



## Review

Search

**Positive computing : technology for well-being and human potential**Calvo R., Peters D., The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2014. 296 pp. Type: Book (978-0-262028-15-8)

Date Reviewed: Feb 5 2015

Full Text

This book provides an excellent look at how computers can become our handmaidens, helping to make our personal lives better. As the authors state, they investigate what they term positive computing: "the design and development of technology to support psychological wellbeing and human potential" (p. 2).

The book is organized in two main parts. The first part covers the fields of psychology, economics, education, and computing that supports the improvement of well-being. It is not surprising to see research from the first three fields, but what was surprising was the initial inroads already being made in the area of computing. The second part (chapters 6 to 11) goes into more detail on specific well-being factors: "Positive Emotions," "Motivation, Engagement, and Flow," "Self-Awareness and Self-Compassion," "Mindfulness," "Empathy," and "Compassion and Altruism." Chapter 12, "Caveats, Considerations, and the Way Ahead," concludes with a look at how to move forward, taking a critical look at the issues that would impact the growth and maturity of this movement. The book is also enhanced by sidebars from experts in various disciplines, including psychology, neuroscience, and human-computer interaction (HCI).

The authors state: "One of the goals of this book is to make a convincing case that considering wellbeing in the design of technology is not only entirely achievable, but also valuable, if not imperative, to building a digital environment that can make a happier and healthier (not just more productive) world" (p. 8). The authors succeed in making the case. They use current literature from many supporting fields and associated researchers, and explain some of the frameworks and methodologies that already exist. The book provides more than just a "wouldn't it be nice to have" explanation. The potential for this technology is grounded in evidence, and the authors provide many ways for these efforts to be effective and helpful. They are concerned that the evaluation methods be rigorous as well. This is reinforced in the last chapter in their guidelines for researchers (p. 267):

- Be honest and explicit about our motives and values.
- Demand research integrity and scientific method.
- Ensure multidisciplinary collaboration.
- Employ multidimensional evaluations.
- Take an iterative approach that allows adaption based on evaluation.

This book is not a conventional textbook since there are no exercises. Although it is not an edited volume, it does have chapters that are very specific and reference the research of the particular area under discussion. Each chapter has an excellent list of references. In the early chapters covering the supporting foundational literature--chapters 2 to 4: "The Psychology of Wellbeing," "Multidisciplinary Foundations," "Wellbeing in Technology Research"--seminal and classic references are included as well as very current research activities in the field. In chapter 5, "A Framework and Methods for Positive Computing," the authors propose a theoretical framework and discuss technologies to support well-being.

The intended audience is not just any user of technology, but anyone wanting to use technology to enhance and improve their life.

Overall, I found the book very interesting. I like how the authors related the innovations and findings in psychology, education, economics, and neuroscience to ways we can use

## Recommendations

★ Reviewer Selected

## Related Topics

Browse

Alerts

[Social Issues \(K.4.2\)](#)

Add

[Organizational Impacts \(K.4.3\)](#)

Add

Manage Alerts

More Alerts

computers to better our lives. They also realize that not everything should be mediated by technology; as in any type of HCI research, the human comes first.

Will all of this come to pass? Only time will tell. But positive computing done right has the potential to provide enhancements to our lives and create a symbiotic relationship between the person and the technology.

More reviews about this item: [Amazon](#)

Reviewer: [Maxine Cohen](#)

Review #: CR143157



Would you recommend this review?

yes

no

Other reviews under "**Social Issues**":

[Thinking outside the continent](#)

**Date**

May 2 2014

Best M. Communications of the ACM 57(4): 27-29, 2014. Type: Article

[African youths and the dangers of social networking: a culture-centered approach to using social media](#)

Apr 7 2014

Ephraim P. Ethics and Information Technology 15(4): 275-284, 2013. Type: Article

[Cyberspace and international relations: theory, prospects and challenges](#)

Mar 7 2014

Kremer J., Müller B., Springer Publishing Company, Incorporated, Berlin, Germany, 2014. 350 pp. Type: Book (978-3-642374-80-7)

[more...](#)



REVIEWER'S AREA

MASTHEAD

SUBSCRIBE

NEWS

TIPS

HELP

CONTACT US

Select Language ▼

Powered by [Google Translate](#)

Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Copyright © 2000-2015 ThinkLoud, Inc.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)