

Meaning, Well-being & Resilience

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Overview

- What is the universal challenge?
- From meaning-therapy (MT) to meaningful living
- The four intervention strategies of MT: Double Vision, PURE, ABCDE, & Dual-Systems
- Pathways to the good life

The Universal Challenge

- Everyone wants to live the good life, but life is full of suffering. How can we help people find a way to find a solution?
- There are many psychological, philosophical, religious and scientific answers.
- Meaning-therapy can show us how to live a meaningful, fulfilling and resilient life.

Universal Problems

- Natural and man-made disasters
- Global economic recession
- Too many people for limited resources
- Birth, old age, sickness, death
- The problem of bad government
- The problem of evil

Personal problems

1. Poor self-concept
2. Self-defeating attitude
3. Self-handicapping habits
4. A lack of meaning & purpose
5. Bad choices in the past
6. Dysfunctional family

What type of therapy works best?

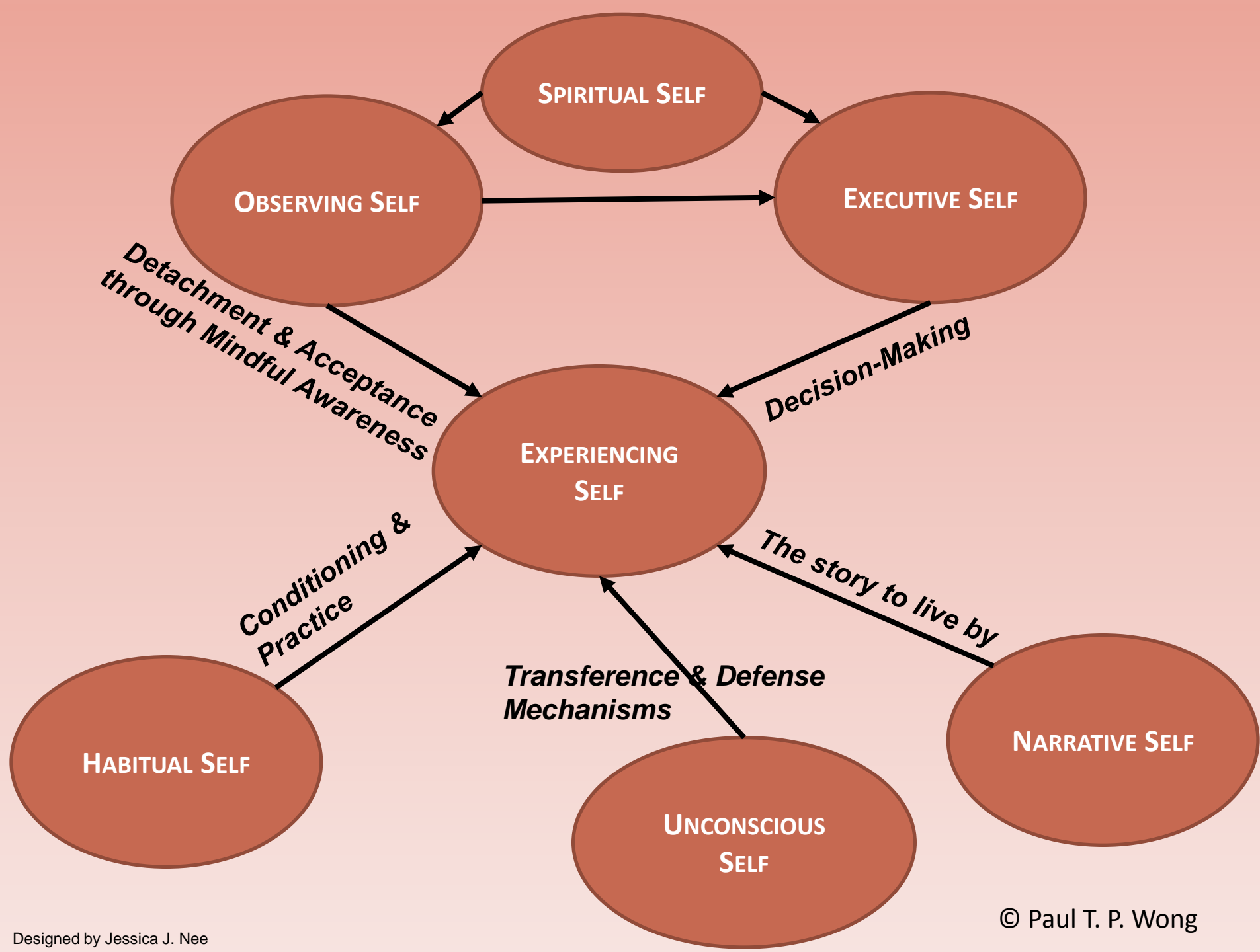
- The best therapy needs to address both universal and personal problems
- It needs to contribute to healing and flourishing
- It needs to be integrative, incorporating the best from every therapeutic modality
- It needs to be flexible & economical
- It can be readily translated into every day living

MT fits the bill.

- The motto of MT is: “Meaning is all we have and relationship is all we need.”
- It is the reincarnation of Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy
- It is also known as Existential Positive Psychology or PP 2.0

Meaning Therapy is Integrative

- **Existential meaning** – Logotherapy & Existential Therapy
- **Cognitive meaning** – Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
- **The Present meaning** – Mindfulness & ACT
- **Narrative meaning** – Narrative Therapy
- **Positive meaning** – Positive Psychotherapy
- **Cultural meaning** – Cross-cultural & Indigenous Therapy
- **Subconscious meaning** – Psychoanalysis



Spiritual Activation Interventions

- Activating personal meaning resources
- Searching for meaning & guidance
- Reflecting on one's own life
- Reflecting on the human condition
- Mindful meditation
- Praying to God or a Higher Power
- Transforming life story into a mythical path
- Creating or latching on to a myth or a metanarrative

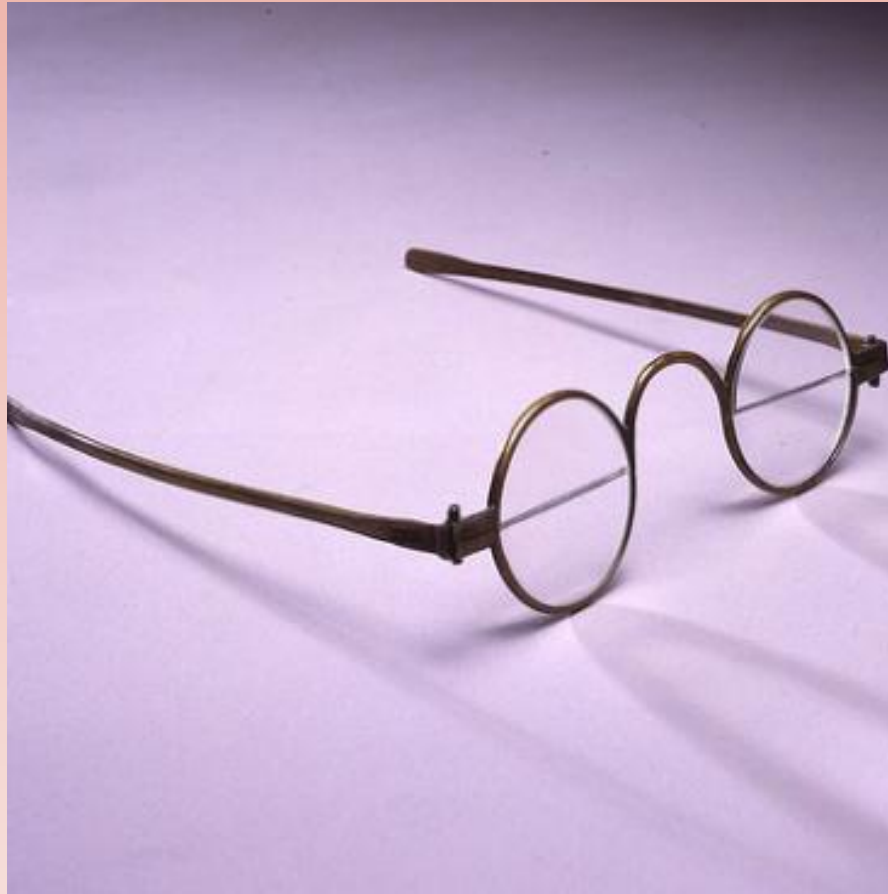
Assumptions of MT

- Human beings are the only meaning-seeking, meaning-making species, designed for a relational world.
- The mind needs to be engaged in productive work or play, just as the body needs to be engaged in exercise.
- We turn Freud upside down by saying that we need to learn to love, work, and play in order to become healthy – not the other way around.

Advantages of Meaningful Living

- A higher purpose is essential to well-being
- Everyone has the capacity of meaning-making
- Protects you against adversities and fears
- Avoids the pitfalls of the self-centered pursuit of happiness and success
- Happiness and flourishing will sneak in through the back door

The Double Vision Strategy

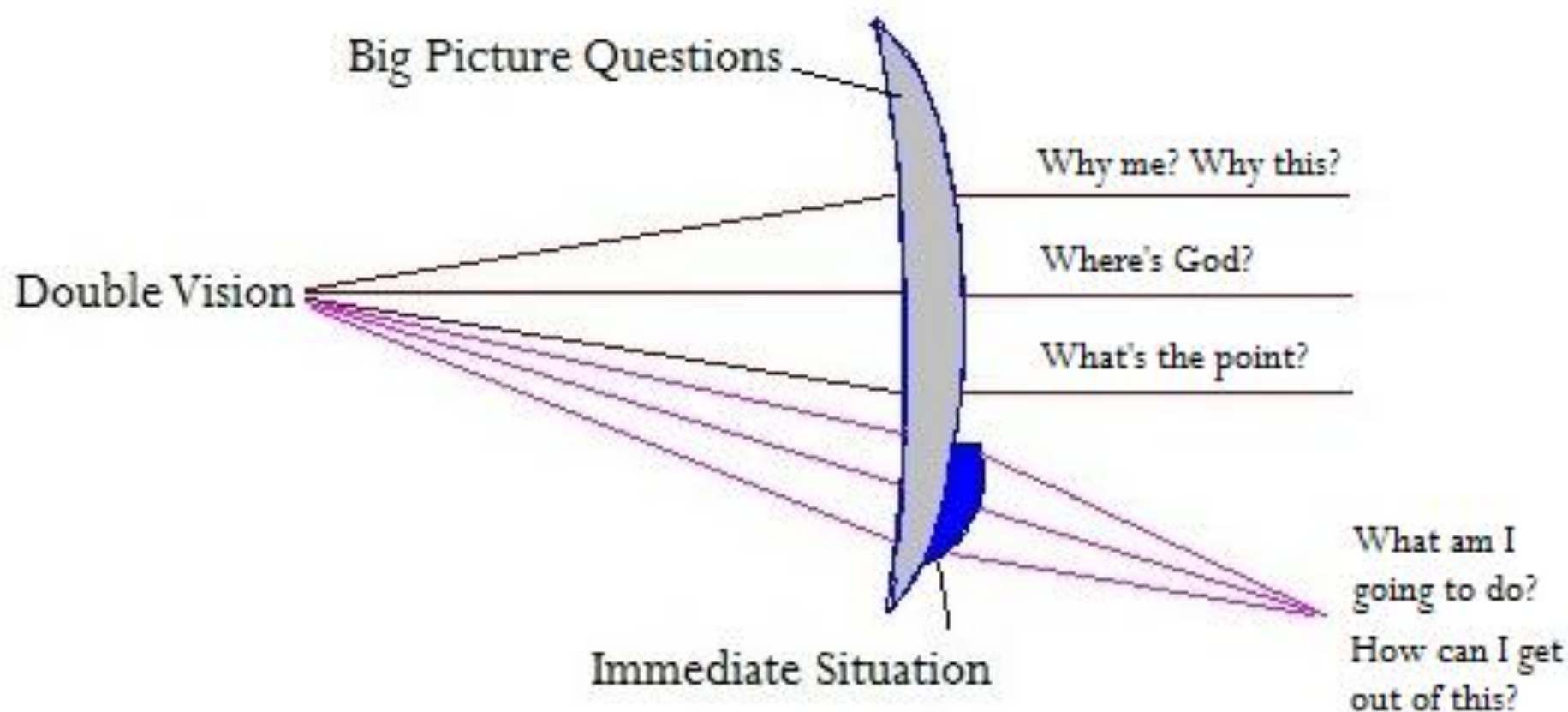


Why the double vision?

- MT never targets a specific behaviour, thought, or feeling. Instead, it helps clients to become fully functioning persons in the context of the human condition and macro forces.
- MT shifts the focus from good feelings for the individual to doing what is good for the individual and society.

Three Ways to Achieve a Broader Vision

1. Taking a long-range view to provide a proper perspective for the present predicament
2. Looking at personal problems from the perspective of universal problems (existential givens)
3. Looking at macro forces such as global recession and global warming



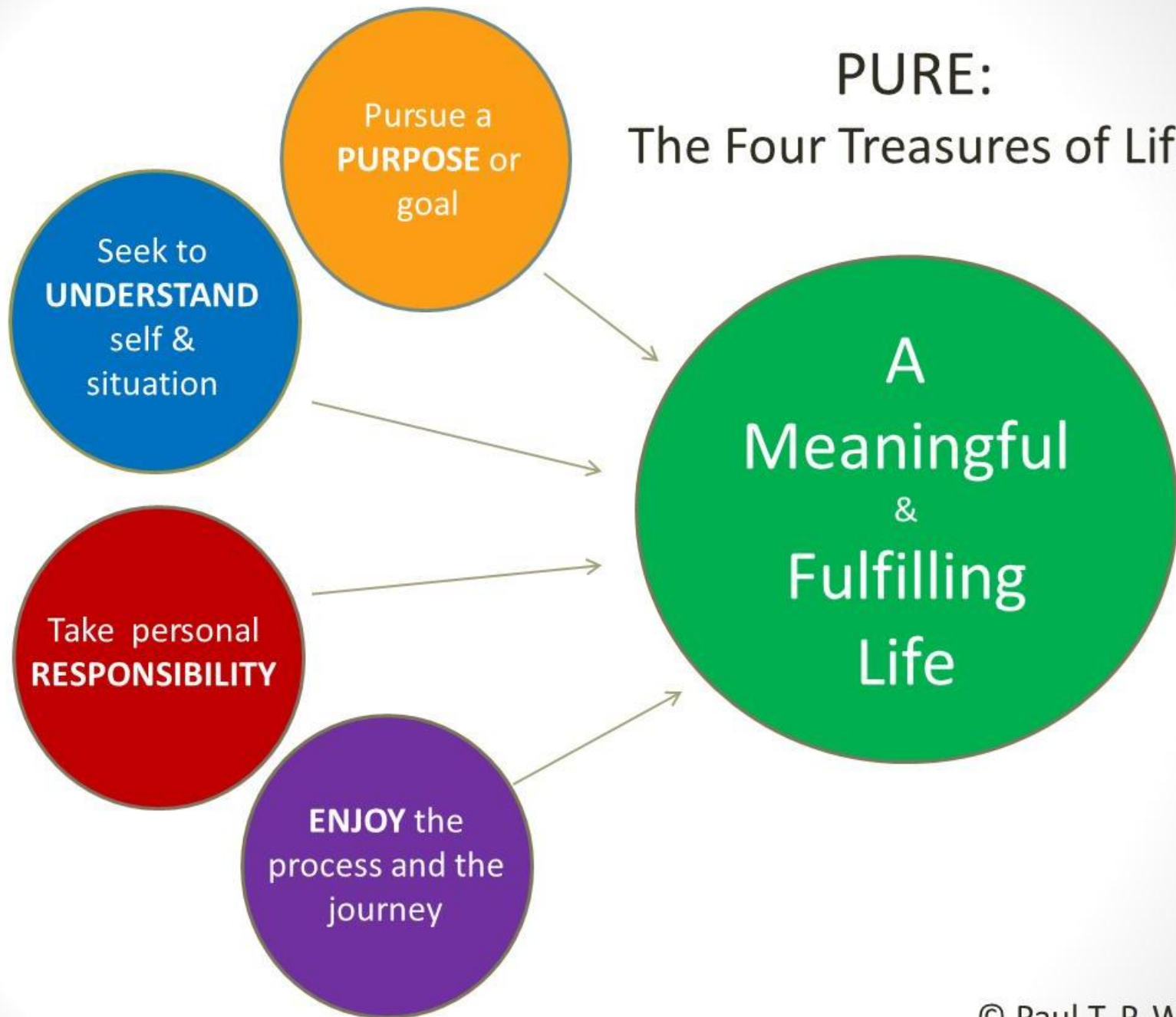
Eight Enduring Existential Questions

1. Who am I?
2. How and where do I find happiness?
3. What should I do with my life?
4. How can I avoid making the wrong choices in the major areas of my life?
5. Where do I belong?
6. What is the point of all my striving?
7. What will happen to me after I die?
8. What would make my life more meaningful and significant?

Spirituality & Double Vision

- Spirituality enables us to experience ordinary things in a significant and meaningful way. Thus, washing dishes can become a way of service or worship.
- Spirituality allows us to wake up from our confusion and hopelessness to look at the big picture and cosmic principles.

PURE: The Four Treasures of Life



The PURE Model of Meaning

PURE represents the four ingredients of meaning; fundamental in meaning therapy

- **Purpose** -- goals, directions, pursuing what really matters
- **Understanding** – a sense of coherence, clear communication, understanding the predicament, understanding self and others

The PURE Model (cont'd)

- **Responsible action** – responsible decision to do the right thing, assuming responsibility for the consequences
- **Enjoying meaningful living** – a sense of purpose, significance, and happiness or evaluating PUR in the absence of enjoyment

Levels of Purpose

- At the **highest** level, purpose represents a basic life orientation, a core value, global belief, or ideal; as such, it can never be fully achieved
- At the **intermediate** level, purpose represents a mission, a calling, an intermediate value, or an objective that can be fulfilled in principle
- At the **lowest** level, purpose represents concrete and specific goals that can be achieved

**OUR VISION MUST BE BIG ENOUGH TO
INSPIRE AND CHALLENGE US, BUT
ALWAYS BEYOND OUR REACH.
OUR VISION MUST ALSO BE REALISTIC
AND CONCRETE ENOUGH THAT WE CAN
FEEL GOOD FOR ACHIEVING A PART OF IT.**

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Our Vision

Understanding

- Encompassing self-understanding, a sense of coherence, making sense of situations and other people
- Having a clear sense of who one is, what one is good at, and what one's place in the world is
- Understanding the pressing need of the situation and what the world needs
- Don't be a stranger to oneself – dare to open the dark rooms and secret chambers in one's life

Understanding (cont'd)

- Knowing another person's true intention and feelings through effective communication
- Having the practical wisdom to make sound judgments and good decisions
- Understanding external and internal barriers to achieving one's purpose
- Understanding what one believes in and what one stands for

Responsibility

- Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand
- Doing the right thing and finding the right solution
- Choosing appropriate reactions and actions in situations of conflicting values and demands
- Holding oneself accountable for one's own behavior
- Discovering to what extent one is responsible for a given problem – blaming only makes things worse

Spiritual Well-Being

- Our sense of well-being depends not as much on our positive feelings as on the positive meaning we live by. We are how we live, not how we feel.
- Meaning Therapy helps clients to develop an open, accepting, positive attitude towards life and an understanding of the human condition

A Positive Worldview

- The world is full of suffering, but it is also full of opportunities for us to work with.
- Learn to maintain a meaning-mindset no matter what what life throws at us.
- Learn to live with uncertainty and adversity.

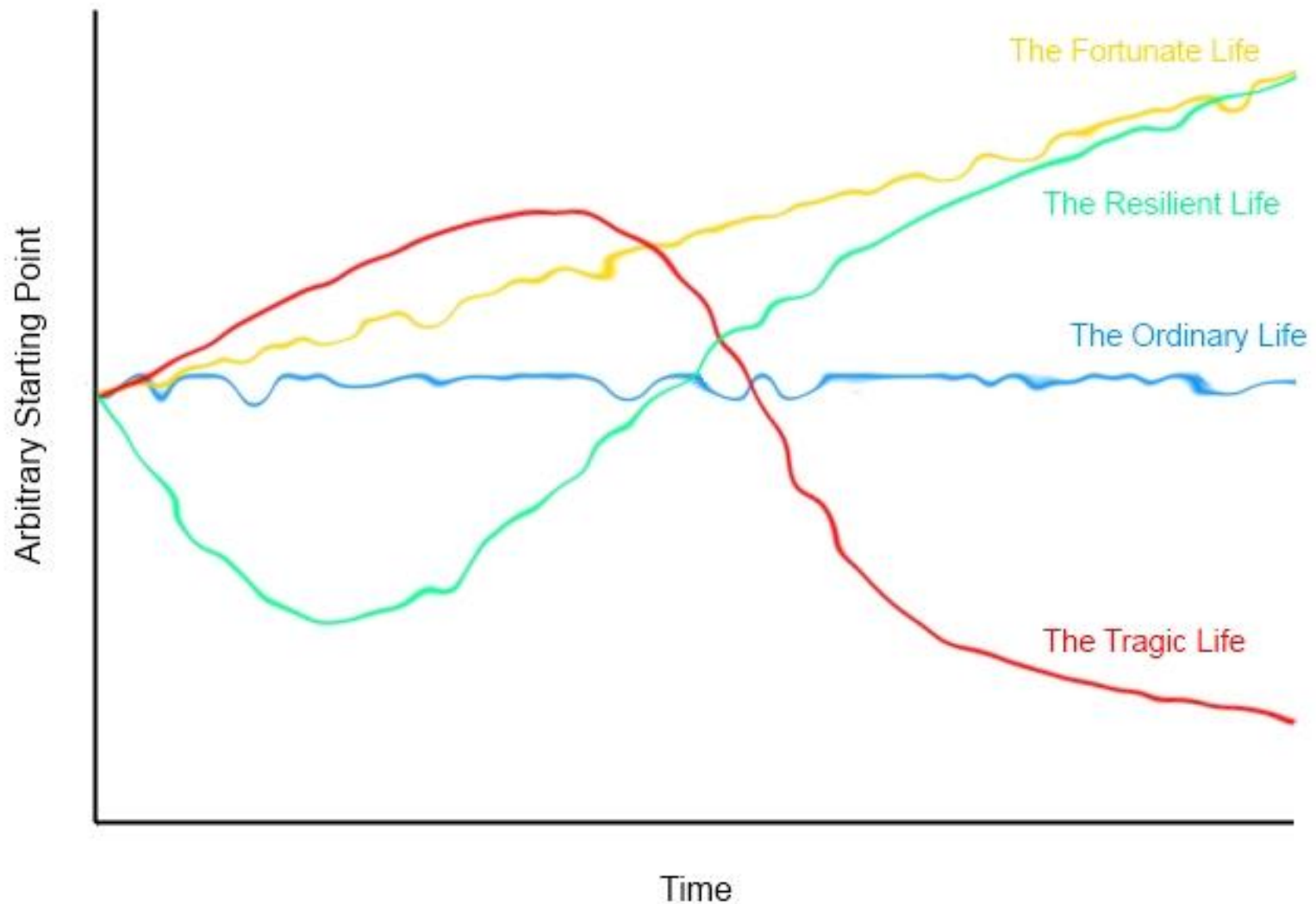
When Tragedy Strikes

- The best built house can be destroyed.
- No one is immune from suffering and tragedies.
- Bad things do happen to good people.
- There is a breaking point for everyone.
- The challenge is to recover and become stronger.

Fate & Resilience

- Fate can be very harsh and unfair to some, but favour others.
- The reality of social injustice and unfair treatment can have the advantage of building the resilience necessary for fulfilling a big dream.

Four Life Trajectories



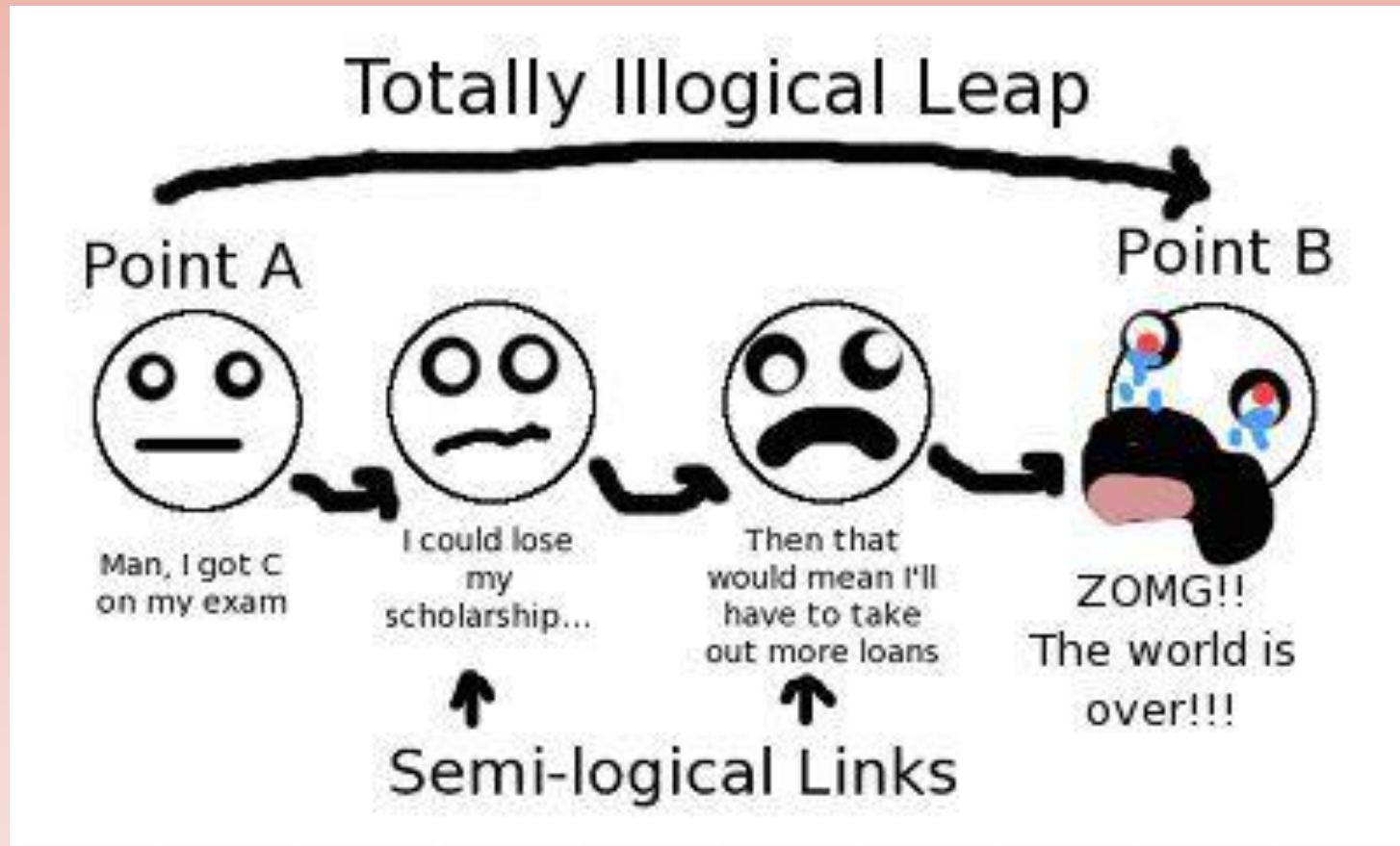
Patterns of Resilience

- **Recovery:** Bouncing back and returning to normal functioning.
- **Invulnerability:** Remaining relatively unscathed by the adversity or trauma.
- **Post-traumatic Growth:** Bouncing back and becoming stronger.

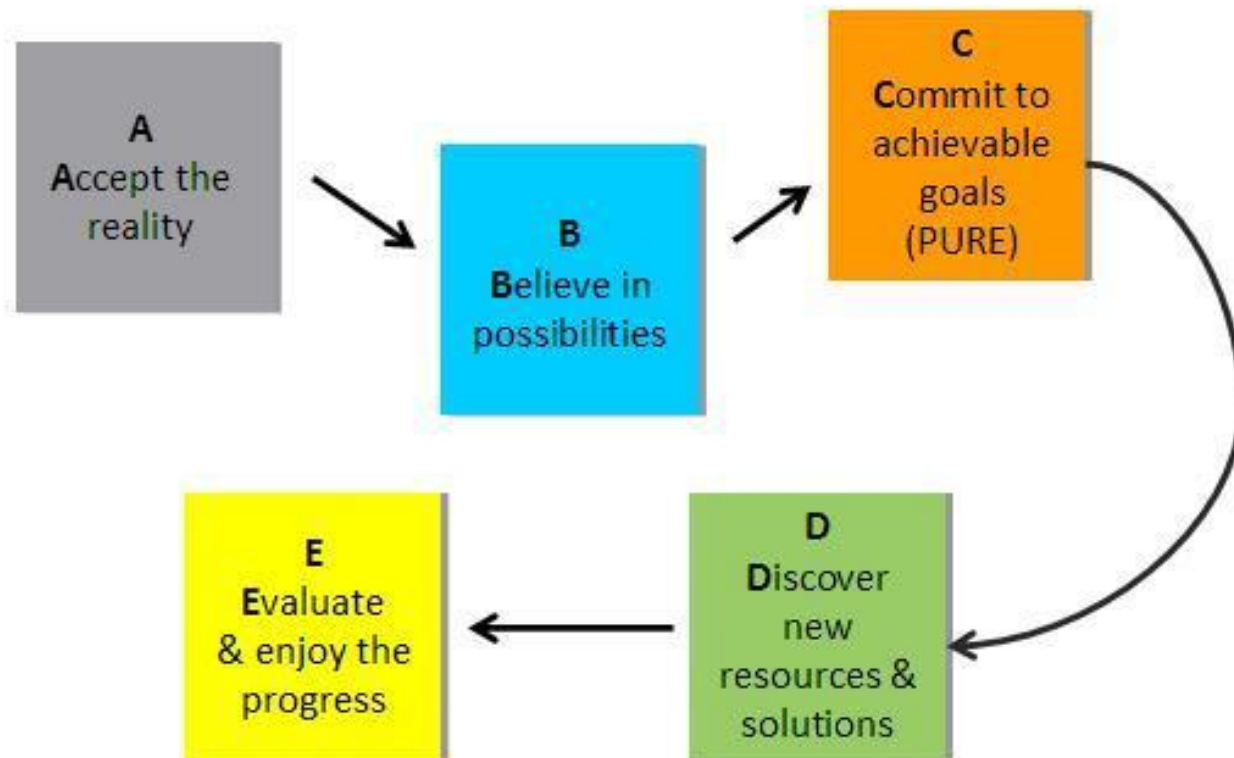
3 Common Responses to Adversity

- 1) Catastrophizing:** Creating unnecessary anxieties & suffering
- 2) Trivializing:** Ignoring the real danger & believing in delusions
- 3) Assessing it rationally:** Appraising the situation realistically

A Case of Exaggerated Appraisal: The Process of Catastrophizing



The Pathway of Resilience



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ABCDE Strategy

- **Accept** and confront the reality – *the reality principle.*
- **Believe** that life is worth living – *the faith principle.*
- **Commit** to goals and actions – *the action principle.*
- **Discover** the meaning and significance of self and situations – *the Aha! principle.*
- **Evaluate** the above – *the self-regulation principle.*

Acceptance

- Accepting what cannot be changed.
- Accepting reality, limitations, loss, trauma, & existential givens.
- Acceptance does not mean giving up or resignation.
- Confronting one's worse fears with courage and tragic optimism.
- Accept responsibility not for what has happened but for how to cope
- Learn to let go in order to move forward
- Transcending and transforming the tragedy.

Four Inescapable Facts

1. You can not escape from yourself
2. You can not escape from suffering
3. You can not escape from existential anxiety
4. You can not escape from death.

But you can accept, transcend and relate to these inescapables in a positive way

Living with Anxiety

- Anxiety pervades all aspects of life
- Trying to avoid it only generates more anxiety
- Accepting and engaging it makes us feel alive
- A life without anxiety would be a boring and empty existence
- When we step out of our comfort zone and learn to work with our anxiety, we will create a magic zone of meaningful living

Coping with Anxiety

- When we are willing to lose everything, including our lives, then there is nothing to worry about.
- When we are free to sail any direction on the ocean, there is no more need to run away from situations.
- When we are willing to become like an innocent and curious child, we are free from ego and all those anxiety-producing games of competition, deception, and control.

Mindfulness facilitates acceptance.

- Allows painful thoughts or feelings to come and go without a struggle
- Transforms the function of negativity
- Willingness to accept fear, pain, & hopelessness
- Opens us up to new ideas and feelings
- Opens us up to the presence of more alternative responses

Belief

Affirming one's ideals and core values

- Recognizing the intrinsic value and meaning of life.
- Receiving support and help from others.
- Turning to a personal God or higher power.
- Growing and striving for positive transformation.
- Believing in an eventual triumph of good over evil.
- Recognizing the worthwhileness and authenticity of one's mission.
- Recognizing and using one's competencies, character strengths and virtues.

Meaning Interventions

- Different ways of helping clients affirm the intrinsic meaning and value of life
 - **Relationships:** Ask clients about who they matter to most (e.g., their children, parents)
 - **Singularity:** Emphasize that they are singular and capable of making a unique contribution
 - **Growth:** Help them realize that everyone has the potential to learn and grow
 - **Spirituality:** Explore how they can access and cultivate their spirituality

Commitment

Moving forward and carrying out one's responsibility with determination.

- Doing what needs to be done regardless of feelings or circumstances.
- Striving to fulfill one's responsibility no matter what.
- Enduring hardship and pain for your cause.
- Problem-solving and effective coping.
- Avoiding errors and temptations.
- Practicing the PURE principle.
- Pursuing realistic goals.
- Re-authoring one's life story.

Sources of Meaning

According to Wong (1998), there are 8 sources of meaning and the good life.

1. Achievement
2. Acceptance
3. Transcendence
4. Intimacy
5. Relationship
6. Religion
7. Fairness
8. Positive emotions

Discovery

Learning something new about the self and life.

- Digging deeper, exploring farther, & searching higher.
- Discovering one's hidden courage and strength.
- Discovering the power of faith and spiritual resources.
- Grasping the complexities of life and people.

Evaluation

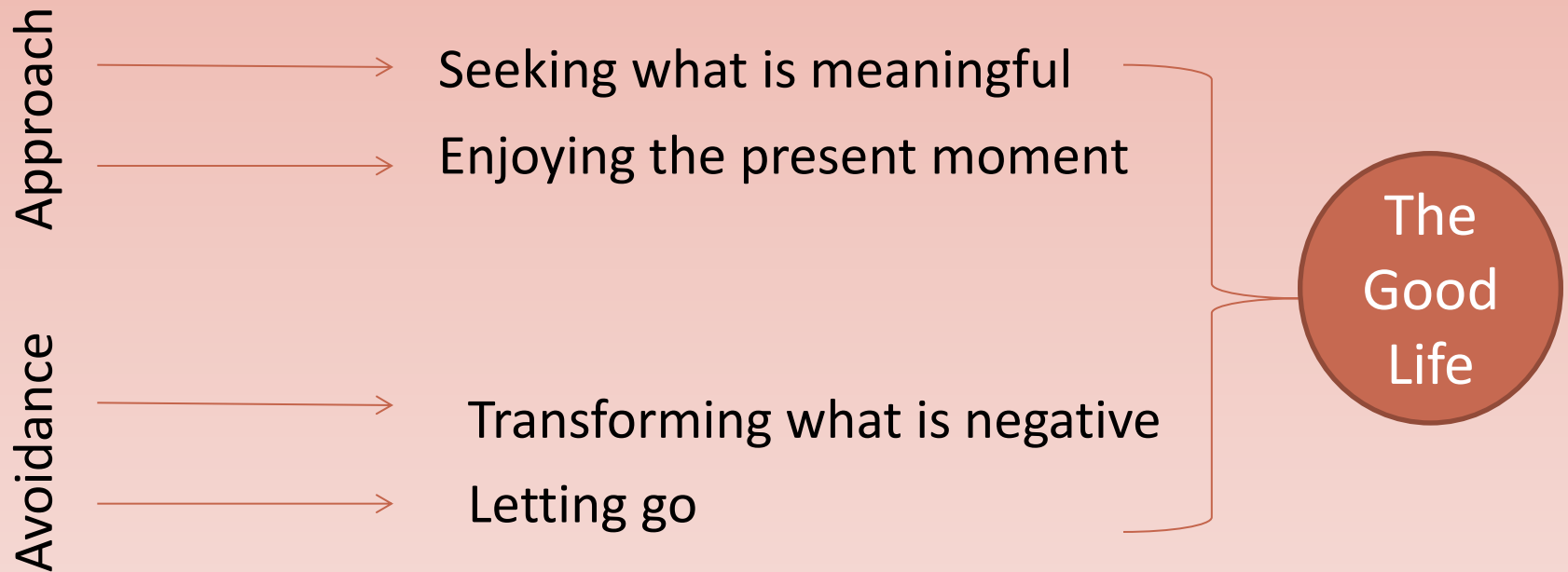
Savoring small successes or re-assessing one's progress

- Feeling relief that the worse is over
- Monitoring progress
- Savoring the moments of small success
- Reflecting and reviewing one's life
- Receiving feedback from others
- Conducting assessments and making adjustments

Self-Regulation Processes

- Individuals constantly evaluate their progress in both goal-striving as well as the pay-off in goal-attainment.
- Self-regulatory feedback processes enable individuals to adjust their strategies and reset their goals.

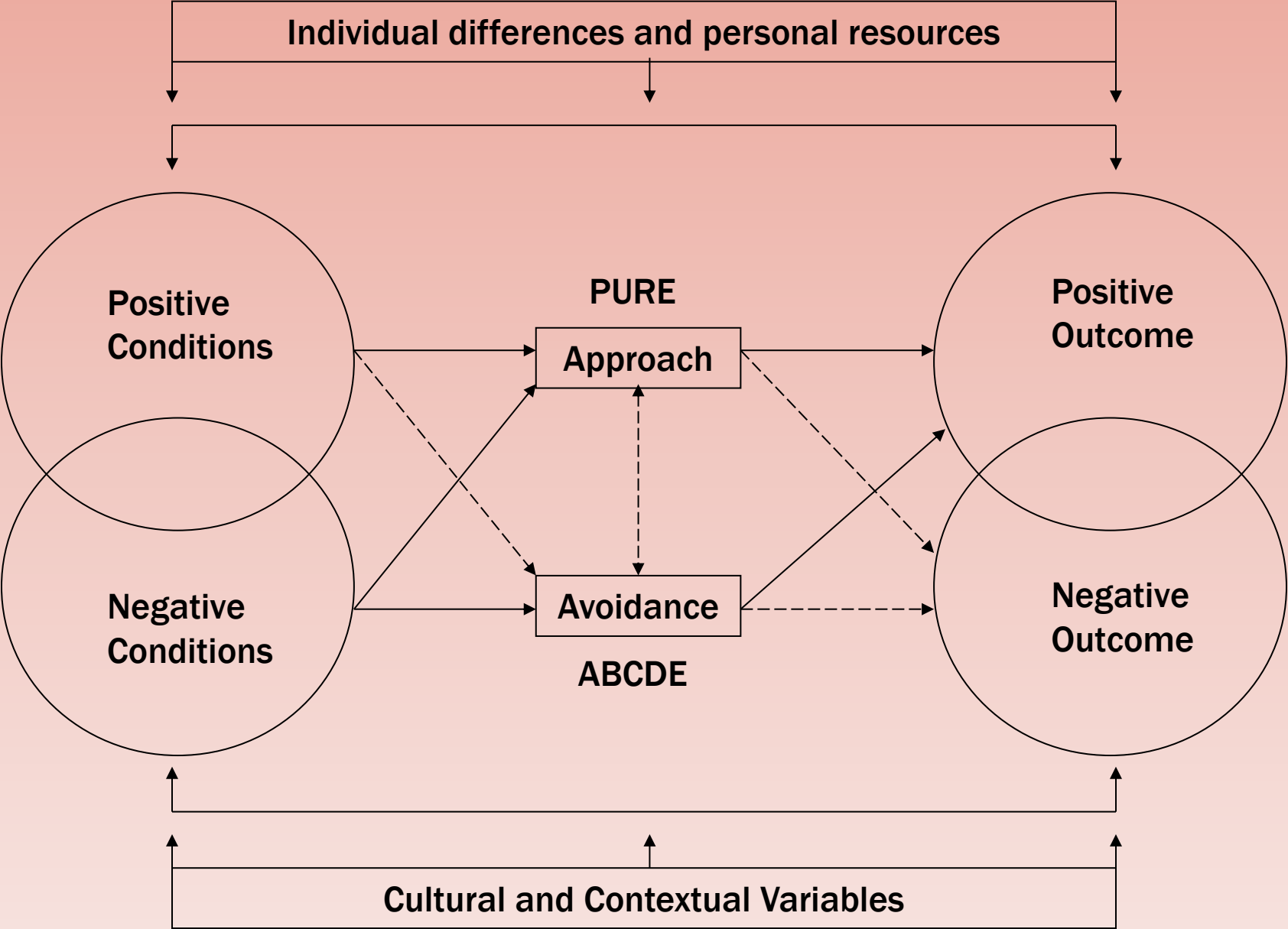
Integrating Dual Processes to Create the Good Life



Dual-Process Model

- We can best achieve adaptive success through integrating approach and avoidance processes.
- The approach process – life expansion
- The avoidance process – life protection
- Employ offence and defence at the same time.

A Dual-Process Model



The Non-Duality Hypothesis

- A meaning hypothesis recognizes the adaptive value of both positive and negative events
- This non-duality hypothesis emphasizes the benefits and necessity of integrating approach and avoidance processes as being complementary in a unified dynamic system

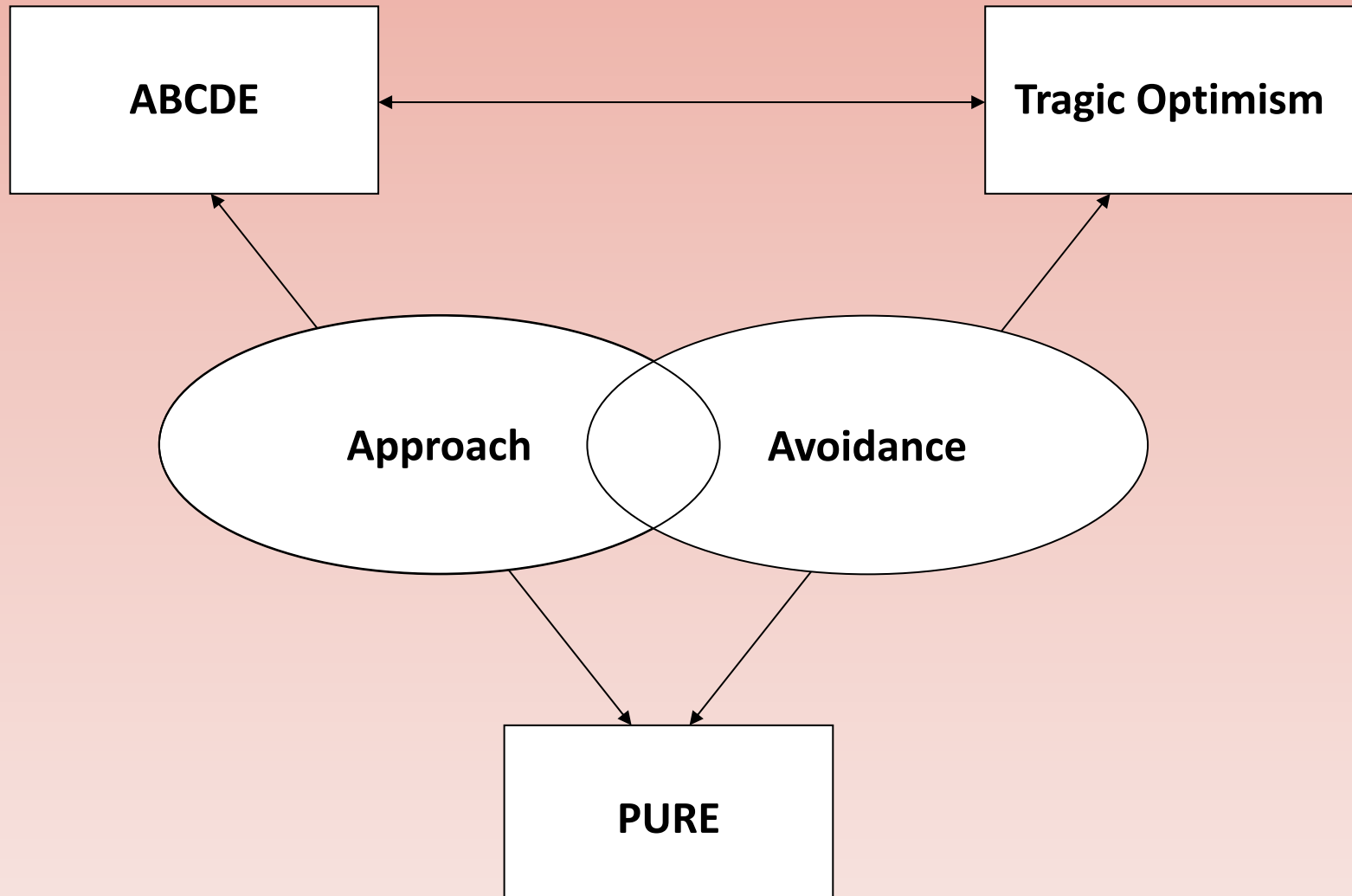
The Non-Duality Hypothesis (cont)

- Albert Camus: “There is no joy of life without despair.”
- Rollo May: “The ultimate paradox is that negation becomes affirmation.”
- Carl Jung: “It is evil to negate the dark side of personality (the Shadow).”

The Non-Duality hypothesis (cont)

- When the two processes work together, the likelihood of survival and flourishing is greater than focusing exclusively on either approach or avoidance.
- There is a down side to everything positive, and there is up side to everything negative. Positive and negative potentials are often two sides of the same coin.
- **PURE** represents the positive processes, while **ABCDE** represents coping with negatives

The Meaning-Centered Positive Triad of Survival & Flourishing



The Hard Road to Mental Health

- In order to maintain your sanity and attain positive mental health, you have to be willing to go through the abyss, hopelessness, and pain that may arise after you have decided to pursue a meaningful life.
- True awakening always results in breaking down the old habits of self-absorption and materialistic thinking.

Blessings from Brokenness

- An opportunity for rebuilding
- Realizing the futility of defensiveness & illusions
- Becoming aware of the need to surrender to the reality of uncertainty and void
- Beginning the journey towards healing and wholeness
- Discovering the depths of one's spiritual resources

From Emptiness to Fulfillment

- This is one of the paradoxical truths of human existence.
- We achieve fulfillment only after we have realized how hopelessly empty and groundless we are. This realization provides spacious room for compassion and enlightenment.

10 Steps to Living a Happy, Healthy, & Virtuous Life

1. Affirm that your life has intrinsic meaning and value.
2. Know your true self.
3. Discover what really matters.
4. Remember that other people matter.
5. Seek and pursue your calling (The PURE Principle).
6. Maintain a double vision (the key to becoming “unstuck”).
7. Practice the yin-yang principle (The ABCDE Principle).
8. Savour the meaningful moments.
9. Keep hope alive, through tragic optimism.
10. Maintain a positive attitude everyday.

Fivefold Path to Positive Mental Health

1. Looking back for lessons learned in life
2. Looking around for opportunities to serve & excel
3. Looking forward to fulfilling my life goals
4. Looking down to lift up the down trodden
5. Looking up for divine inspiration and help