smoke, mirrors, fog, and superstition.

Even better, a science of mental illness developed. We found we could measure such fuzzy concepts as depression and alcoholism with statistical precision. We created a classification of the mental illnesses (DSM and ICD), with which we could diagnose mental illness reliably. We could unravel the causes of mental illness by doing longitudinal studies of the genetics, early environment, life events, and mental states of individuals across time. We could pin down causes by eliminating third variables using the experimental methods. We invented psychotherapies and drugs to treat the mental illnesses and best of all, we did rigorous, random assignment, placebo controlled studies of the putative therapies to find out which ones really worked and which were inert. (The fine Department of Psychology here in Complutense Madrid represents this tradition in exemplary form.)

So Psychology can boast that we have discovered ways to actually make miserable people less miserable.

Bueno.

Not Good. Three problems of working in the disease model have plagued Psychology since it became a mere handmaiden of medicine. First, victimology, a moral problem: We took on a pathological view of human nature such that people were seen as victims of circumstances, and we forgot about venerable concepts like choice, will, character, and responsibility. Second, we misplaced our mission of making normal people happier and worse, genius became a dirty word. Third in our monomania of developing therapies that would relieve suffering, we forgot about developing interventions that would make people happier, productive, and fulfilled.

Good enough? So how might Psychology of the next decade become good enough? Toward this goal, I have been part of a movement called Positive Psychology. It has three aims: To study and build positive emotion (the Pleasant Life), to study and build the strengths and virtues (The Good Life, *eudaimonia*), and to study and build positive institutions (the Meaningful Life).

Parallel to the science of mental illness, we have found that we can measure such fuzzy notions as life satisfaction, optimism, social intelligence, and strong families with good statistical precision. We have created a classification of the Strengths and Virtues, the opposite of DSM and ICD classification of the insanities. We have a burgeoning science that looks at the causes of what makes life worth living. So for example, longitudinal studies of optimism show that optimists live on average eight years longer than pessimists, and experimental studies of meditators show that activity of the left frontal cortex may be a cause of tranquility. We have refined a large number of interventions, created over centuries from the Buddha to Tony

Robbins, and are testing which ones actually work to build happiness and which are inert in random assignment, placebo controlled studies.

So my hope for Positive Psychology is that it may show in the next decade that Psychology can make untroubled people happier. And if that occurs, Psychology may then be good enough.

Bastante bueno.

Muchas Gracias.