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### POSITIVE THINKING – A UNIVERSAL CURE FOR MODERN-DAY DISEASES?

In this article, I analyse features of positive thinking which have made this ideological trend come to be a perceived as a panacea for the whole spectrum of shortcomings felt by many modern people and, in their conviction, are blocking their ability to succeed and enjoy life. Most therapies and self-improvement techniques offered are now deeply embedded in modern reality and, irrespective of their intellectual level, proven results or magical atmosphere, are highly popular. Therefore, we should ask why this has happened, i.e. what do individual positive thinking schools actually offer? In this article I present concepts which lead to answer this question.

Keywords: positive thinking, “nonmarket” personality, therapy, interpersonal relations, hidden knowledge.

#### INTRODUCTION

Even though the positive thinking movement, together with its different variations, ideas and recipients, has become a perfect fit for modern reality, it still remains an understudied phenomenon. The reasons for its popularity seem especially intriguing, as they indicate that it serves important social functions. The aim of the article is not to present all functions of positive thinking nor to provide a broad description of all of its aspects. The priority is to analyse those characteristics of positive thinking that indicate that it has become a universal and multidirectional social therapy, responding dynamically to common problems and ailments.

The empirical basis for these considerations, typifications and conclusions are concepts featured in positive thinking handbooks and guidebooks written by popular authors from the positive thinking movement, most of all: N.V. Peale, M. Seligman, R. Murphy, N. Hille, S.W. Ventrelli, P. Waters, E.F. Freitag, S. Palmer, L. Williams, and L. Pelamatti. Qualitative analysis of the contents of such publications was performed to interpret the individual approaches, focusing on six separate categories.

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There are:

- references and theoretical assumptions which justify the claims accompanying the individual positive thinking theories,
- contents of appeals addressed to the recipients,
- types of techniques used and recommended therapy types,
- objectives of the recommended therapies,
- recipients of positive appeals,
- areas of social life where the authors' recommendations are to be applied.

This method has facilitated identification of two positive thinking movements, different in terms of contents, which respond to different social needs.

## THE NEED FOR NEW THERAPIES

The list of diseases and ailments affecting modern man, despite scientific progress and dynamic developments in medicine – or perhaps paradoxically because of them – seems to be growing significantly. Although some diseases decimating the population have become history, they are being replaced by new diseases, including ones affecting broadly-understood mental states and even the individual's personal characteristics and intellect. The new diseases include not only ailments and disorders that medicine is trying to address, but also numerous, quite common conditions which seem to partially fall outside the scope of interest of medical science. As one may think, their omnipresence is also as a result of the media's popularization of the images of individual weaknesses, defects and broadly-understood deficits. Some of these weaknesses are found in the somatic sphere (e.g. "bad body", sickliness, physical inability to perform strenuous activities and to concentrate, a permanent feeling of fatigue, inefficient sleep), while others relate to the psychological sphere (e.g. weaknesses in personality, low self-esteem, a lack of communication skills, inferiority complex, a lack of vitality, resourcefulness and optimism, etc.). As a result, they seem to create an intuitively conceptualised image of the imperfect human being who has difficulties facing the challenges of the modern life; an image comprised of "nonmarket" personality and "nonmarket" carnality, i.e. specific defects which today are in fact becoming new diseases (or at least they are perceived as such), which not only prevent people from achieving spectacular success in life, but also from experiencing normal satisfaction with life. Masses of people focused on their own weaknesses are seeking medication, therapies and strategies to enable them to overcome their weaknesses, and in reality to enable them to reduce normal, natural and common characteristics, which have suddenly come to be interpreted as deficits and defects. However, such personality traits as hypersensitivity, shyness, and a lack of "feistiness" can simply be the characteristics of reflective and sensitive individuals, whereas other characteristics, such as a lack of consistency, lack of initiative or resistance, lack of optimism, etc., have been classed – since recently, and usually in the context of a professional career – as traits which need to be moderated. According to the authors of self-help books, support programmes and various therapies, such characteristics make it significantly more difficult for individuals to function in modern

reality. In different movements under the common, rather euphemistic banner of “positive thinking” we can find a range of methods of lessening such traits or re-shaping them so that they become personal assets. It is positive thinking that holds an attractive offering of various methods of tackling one’s weaknesses, often close to psychotherapy, sometimes resembling a complete ideology, and at other times only constituting a “treatment” suggestion based on radical diet, specific colours, relaxation techniques, affirmation, belief, or a radical change in lifestyle and interpersonal relations.

Therefore, we should ask why this has happened, i.e. what do individual positive thinking schools actually offer, and the aim of the article is to analyse the social functions of positive thinking, which will lead to understanding the real reasons for its popularity, and to identifying certain hidden social issues that are difficult to distinguish. Positive thinking seems to play a socially unnoticed role of a multifunctional replacement social therapy. However, it is not the same as therapies aimed at reducing banal problems, such as poor interpersonal relations, work and family issues, because this kind of healing is often outright promised by the leaders of the movement. To find the basic reasons for its popularity one needs to dig much deeper, as they boil down to the promise of effectively reducing the majority of fears experienced by people these days, for whom positive thinking is the universal cure for social weakness and fear of being average – at the same time indicating the presence of magic and esotericism in their banal existence and ordinary everyday events.

An attempt to examine the phenomenon should start with an explanation of its roots and main assumptions, from capturing the moment in time when positive thinking began to spread successfully and gained the status of an effective antidote to the problems faced by modern man.<sup>1</sup> It is not an easy task, as despite the link between some schools of positive thinking and modern forms of self-help psychology, its strong relationship with modern esoterica is equally important. Positive thinking can also be interpreted as a specific variation on magical thinking, which is evidence of intellectual regression, but this predilection is highlighted just as often when discussing the potential of positive thinking.

The term “positive thinking” was popularised by Norman Vincent Peale (*Power of Positive Thinking!*) (Peale 1995), who, along with Napoleon Hill (*Think and Grow Rich!*), should be considered a precursor of most of today’s variations on this movement. In the 1930s, not only did they popularise simple and, as they claimed, effective techniques to reduce various human weaknesses and defects, but they most of all promoted the view that people can basically help themselves by engaging in radical therapies to improve their quality of life. This self-therapy skill, supported by the modern psychological knowledge on self-affirmation techniques, still constitutes the theoretical core of the most popular schools and variations of positive thinking.

Despite its varied character, we can distinguish among several separate variants of positive thinking. In this article I distinguish and analyse two of them, which I believe to be the most popular schools of positive thinking: the psychology-related school and that referring to belief and the potential of the teacher – the spiritual guide. I point to those of their characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> I am skipping an extensive examination of its origins, sometimes linked to the popularisation of so-called New Thought by P.P. Quimby, Mary Baker, the creator of Christian Science, and finally by the father of psychology, William James.

which, in total, create models of universal therapies.<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Zbigniew Bela, until recently the term “treatment” covered a wide range of meanings and referred to all methods of “ridding the patient of disease”, including the use of magical techniques, such as casting a spell over the disease (Bela 2005; 2011: 26–28). It should be noted that this view on treatment and disease seems to return periodically, and many of its forms are now present not only in positive thinking, but also in herbalism and alternative therapies: including the function of a “folk healer”, casting spells on diseases, whose popularity may be surprising from the perspective of 21<sup>st</sup>-century medicine, but remains a fact.

## POSITIVE THINKING RELATED TO PSYCHOLOGY

The origins of some popular positive thinking schools relate to Carl R. Rogers’s humanistic psychology, in particular, to the principles of his customer-oriented therapy, including an important component of self-actualisation, i.e. discovering with the therapist’s help the psychological capabilities that one possesses but has not been using (compare: Rogers: 1991). The path leads through laborious multi-stage reconstruction of self-awareness to finally build an individual self-acceptance strategy. (Rogers 2002: 65). As, according to Rogers, there is strong potential in the abilities of each human being – a positive attitude towards oneself – it should become the main basis and tool in the self-realisation process (Zimbardo 1999: 534–536). However, this assumption, despite undoubtedly being highly attractive due to, among other things, its simplicity, leads to the abandonment of part of scientific knowledge of the mind, or at least to its significant reduction. Therefore, Roger’s humanistic psychology today seems to inspire mainly such theories and therapies which place trust in the individual’s experience and assume that the individual can help him/herself, i.e. independently modify their life or complete an effective self-healing process. This rather simple assumption constitutes the basis for a movement based on orientation of specific and prompt support activities, which, obviously, highlights the significance of the imperatives embedded in human beings which enable them to activate the great “power of personal transformation” (Yalom 2002: 11). Moreover, the authors of these concepts claim that virtually everyone should work hard on themselves, as such work is not only necessary to maintain good mental well-being, but it actually determines the achievement of their goals in life. Without it, efficient learning, management, pursuit of professional goals and building a happy family is not possible. It is easily seen that the enthusiasts of that point of view assume that basically, without working on themselves, modern people do not feel satisfied with their lives, lack high self-esteem, and are unable to pursue achievements or build satisfying interpersonal relations. Thus it seems that positive thinking implies a belief in specific and unfavourable conditions of modern life; in multiple defects which are demonstrated in this situation; in modern life which requires extreme mobilization, as nothing is simple; and most of all in the need for working continuously on oneself with the support of therapies.

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<sup>2</sup> As in this article I am analysing the therapeutic elements of positive thinking, I am skipping its relations with the New Age ideology.

It should be noted that Rogers, while introducing the seemingly positive term “the man of tomorrow”, reinforced the belief in the need for searching for ways to adapt to the new reality. It seems that by doing so he also assumed there was a need to analyse, control and select natural psychological traits, and consequently, a need to consciously reinforce some of them while reducing others. The pessimism in that approach is even more visible when we realise that it leads to the conclusion that either everybody is too weak for modern times or that modernity is destructive to at least some of them. That strong fatalism is counterbalanced by the belief that with some effort it is possible to take control of one’s weaknesses or even to redesign them into powerful and positive traits. This gives rise to three of the most fundamental assumptions of the positive thinking movement: 1. hidden knowledge and mental strength and 2. self-creation ability are not only embedded in the personality of each human being, but 3. we can learn about them, activate and multiply them – which is required in order to consistently build a satisfying existence.

It should be added that in such assumptions we can sometimes find traces of old occult rules, well adapted to modern times. One supporter of this view is Zbigniew Musiał, who claims: “First of all, PT is a simplified and even more naive version of classic occultism. It does not require knowledge of magical rituals shaped over centuries, spells, pentagram drawings [...]. The whole ritual is limited to a wish that is mundane but repeated with a passion, such as wealth, wealth, wealth” (Musiał 2006: 142). Similar critical views are shared by psychotherapist Gunter Scheich, who also sees fraud and manipulation in positive thinking, pointing to the incorrect version of the personality theory promoted by the movement (Scheich 2000). Severe criticism is also found in statements which suggest that positive thinking seemingly gives one optimism, but in reality it burdens the individual with excessive responsibility for their own fate, as it suggests that they are its sole creators while omitting determinants beyond their control (Saleci 2013).

Importantly, that orientation, which is dominant for positive thinking, most often corresponds to tendencies found in popular self-help psychological literature, most of all in literature focusing on various emotional issues people face, but also on perfecting social life skills: work and learning techniques, efficient team management and effective marketing. (Ventrella 2008). This extreme highlighting of the specific living conditions of the modern man and consequentially the primacy of everyday life over spirituality is linked to a concept of Martin Seligman (Czapiński 2004: 8–7), who unexpectedly placed healthy individuals and their ability to create their own lives based on pragmatic self-esteem in the limelight for psychology (Seligman 2004: 19–31; 2005). The titles of his works alone are enough to characterise his concept, e.g.: *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*; *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*; *What You Can Change and What You Can't: (learning to accept who you are)*. *The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement*. Their postulates have led to a radical re-establishment of the tasks of psychology, which now should involve showing the way which leads to joy and individual happiness by changing one’s self-esteem and destructive habits, including the habit of negative thinking: “I finally decided to tackle helplessness, depression and pessimism. Over the course of my research I found that each of these attitudes can be learned and *unlearned* [...]. Pessimism can be unlearned to consequently protect one from depression, improve one’s achievements and gain better health” (Seligman 1996: 19).

Surprisingly, what is most important in that process directed at achieving individual well-being is not to focus on the inner self, but on the social perspective, i.e. orientation towards other people, as Seligman claimed – and certainly rightfully so – that excessive concentration on self-analysis, on the individual “I” and aspirations have rid people of the ability to accept support from their direct social environment. (Seligman 1995: 24). Therefore, while boosting one’s self-esteem and even reinforcing their narcissism, positive thinking also reminds them about the significance of the social environment, the role of social ties and the ideas on which a community is based.

We can point out a range of similarities between the assumptions of positive thinking and modern psychology. The similarities are not only limited to the references to the language of psychology made by positive thinking and to using the programmes of psychological therapies. On the theoretical level as well, positive thinking is reinforced by strong trends found in psychology, while popular training in building self-belief and positive thinking are also often used by professional psychologists today (Wilding 2010; Wilding and Palmer 2007). It is thus clearly evident that different concepts based on a belief in human self-development capabilities are intertwined. They can be found in many therapies aimed at activating natural adaptation skills extracted from the inner potential of individuals. (Williams 2006: 7). It needs to be stated that the aspects of positive thinking movements strongly legitimised by psychology certainly contribute to their vast popularity, and psychology has not only accepted some of their methods and theoretical assumptions, but also embraced them within its own practices. We could even propose a thesis that with regard to self-help and therapy, psychology takes quite a lot from positive thinking, but whether this creates mutual gains is a different question.

## POSITIVE THINKING BASED ON BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS

The other strong positive thinking school is certainly a departure from science, as it comprises concepts which refer to belief, inspiration and extraordinary abilities of the teacher – the guide. In case of that school, its anti-scientific aspects do not only include ideology, but also the form of sharing contents and related rituals, and it promotes concepts of the world and human nature promoted that command people to search for support tools in completely different areas. The creators and preachers of positive thinking seek its legitimization by creating denominations which relate to religion to a slightly higher or lower extent. It should be highlighted that the religious or quasi-religious ideas and formulas shaped by them are only seemingly related to a specific religion, while references to faith are only superficial (e.g. through the use of analogical language, invocations or prayers), but they direct the recipients’ attention to something which could be described as the power of the spirit, drawn from a deep trust placed in the spiritual guide. With regard to that enthusiastic belief, justified in various ways, subsequent authors search for ways to lead people to a happy existence. However, it seems that it is not the theoretical assumptions of the individual concepts that contribute to the popularity of the movement; one could even say that together with the quasi-religious form of communication they only serve to reinforce the mysterious and attractive atmosphere. Much more significant is the strong focus on the “all-knowing” teacher, who plays the role of the guide-master, leading trusting students to new techniques to improve their own lives.

The numerous concepts embedded in that movement – similarly to the psychology-based movement – are of a clearly compilatory nature: using exotic techniques to heal the body and soul (Waters 2003), religious ideas, biological renewal principles, mediumism, theosophy, etc. Moreover, some works suggest that positive thinking is in fact a new interpretation of the Bible, but, importantly, one made by the teacher by way of individual illumination. That view was shared by, for example, Joseph Murphy, the creator of the so-called philosophy of love, whose works are sometimes described as an example of building a deceitful and partially pagan theology (Musiał 2006: 138). Along with his followers, Murphy suggests that there is a concurrence between positive thinking and religion, which they reinforce by writing prayers and referring to the biblical language and quoting biblical verses. Finally, however, they revert to the person of the teacher, as he is the discoverer of the way to change fate, i.e. the discoverer of a previously unknown form of knowledge. In the case of positive thinking based on belief, the source of that special knowledge is the extraordinary ability of the teacher to experience and understand absolute faith. It is the teacher – oriented at the mission, i.e. a sense of responsibility – who can share it with others. Knowledge, however, is in each case, i.e. in each individual variant of positive thinking, generally simple and, more importantly, can be subjected, just like the accompanying experience, to practical purposes. Let us stress that faith relating to that knowledge is basically free from any contemplation or pursuit of absolute values, while prayers and invocations are usually strongly focused on everyday life (Murphy 2000: 18). It should be noted that from that perspective, apart from highlighting the role of the teacher, another important role is assigned to the human being, who can use the power of their own feelings, thoughts, beliefs, i.e. their own “inner power” to achieve any desired result. For instance, they can stop the ageing process, so in a sense turn back time, according to the claims of, among others, Lucia Pelamatti, by relying on positive thinking, which has a rejuvenating effect, so that virtually everyone is able to activate their intellect and derive new joy out of life (Pelamatti 2009). Despite the large dose of naivety and banality, such statements spread very easily, as they refer to commonly felt anxieties, while the example referred to above, old age, is especially controversial today. The global industry built on attempts to stop the ageing process proves that it is certainly perceived as a disease which signals not only the end of one’s vital capabilities, but also the end of their social significance. Although old age has always been a weakness to some extent, it seems that it did not instil people with such a strong and, more importantly, common fear. We are now living in an era of open ageism, where people feel an aversion to all the attributes of old age – including their own – and are desperately trying to find a cure. Positive thinking provides a means to address that issue and a range of other problems, because according to its creators, it facilitates the changes that people want: changing their unsatisfactory life, experiencing joy, achieving success, retaining a good memory and intellect, staying active, maintaining their social status, and obtaining joy out of their surroundings and beliefs. Pelamatti creating a manual to combat aging upholds conviction of old age as a shameful disease, even when the link to Erika Erikson and his distinguished phases in life, where maturity and old age is accompanied by a sense of accomplishment (Pelamatti 2009: 7–8; 19–43). They can also, for their own practical purposes, activate forces sometimes described as cosmic powers, and most of all activate their own hidden potential.

Conviction of the ability to self-create is very important in positive thinking and can be found, among others, in some of the statements of E.F. Freitag, e.g.: “You do not have to wait for salvation to come in an endlessly distant future,” or “You are your own salvation.” Even though, I believe, these should be interpreted as metaphors or mental shortcuts whose radicalism also results from the specific writing style of self-help books, they inspire people’s trust in their own self-creation abilities. Self-creation is directed at both corporeality and mentality, so it becomes an opportunity for restructuring one’s own life, also in its social aspects. A person changing him/herself can effectively change their social status. And this is not overshadowed by the fact that phrases commonly used in positive thinking, such as searching for “spherical harmony” and “secrets of conscious seeing” merely boil down, in practical terms, to a reasonable diet and nurturing optimism (Polish guides are also of such character, e.g.: Mateja and Sakowska 2000) or an attempt to improve the quality of one’s own life: “I have taught thousands of people all over the world to use cosmic power, to bring love into life, to restore harmony and peace where there’s discord, to bring out joy where there’s sadness, to restore health instead of succumbing to diseases, to live in prosperity and abundance, instead of being stuck in poverty and scarcity,” as Josef Murphy writes (Murphy 2000: 137). When analysing that section alone, however, we find that it refers to common and naturally rational desires, while the techniques promoted by the author – “the cosmic energy”—are just standard motivational techniques: improving self-esteem, improving one’s mood, and building a positive attitude towards others. (e.g.: Rubin 2011). We should add that today such techniques are just as often used, but also criticised, in psychology and positive thinking for their anti-rationalism and promoting ineffective self-deceit (e.g.: Burkeman 2017; Stawiszyński 2013; Lilienfeld 2013).

## SOURCES OF THE APPEAL OF POSITIVE THINKING

It should be noted that the strong adoration of man, sometimes close to anthropolatry, characteristic of positive thinking, most often in fact understood metaphorically rather than literally, is directly linked to the view that people can change their lives independently. Of course both of the desires for uniqueness and strength are not only characteristic of the modern times; on the contrary, dreams of the ability to actually influence one’s fate go way back and are reminiscent of the old anti-Christian heresy preached in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Pelagius, after whom the movement was later called Pelagianism (O’Collins and Farugia 2002; Musiał 2006: 137). The special adoration of man in modern positive thinking, however, has changed into a conviction that virtually everyone has an omnipotence which gives them a chance for social success. Thus consequently such success is more adored in positive thinking than the people who pursue it.

The references made by positive thinking to so many sources confirm the strong hybrid tendencies of that movement and its clear tendency to combine models drawn from various cultural systems and types of knowledge into slightly more or less compatible wholes. However, it is not a weakness of the movement, but to the contrary, such “idealistic patchwork” significantly increases the attractiveness of individual variations of positive thinking and the whole idea. Moreover, it also facilitates legitimization of the movement and presentations of



its effectiveness. Combining various concepts and presenting them in simplified forms contributes to creating a picture of an exceptionally democratic doctrine, which offers universal messages and, most importantly: messages which can be used in practice in everyday life.

Critics of positive thinking point out other reasons for its popularity. It is worth referring to them here, as contrary to the authors' intentions, they also illustrate the special universalism of positive thinking. Psychotherapist Gunter Scheich, representing the most popular line of criticism, distinguished 13 reasons which make PT so attractive. They all basically result from skilfully satisfying various desires and needs of modern people: the desire to have freedom, wealth, safety, and comfort, to avoid internal conflicts, to hide the need for social support, to forget any harm suffered (it is more about forgetting painful incidents from one's life), the need to simplify the world, the need for special emigration from the real world, the need for health and salvation, individual reality, omnipotence, harmony, and happiness, and to live in a happy world and in wealth which comes at no effort (Scheich 2000: 17). Even though Scheich offers many true comments on the psychological trap to which positive thinking leads many of its enthusiasts: unrealistic thinking and only blaming one's bad attitude for failures, we cannot agree with the abovementioned reasons for the movement's attractiveness. What causes difficulty are the vague, highly literary phrases used by the author (e.g. "the land of happiness") and most of all the mutual exclusion of the needs listed. For example, on one hand people want omnipotence and isolation in their own comfortable world, but on the other they lack a sense of security, which they cannot provide for themselves, so they long for support. That view also offers an excessively relaxed combination of material needs generated by everyday life with eschatological needs, such as the desire to maintain one's health and the desire to have wealth combined with the desire to find salvation. Apart from these contradictions it should be added that Scheich presents an approach which excessively simplifies human needs, as he focuses on listing characteristics, wishes which merely boil down to the desire for material wealth and mental well-being (Bettina Burghof introduced a term illustrating the range of such hedonistic needs: "happy-being", Burghof 2007). But he does not notice seemingly basic reasons for seeking support from positive thinking, and thus the basis for its appeal: weakening social bonds, all knowledge resources quickly becoming out-dated, and growing social anxiety. It is the conditions of modern life that are the source of many types of social anxiety and the lack of a sense of stability. In this situation it would be more surprising if people did not try to look for a simple antidote, fearing that they could not cope when confronted with the modern world. Therefore their need to find support in an idea and action strategy is not an infantile fusion of childhood dreams and adult daydreams, but a search for a way to reduce common fears.

## FINAL REMARKS

Critics of positive thinking focus on the visible ignorance of those who look to it for support and on the infantilism and manipulative tendencies of the entire positive thinking movement. What they see in PT is psychological deceit and a call to ignore the reality of life, and sometimes even the presence of occult ideas, as positive thinking attributes enormous powers to the individual, hidden even from himself. Therefore, it bestows a special mystery

on the person, characteristic of the invisible world, which one can learn to use. Even though it is often quite right about many things, most often it only concentrates on “the sick” and “the cure”, completely ignoring “the disease”, without asking what people really look for in positive thinking under the surface of emotional and naive slogans. Thus they ignore the fact that the conditions of modern life can actually generate a range of pressures or even specific “overloads”, in the face of which people feel helpless and lacking support. We should also notice that individual positive thinking concepts generally do not offer an extended image of the world, and there is not one complete concept nor a general outline of one – it is only presented as enigmatic external conditions. And although theoreticians and ideologists of the movement often repeat that it is possible to effectively protect oneself from the world, so one might think that they attribute great significance to the world, but in reality in their concepts the role of the world as the creator of the individual’s life has been maximally reduced, while the focus is placed on the concept of the human being and their actual and potential abilities. In positive thinking, the person has taken the place of various determinants, as it is the person who can effectively create reality in the light of its basic assumptions. That change in the relation between the individual and the world I believe should be seen as the source of success of the movement. Individual contents presented by numerous schools of positive thinking are therefore not as significant, because it seems that they do not have to be interpreted literally, but rather as a general message which states that despite various pressures felt by modern people and despite all the pressures of the external world, people can easily gain an advantage in that confrontation. Therefore, boosting one’s self-esteem plays a significant role, but it should be added that the idea involves contents which reject the models of relationships between man and the modern world so suggestively promoted by mass media, showing the weakness of an individual in the confrontation with the mechanisms of social life. At the same time positive thinking concepts prove that it is not the external world that shapes, pressurizes or determines the individual, but that the individual has the power to at least partially take control of the world by taking control of their own life. In this way positive thinking in fact demythologizes the image of the world and pressures on modern human – that process should be seen as the source of its success. The new diseases of individual and social weaknesses, deficits, and shortcomings are not as dangerous in its context and people can overcome them individually or ignore them by focusing on their “powers”, “potential” and “hidden strengths”.

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#### MYŚLENIE POZYTYWNE – UNIWERSALNY LEK NA CHOROBY WSPÓŁCZESNOŚCI?

W artykule poddano analizie nurty i idee myślenia pozytywnego, wyodrębniając te ich przesłania oraz te cechy terapii powiązanych z technikami samodoskonalenia, które na dobre już zakorzeniły się we współczesnej rzeczywistości i, niezależnie od poziomu intelektualnego, dowodów skuteczności czy magicznego entourage'u poszczególnych propozycji, cieszą się dużą popularnością. Przeprowadzony wywód doprowadził do konstatacji, że formuły i treści oferowane przez poszczególne szkoły myślenia pozytywnego znajdują tak szeroki odzew społeczny, ponieważ przypominają swoiste panaceum skuteczne na całe spektrum mankamentów i dolegliwości odczuwanych przez współczesnych ludzi. Oferowane tam techniki redukcji owych dolegliwości szczególnie mocno skoncentrowane są bowiem na ograniczeniach utrudniających zdolność do osiągnięcia sukcesów i odczuwania zadowolenia z życia.

Słowa kluczowe: pozytywne myślenie, nierynkowa osobowość, terapia, relacje interpersonalne, wiedza ukryta