

**ShrinkRapRadio #386, April 10, 2014, A Plan for Long-Term Life Satisfaction
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Tobin Hart,
Ph.D.**

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Yann Derobert)

Introduction: My return guest today is Dr. Tobin Hart, psychologist and professor whom I interviewed on Shrink Rap Radio episode #89 on The Secret Spiritual World of Children way back in 2007. Today we are discussing his latest book titled The Four Virtues. For more detail on Dr. Hart, please go to the show notes on ShrinkRapRadio.com. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Tobin Hart, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Tobin Hart: Thank you David.

Dr. Dave: It's been seven years, hard to believe!, since our interview about your book on the spirituality of children. And even though it's been a long time, and I've done more than three hundred interviews since then, that one still stands out in my memory as one of my all time favorites so when I heard about your new book, I was eager to get you back on the show here.

Tobin Hart: Thanks. Nice to be back with you. I appreciated the previous interview so well because you really grasped things beautifully. I just really appreciated that a lot so I was happy to come back with you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's great. And, you know, we have a kind of kinship because I was at Sonoma State University for all of my academic career. I retired actually, it's hard to believe but I think it's been maybe nine years. And you were at West Georgia... is it West Georgia State College or did it become West Georgia University and are you still there?

Tobin Hart: Yes, at the University of West Georgia

Dr. Dave: University of West Georgia

Tobin Hart: And I've been here... my wife and I moved down to Georgia from Amherst, Massachusetts when my youngest daughter... my oldest daughter was ten days old and we thought we'd stay for a year or two and it's been twenty years, so.

Dr. Dave: Oh! Okay! (laughs) Well, I know how that happens. And Sonoma State, you know, had kind of planted a flag in humanistic psychology and to some extent transpersonal psychology and that, I think, was a heritage that was kind of shared... West Georgia was the only other place in the country that had done kind of the same thing, I think in both cases as a result of a student of Maslow...

Tobin Hart: We've now several of our students who've gone under... to teach elsewhere so we're... absolutely, we're proud of our heritage and our horizon too!

Dr. Dave: Well, that's good for you and good that you've been able to preserve it over this period of time. Because there were various forces gnawing away (laughs) at our program!

Tobin Hart: Absolutely, absolutely. For some reason, people haven't... you know, we've been a little bit under the radar, and I think that's a... that helps when you're at a program out in the country a little bit...

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Tobin Hart: and off the beaten path, that's... People haven't paid too much attention to us which really has been great for us. It's enabled us to survive.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Under the radar is good (laughs)

Tobin Hart: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Now, the title of your latest book is "The Four Virtues". And "Virtues", the word "virtues" in some ways strikes me as an old fashioned word, maybe an old fashioned concept, except for having been revived somewhat by Martin Seligman of positive psychology. I suspect that the word has a lot of meaning for you and maybe you

can kind of unpack it for us?

Tobin Hart: Sure. Let me do my first disclaimer and (laughs)... I didn't pick this title.

Dr. Dave: Oh, all right.

Tobin Hart: That was the publisher that picked it. Yeah, I had a really hard time coming up with, you know, just that right title, and they wanted to go in this direction and then I thought "Well, Okay, let's give it a shot" so... For me the downside... What this isn't maybe is a way to start. And that is... the notion of virtues in this case are not commandments or how-tos... in any sense of that word. I think of them instead as inner capacities, capacities of our humanity that can be grown and developed but also in many ways are quite innate. And so, for me, these virtues are qualities and capacities that are essential for really, you know, living the good life, what the Greeks originally meant by the good life. It wasn't about lots of bling it was about lots of, you know, lots of character, lots of bliss, and lots of flexibility as well.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Do you happen to remember what your original title was going to be?

Tobin Hart: I think I had half a dozen of them. And one of them, one of the subtitles that I liked and still like is: "A Field Guide to the Inner Life".

Dr. Dave: That'd fit very well, yeah... Yeah, I like that (laughs). You know, somehow the... I had originally planned to... I title the episodes and I originally planned to, you know, make it "Four Virtues with Dr. Tobin Hart" but, I felt like there should be something maybe a little more descriptive and so I want to run this title by you, the one I've come up with is "A Plan for Long-Term Life Satisfaction".

Tobin Hart: Hum

Dr. Dave: How does that fit?

Tobin Hart: Yeah, where have you been? You know, I needed this title! (laughs) Yeah, I think that's nice. I think, originally, for me... My wife and I were working on a book that was following *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, and we were looking at some way to help develop those natural capacities that children have, but to do them in some way that... really honored where they were but also understood that there's a development

art to this sort of inner life. Hum, and that sort of had us run and we decided not to follow up on that, and I picked this up a few years ago to follow up. And then I realized what I was writing for were most of my students, you know, who range from eighteen to eighty and also clients and also my friends and myself in some way, and I really was asking the question: "Well, what is it that we need to live a life of flourishing and fulfillment? And hum... I noticed that in many cases, these... The various traditions both psychological and spiritual have emphasized one or another, sometimes more than one, but I really saw these as the matrix, as a kind of balance that was required, and I didn't see that very well in many other traditions, in many other writings.

Dr. Dave: Well, you anticipated one of my questions which was to ask you who the intended audience for this book is, and you mentioned psychological and spiritual and this really is a book that... that is addressing or coming from both of those places and really kind of marries the two in some very nice and very profound ways. Writing a book is a lot of work. How long did this take and what was driving you to write this particular book at this particular time?

Tobin Hart: You know that's a good question. Hum... Well, again I... you know it's pretty easy to see a hunger out there and that hunger is for something deeper and more sustaining, I think, in our world, and it's particularly, for me, a hunger that begins on the inside, and ends on the inside... You know, we certainly want those things on the outside, and those ways of being in the world and so forth that are fulfilling. But for me, it really felt like in order to be a match for the reality that is presented these days, we really needed these inner capacities, these inner qualities, these inner virtues, in order to really be able to take on and take in the world most fully. So... ha... you know I just have... I think this has been lingering for a long time, I'm not even sure how long it took to... to write... I had a couple different iterations, as I said my wife and I began something many years ago, and then... this popped up again. And I said, I feel like I need to finish this and hum... I feel like there's some contribution here. In some ways I think of this as hum... a little bit of a curriculum, you know, a curriculum for that inner life...

Dr. Dave: Yes

Tobin Hart: ...or psycho-spiritual development. It's sort of laid out that way and it emerged spontaneously or organically that way for me.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I wouldn't be surprised if you (laughs) use it as a required text maybe for a course you teach or that others might do that.

Tobin Hart: Well, in fact, I have piles of it, you know, on my... some master student guinea pigs (laughs) in a course called "growth and potential", and it actually is a, for me, a nice framework, I think, to explore some of these dimensions.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. You talked about that sort of inner hunger that we have of searching of something deeper, and, actually that's part of what drives me to do these interviews, that's what I think characterizes my audience out there. That the people who listen to these series have that hunger and go about filling it in different ways, and Shrink Rap Radio, I think, becomes part of that. The ability to listen to people such as yourself and find some nourishment. Is there something about the time that we're in right now that lent urgency to getting your message out?

Tobin Hart: Well, I think that it's easy to find (laughs) tough times in any age, you know, but there such is urgency these days, you know, unprecedented peril and also possibility, of course, in these days and with the advent of instant technology, I think it puts an added opportunity and also an added threat to us. You know we've already become functioning hybrids, you know. With a flick of a finger we can access virtually any information. But the issue is not so much access as it is how do we integrate this, how do we make sense of this? And so, for anything that's out there it requires a big enough and a savvy enough receptor side in the inside for us to really find our resonance with it, to be able to sort the wheat from the chaff to be able to really... see what is of value in this sea of information. And those things to me are both – what's required as we mentioned before – both psychological and spiritual. All these things are often thought of as odd and paradoxical, you know, the psychological develops our will and the spiritual asks us to be willing, psychological strengthens our sense of self and the spiritual asks us to be selfless... you know, psychological helps us differentiate and individuate and the latter helps us to lose our self-separateness and so... these things are really paradoxical, you know... explicitly and so, part of our challenge, I think in this age is to figure out what the right balance of those, and what the right application, for example, of psychological insight and spiritual wisdom at the same time and so, you know, we've gone on different threads sometimes and emphasize one or the other but I really, really try to bring these together in a very grounded way, I hope.

Dr. Dave: And indeed you do, I love what you've just said about the paradoxes of

psychology and spirituality, sometimes seemingly pulling us in different directions. In the preface to your book you describe a pivotal moment when you had been suffering from unbearable angst after having graduating from college and you discovered by chance a book by Edgar Cayce on your parents bookcase... Tell us a little bit about the impact of that serendipitous discovery of a book by Edgar Cayce, whom I'd gather you'd not really heard of before that?

Tobin Hart: Well, I was sort of the prototypical last... lost soul (laughs), you know at that point, and I had all the advantages that anybody should have and yet I just felt more lost... It was a genuine dark night of the soul for me. We'd buried – rather sprayed – my mother's ashes some time in the year before and my dad was living in some place warmer for the winter and I had just graduated and went back to his house and just was struggling to make it through the day and hum... a book seemed to jump off the bookshelf in my very mainstream parents' house and as you said it was Edgar Cayce's story of coma and I had remembered my mother once tried to share this book with me when I was twelve or thirteen and I was already too... sort of dispossessed to have anything to do with it and so... but in this moment, I opened the page randomly and it was like an arrow shot at the heart of my longing and lot of things might have served this function, I sure was prime for something, for anything so... but this is what did it in that moment and what it did to me was to open up this possibility that things like suffering and so forth seem to have a kind of hum... inherent meaning in them. Maybe a carryover from a previous time or an opportunity to learn some new lesson and so that was helpful. But part of what it did, part of the turn it made for me was to really help me to go inward and so, rather than assuming that my solutions were about carrier or about something on the outside, it was instead directing me toward the inside and this was really quite profound alongside this almost unspeakable resonance and epiphany really that I had in reading this... I didn't... you know, I don't know that I ever read very much more of it, although I think I did from time to time and some of it resonated and some of it didn't but at this moment it was clearly... one of this sort of conversion experiences although I wasn't converted to anything, you know (laughs)... It was a conversion to... open inward and to really pursue a path in the inner life...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. And to take a tiny step back: what was the major you had just graduated from?

Tobin Hart: Well it was psychology

Dr. Dave: Okay, I was wondering.

Tobin Hart: Yeah. But it was not a psychology that hum... I got much out of or I appreciated very much. It just didn't... you know, there wasn't much to it and yet I... still was drawn to that in some way.

Dr. Dave: You describe another pivotal experience that occurred a couple of years later while hiking in the Adirondacks in upstate New York with a friend. Maybe you could tell us about that one here?

Tobin Hart: Yeah, my friend Art was initiating me into the high peaks of the Adirondacks which are 40 peaks above 4000 feet and this is a six million acre wilderness not usually what people think of when they think of New York but this is up near the Canadian border and lake Placid is sort of situated in the middle, if one doesn't know. And so I was... we were hiking and it was one of this long sloughs, we're going up Gothics mountains this day and it was cold, one of these crisp fall days, maybe 35 degrees, lapis blue sky and hum... we were in the trees for most of the time and just plodding along one foot after another and... you know, like going through my wine zone I call it, it's like "What are we doing here? Can't we find something better to do than, you know, this hike?", you know, you get to that tired place and then

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Tobin Hart: Finally, finally, you get into that meditative rhythm which is so special... And then we made our, you know, we summited it, we went in the sheer rock, the grand face and got to the top of this mountain and all of a sudden something popped. And hum... I started singing the song from The Sound of Music, you know that song "The hills are alive...?", with tears streaming down my face

Dr. Dave: Ha...

Tobin Hart: I didn't know what else to do, I just was absolutely blown away and felt instantly... I disappeared, I became one with the sky, one with the mountain and I had, in retrospect, what I didn't know but what I learned later, was that sort of classic ha... what William James called an oceanic experience and of course Maslow talked about this is one form of a peak experience

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Tobin Hart: And so this... this just opened up a whole nother avenue for me on this search. And I felt fast asleep into... on the side of this mountain. I'd never slept on a mountain like this before but that was about an hour later and we got both more different and more myself than I ever felt. And this really catalyzed a whole nother pursuit for me of beginning to study this kind of phenomena and this kind of knowing, in this place where subject and object collapse into one another. Ha... and so that started me toward graduate school and towards... ha... a life, really (laughs)...

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I was really struck and touched by that story and that experience and could really see that was a very important kind of launching point for your life, your career and... and for this book (laughs)... and the previous one.

Tobin Hart: Yeah, absolutely. And in some ways I guess it was a funneling. Because it felt like, in retrospect, it feels like "Wahoo", you know things had always been moving in a certain direction and sometimes it takes these sort of shocks or momentous moments to... to really catalyze to another level of it and so forth, so... Anyway, that's a... it doesn't always happen that way! (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Right!

Tobin Hart: That's the way it happened for me

Dr. Dave: Because sometimes the shock is... you know, that was a transcendent... pleasant, mind blowing experience but sometimes the shock is not so pleasant!

Tobin Hart: Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, part of our work, I think, is to then try to unpack this, right, to say: "Well, what's the meaning in this for me?". And that's part of what Cayce's work did for me too, is to say: "You know, things may or may not be ontologically, sort of random, but... but ultimately, you know, what meaning do we make of this and how do we use whatever is given as fuel for our fire to move further on?".

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I don't think that's the way Cayce put it but I like what you made of it (laughs)

Tobin Hart: (laughs) Well there's always a question: "Is meaning inherent in a situation or do we create it?"...

Dr. Dave: Yes

Tobin Hart: ... and I always like Viktor Frankl's notion, you know, that ultimately, you know, who knows?, but ultimately we have to make our meaning out of what we're given.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah, you summarize some of those choices in the last chapter too, of the book, in just a way that is so succinct and so beautiful. I think after the interview part is over, I'm gonna read a passage to my readers if you don't mind.

Tobin Hart: (laughs) Of course!

Dr. Dave: So that they get a taste of the writing which I think is just very beautiful, very profound. Now you describe the four virtues as Presence, Heart, Wisdom, and Creation. So... maybe you could just kind of give us a bit of an overview of each of these four... Maybe before you do that, actually though, let me ask you: why these four? And not some other list of possible virtues I could imagine somebody else laying down to write a book about virtues, they might have come up with a very different list...

Tobin Hart: Well, in fact, the ancient list of virtues in religion and also in philosophy are different than this. Ha... and so, for me, I tried to do this from the ground up so it was a question of saying: "What is it that's important? What is it that really makes a difference in our lives?". Both at the psychological level but also from the wisdom traditions, and what are the... you know, what do we know contemporarily from everything from neuroscience to virtually, you know, anything else we could get our hands on. So, for me, hum... these four broad categories form a kind of matrix, and I'm... I love the etymology of the word "matrix", it comes... it essentially means "mother" or "womb"...

Dr. Dave: Hum...

Tobin Hart: ... and this is the kind of womb, I think, this interiority out of which our life flows, essentially. And, for me ha... Meister Eckhart has this great heretical line, he says: "We are meant to be mothers of God". He says: "We are meant to be mothers of God". And it's in this matrix, it's from this womb, that we generate both our humanity and our

divinity all in once. We're meant to be mothers of God. The most outrageous thing is that we're both the offspring and we're the origin of this. And this is, again, one of these great paradoxical dilemmas. So, for me, this is about this inner womb, this inner dynamism, this vitality out of which our life flows. So...

Dr. Dave: Yeah! Go ahead...

Tobin Hart: Sure. No, go ahead David, if you...

Dr. Dave: Well, let's drill down deeper into each of these four virtues

Tobin Hart: Hum hum

Dr. Dave: For example, under the first one, "Presence"...

Tobin Hart: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ... you have a section titled The Beautiful, Sensing, Focusing, Witnessing, and Opening. So... let's step through these, we'll see how far we get here

Tobin Hart: Sure

Dr. Dave: Hum... So, "Presence". You know when I think of Presence I don't necessarily think of... well, having read it I do now but (laughs)... The Beautiful, Sensing, Focusing, Witnessing, Opening. So hum... how does The Beautiful relate to... Well, first of all, what do you mean by "Presence"?

Tobin Hart: Sure. Sure. So... each of these four, like directions on a compass, ha... provide certain general capacities and within each one of these I've tried to break them down, operationalize them a little bit. So Presence is about this quality... you know, we hear these days from "mindfulness" to "being here and now", this kind of thing, that so many traditions have talked about in one form or another, and so... this really allows us to be awake and to show up for whatever comes. And so various practices and woven throughout the book are – at the ends of the chapters are these ha... are some practices that just... a sampling of practices that make this a little more concrete and help lead us in a direction. So, Presence, again is about this ability to be awake. And, for me... hum... when I looked at these four, I also came to see... that the most enduring depictions of...

human flourishing and fulfillment and the direction for this... hum... we could say... what the Greeks talked about was the Good and the True and the Beautiful. And so, for me, it suddenly dawned on me one day as I had written much of this that hum... "Presence" for me tied in to what I thought of as The Beautiful. And the Good to Heart and the True to Wisdom and we added this fourth one of Creation or Voice or Expression. And so for Presence hum... Beauty is revealed to the extent that we open to it.

Dr. Dave: Hum hum

Tobin Hart: It's a kind of "knowledge by presence" as the Sufis talked about. And that the extent to which we open to that which is before us is the degree to which it opens to us and is revealed to us. And, so, while a tree or a painting may have some inherent beauty that we might objectively identify, it is this capacity of presence that actually allows everything to be opened as beautiful. And so that's part of the... the hinge, the connexion that I began to see with these.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, I get it. If we were fully present, probably everything would be beautiful. I think that's one of the... maybe one of the central ideas of Zen. And also I harken back to psychedelic experiences that I had and... and that was... a huge piece of it was a sense of the discovery of sensory beauty all around.

Tobin Hart: Yeah, exactly. And again I think because we've sort of shut ourselves up and hum... in various caverns of category of what's beautiful and what's not and so forth, it's hard for us to really make contact in that way. So, things like, for me, sensing and focusing and witnessing and opening are four distinct capacities that really engender presence, that help us bring the beautiful hum... awaking the beautiful really in front of us and within us in some way.

Dr. Dave: In the section on presence, I love the story that you told about the violinist in the DC metro station, do you remember that?

Tobin Hart: Yes. In fact, I think it was the Washington Post that placed... I forgot who the violinist was, do you remember?

Dr. Dave: I don't but it was a major violinist.

Tobin Hart: Somebody that we both should remember but wasn't recognized... They

placed him in the middle – this is an experiment during rush hour just to see what would happen, you know, as he plays for 45 minutes. And he was... And people just pass by except a child. And the child stops and rivets his eyes onto this violinist who's playing and hum... and is basically dragged away by the mom. And over the course of next 40 minutes or so, hum... the only people... virtually the only people who stop and linger are children. Hum... which is very revealing I think! Over the course of 45 minutes or so he did make 37 dollars, people did put some money in, but they didn't pause at all and so we're just... and by the way he was playing a two and a half million dollar, the violin was worth two and a half million dollars and he just played it in Boston the night before, a hundred dollars a ticket and (laughs) you know this is one of the greatest violinists in the world and yet we pass by, almost unnoticed. And of course the point of it for the Washington Post and for this issue of presence was: "What else do we pass by that we don't know?" and to what extent do we need to be awake, see the moment in order for us to gain the nourishment of the beauty in all things?

Dr. Dave: That's a beautiful story! (laughs) It's such a cautionary tale in a way!

Tobin Hart: Exactly!

Dr. Dave: And you've got lots of great examples throughout the book, stories like that or references to research or to wisdom literature. So I really wanted to... I didn't write them all down so I really want to encourage you to throw in any that come to mind as we move along here.

Tobin Hart: Sure.

Dr. Dave: Is there anything more that you want to say about some of the other sort of major sections under Presence? We talked about The Beautiful. You've got sections on Sensing, Focusing... where you talk about Eugene Gendlin and I was very... I got to meet Gendlin and was very taken with his approach... Hum... Witnessing, Opening. Oh, another thought that came to mind! Aside from Gendlin I was also very interest... very influenced by Jim Bugental...

Tobin Hart: Hum hum

Dr. Dave: ... a therapist who was ha... maybe the first president of the Association of Humanistic Psychology and who wrote very powerfully I think about his approach to

therapy. I don't recall if he used the word "presence" or not, he might have, but I think the concept of presence is really key in psychotherapy in terms of whether or not it really works and jells.

Tobin Hart: Absolutely, and I think there's sort of two directions of presence too, right. One of them is what Gendlin was so... is so good still... He's a buddy of one of my current doctoral students so... and he's still active and thinking really well, by the way...

Dr. Dave: Oh good!

Tobin Hart: ... and Gendlin's work was as we know, the audience might not, is on focusing. And for him the word "focusing", David Rome, for example, calls it "inner listening". And basically it's about listening to the body's felt sense. And so... this... so that's one direction, to listen within...

Dr. Dave: Hum hum

Tobin Hart: ... and, of course, the other, as Jim Bugental talks about and others, is to "listen without", that is to listen from a deep place within to the other. And as you said, this is just absolutely fundamental, it's what Rogers did and all the great humanistic therapists, I think, is to really be able to come and make contact and be available for the other. Part of what all the focusing section and also the sensing section under Presence is about, pays particular attention to the sensual world, you know, both... well, how it resonates with us. And we're beginning to learn, for example, even in neuroscience, how central this sense of felt senses... For example, we now know that the gut – we've talked about "gut feelings" for a long time and our language is imbued with references to "body knowing" in some ways – but now we've got psychiatrists who are prescribing probiotics for psychiatric conditions like OCD and anxiety. We know that there's a new language being talked about about body sensing, it's called the "enteric nervous system", the enteric nervous system, which is about the gut as a source not just of digestion but of digesting information. That's it's a knowing center. And the extent to which we can actually integrate these ways of knowing, for example, to rekindle our attention to the sensuality of the world including our own senses actually makes for a more robust way of knowing the world.

Dr. Dave: Well, I had not heard that part about psychiatrists prescribing probiotics and if you have a reference you can send me after the interview that would be a good thing

for me to follow up on, because I have kind of done a sequence that I hope to put together for CE credit about diet and things like that and so this... you know, talking to somebody about that would fit right in beautifully. And in the section that you're kind of describing now where you talk about the gut sense, I remember that you mentioned Candace Pert and her research, and just synchronistically, just the day before I read that, a friend was telling me all about Candace Pert and the importance of her work and I didn't know about her and... I'm not sure I remember enough to talk about it and I don't know if you do or not, but if you can, enlighten us!

Tobin Hart: Sure. Well, Candace wrote a book called "The Molecules of Emotion" in the early 80s and she was a... you know, a neuroscience researcher essentially and she was looking... well she found something in the last place that neuroscientists would be expected to find and that is: she found, basically, neuropeptides in the receptor sites which are associated with cognition and we find them in the brain, but she found these neuropeptides in the gut! And so, what she essentially concluded was that if those are in the gut and we know that they're about cognition, about thought essentially, is the gut capable of thinking? And so, as she said, she could no longer make any meaningful distinction between the body and the brain essentially – and there is this very much sort of full body knowing essentially that she ha... she began to understand and really sort of launch this all direction of understanding the gut and other parts of the body as sentient in some way.

Dr. Dave: And so this sort of reinforces, you know, a lot of people have for a long time – I was one of them – felt that bodily approaches to psychotherapy were important. This would seem to help buttress that notion.

Tobin Hart: Absolutely. From Wilhelm Reich whose son actually, I lived next to his son in Massachusetts for a number of years

Dr. Dave: Oh! Really?

Tobin Hart: Yeah... That was a nice guy and so from Reich to Lowen to Pierrakos to Ida Rolf...

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Tobin Hart: ... to all the somatic psychotherapists Ron Kurtz's Hakomi and Fritz Perls'

Gestalt and so forth, that we really... we really have come to understand, I think, much better that, you know, a somatic understanding of issues is central and that, like any good... One of the things therapists sometimes make the mistake of doing, is assuming, because of their, you know, our particular bias is that we assume things are psychological, and in some cases they absolutely are, but in some cases, like a good physician, the first thing is to say: "Okay, you have a physical, what's going on at the physical level?". And this is why really attuning to how the body is operating, particularly with things like the gut, can be dramatically influential in our psychological state.

Dr. Dave: Well, moving along, you know, speaking of somatic, the next virtue that you discuss is "Heart", though you weren't speaking of it somatically, and your last name sounds the same as well (laughs) I have to note, but is spelled differently. And in fact we have learned a lot about the heart somatically and how it ties in to some of the psychological processes. I don't know that you go on about that in your book but hum... have you been following any of that?

Tobin Hart: Sure, there're good folks at Heartmath for example

Dr. Dave: Yes

Tobin Hart: who have done a really commendable job of putting energy cardiology on the legitimate scientific map and I hope I have mentioned it in one form or another, in fact I think I have... But absolutely, just as the gut and the brain are sources of knowing, the heart certainly is too, and so in this big section with the heart... and of course, you know, we know across all traditions through all time, the heart is both the path and the end goal for a life well lived. And yet so much has been written about love and heart and so forth, you know from every poet and great song writer and philosopher in many ways have tried to circle this territory and so... what I try to do is, you know, also the impossible, and that is to operationalize what we mean by heart...

Dr. Dave: Hum hum

Tobin Hart: ... and so, essentially, I say that it is the foundation... When we talk about the heart, we're talking about the foundation for the good. And, for me, I see four key capacities, four key dimensions, each of which can be assessed and developed, and each of which is both psychological and spiritual. And so, these are compassion, which is quite a natural state, even among young children, that's one of the things I discovered looking

at spiritual life of kids. Empathy and empathizing, so this ability, you know, the word empathy from German, means "feeling into", and so it's a way of knowing that is resonant, where we literally are in a frequency lock with the other. And of course, these days we're hearing about things like mirror neurons that give some neurobiological validity to...

Dr. Dave: Hum hum

Tobin Hart: to what we know, you know, what's been around for a long time. The third dimension is, besides compassion and empathizing, is feeling, and so this is sort of obvious but we don't always know what to do with those feelings. Often we preference some feelings over other obviously, you wanna feel happy instead of jealous, but the work is exactly and precisely to befriend all of what's there otherwise we develop, as Jung says, this shadow. And then the last one is connecting, and it's about... "Heart" is about, so much about how we live always as a self in relation and how we connect with others.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Are there any good stories that you recall from that section on "Heart"?

Tobin Hart: Hum, well, ha... You know, (laughs) I remember this old ha... this old ascetic story that I think Martin Buber tells about hum... ha... you know this fellow who comes up to this famous rabbi and he says, you know: "If you can tell me what the meaning of the Torah is, while standing on one foot, I'll convert". And so, apparently standing on one foot, the guy says, the rabbi says, you know, basically: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". And it is essentially this notion of the Golden Rule. And it's also called the Law of Reciprocity. And it is this power, you know, this notion of always being in alignment with, or in consideration of, the other, in some way. And as it comes out of the heart, of compassion and is applied in their feeling, world of empathy and ultimately it makes us connect. So this is the... you know, we know, for example, psychologically that empathy, for example, is the heart of morality. No matter what sort of commandments or rules are around, ultimately, it's the degree to which we can bring our heart to this meeting with the planet, with the person, that will determine how we act towards it.

Dr. Dave: Wonderful. Well the third section is "Wisdom". And you have sections on "True", the "True", "Possibility", "Guidance", "Clarifying", and "Discerning". So, how are these components of "Wisdom"?

Tobin Hart: Well, for me this was a little different. Of course, in many traditions hum... the Good and the True or Heart and Wisdom, or Compassion and Wisdom are recognized as the dynamic duo, you know, that will lead us to the next step, spiritually. For me, I try to unpack wisdom a little bit. It is a funny thing, right, it's this thing... Aquinas says that it involves "gnome". And gnome means being able to see into the heart of something or seeing things from a greater height. And so, this capacity of wisdom, of sorting out what is true from what's not, involves a particular quality of knowing. It's also not something that we accumulate as if wisdom were a thing. Instead, we act wisely or not. So it's this living virtue, it's this living capacity that requires our presence and our heart in every moment to decide whether, what the wisest thing is to do in this moment. And that's why hum... you know, that's why there isn't a list of things that are wise to do, you know (laughs), it may be smart or it may not be but essentially it is this living quality that sometimes we mistake for a thing.

Dr. Dave: I'm interested in "Guidance" which is one of the things that you talk about here. Tell us a bit about the role of Guidance. And, by the way, that was one of things that really struck me was... towards the end, you say something to the effect of hum... one striving not to be wise, but to act wisely

Tobin Hart: Hum hum

Dr. Dave: And, you know, it's such a compact statement but it really made an impact on me.

Tobin Hart: Yes. So, so... you know, we fall prey to, you know, sort of striving in hubris, I think, if we think we're wise, you know...

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Tobin Hart: ... because any situation can present itself and it's a question of "Wahoo, Okay, can I bring my presence and my heart to this moment in order to see from a greater height or see into the heart of things", as Aquinas says. And, yeah, you know, this is this very delicate living balance, I think. So "Guidance" hum... You know, we ask all sorts of things. You know, we go from TaxTalk to CarTalk when we need wise guidance on things, and so we may find those wise sources outside us, so that's one source of guidance. We may also find guidance in the form of values. So not what

somebody else's values are but what values really ring to you. And there's an exercise in which we're invited to think of three people that we admire, and what those qualities are that they possess, and to what extent do we hum... live up to those. That is to what extent do we see those qualities within us. And that's often... It's often a kind of a sneaky way to assess our own values, and so, that's a way of seeking guidance, to sort of imagine ourselves aligned in our choices with that. But then the other... the other source... another source is of course this deep center that's both within and without somehow where we, you know the ancient Greeks'... for example, Hesiod, the first offering or the first writing of the word "inspiration" was in Hesiod's theogony. And he says: "Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story". And so, it is this sort of call, this invocation to something both deeper than us and maybe beyond us, in which we look for hum... we look for some kind of ha... source, some kind of clue, some kind of hint, some kind of symbol that may... we may be able to find a path, a step on the path...

Dr. Dave: You know, some people refer to their spirit guides and I noticed that as you talk about this you're very careful to keep open the possibility that it's coming from without, can you say a little bit about that? Cause I always wrestle with that a little bit, you know, I don't have that experience with spirit guides and yet, as I look at my life, I feel like there's been some guidance there that I wasn't particularly aware of, but there's too much of a pattern, and kind of a meaningful pattern, for me to totally discount, in a rational way.

Tobin Hart: Well, and I do think that's where hum... both the phenomenology of psychology, and also the... the source of spirituality really comes in, where, you know, we just don't know, you know (laughs)... that for us to stay alive to the mysterious is not naïveté I think it's actually profound wisdom. And ha... I too, you know, feel like ha... you know, anything may be speaking to us. You know, we just don't know how this thing called consciousness or the world works and so... you know, it's just as reasonable a story, I think, in many cases to say "Oh well, you know, I heard this voice and it told me this" as opposed to, you know, "some part of me was talking to another part of me". I just don't think consciousness is confined to the brain. Of course, we've talked about the heart and the gut already but it's probably not confined to our body either, and so we've got lots of evidence from oh! very credible accounts of past life memories from Ian Stevenson at the University of Virginia Medical School, professor, to all kinds of other accounts of near death experiences where we understand that those things that we think are solid and secure and live just within us may exist outside of our body as well, so...

hum... certainly, the great prophets of all times recognized or at least gave credit to something beyond themselves. My doctoral dissertation happened to be on the experience of inspiration and its role in healthy functioning, and one of the things I looked at, both spiritually and also psychologically, was this notion of... this experience of getting something from somewhere else, or at least it seemed that way. So we only have to look at any act of creativity, or most acts of creativity where folks experience, phenomenological experiences: "Wahoo, I...", you know, "I just saw the whole symphony light up like a landscape at a lightning strike", that Tchaikovsky talking about his inspiration, for example, for writing music. So, we get this sense of something outside of us a lot of times.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and of course I'm wondering where you did that doctoral dissertation because there aren't a lot of places where you could do that (laughs)

Tobin Hart: (laughs) Well, that was at the University of Massachusetts, at Amherst, hum... some time ago and at that time, there was a really viable, sort of transpersonal and creativity and humanistic program.

Dr. Dave: Wahoo, I wasn't aware of that. Well, good for them! Well, we get to the last virtue, which you characterize as "Creation" and hum... Well, that sounds like God, you know, the God...

Tobin Hart: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ... is the Creator. What are you talking about here?

Tobin Hart: Well, I'm going back to Eckhart, right, "We're meant to be mothers of God", he says, so... so, for me, hum... this is the fourth direction on this compass. And these things really fit together for me, and... so, one might have a great presence, they might have great heart, they might have even a great sense of wisdom, how to act wisely in a given situation, but there's one more thing that's required of us. Hum... Emerson, for example, in his diaries, he said: "When you arrived here you were in that place to testify". And so, who knows exactly what he meant by that, but for me, what that meant was that this is a place where you need to bring your creative juice into the world.

Dr. Dave: hum hum

Tobin Hart: And so I use the word "voice" in this case...

Dr. Dave: Yes

Tobin Hart: ... and by "voice" I mean "your unique creative expression in the world". So it might be literally writing a book or it might be the way that you make that soufflé or it might be the particular quality of your skateboarding or it might be the way that you raise your child, it's whatever that creative expression in... it's identity, it's self-sculpture, in some way. And so, each of those things totally unique to us, and it requires a particular attunement I think to our own originality and also to this adventure as Whitehead talks about, one of his qualities of being is this sense of adventure. And in order to feel that we have to be able to bring our life force out. It's a great line from the Nag Hammadi library in Gospel of Saint Thomas and it says: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you". And Maslow actually said something quite similar, I'm not able to pull up that reference in my mind right now but something very similar. He said: "Look, you got to be able to express yourself creatively out there. Not by anybody else's standards but by your own. You have to find your voice. You have to express it in the world". And, for me, a lot of times we're not sure what next step to take or, with our clients or our loved ones or our friends, what next step to take, and part of what I try to do in this book is to say: "Okay, you may have great heart but not necessarily great capacity for discernment, and so..." which is in what I think of is wisdom, "and so you may spend your heart in ways that lead to burn-out" or "you may have a great sense of presence and a great sense of heart but not yet found a creative expression in the world" and so... things will back up and clout your consciousness. And so it's the balance of these four, you know, each in our own unique particular ways that form the possibility for this flourishing and fulfillment. It's my argument at least.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah, you know, and Freud argued that, it was a sort of pent-up, dammed up, denied sexuality that lead to neurosis, and...

Tobin Hart: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ... it occurred to me independently, I must admit because I wasn't so widely read, that creativity might also, that blocked dammed up creativity might also lead to a bad result. And so in part I think that's kind of what you're saying here?

Tobin Hart: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly the case. And again the creativity doesn't have to be hum... you know, becoming a great painter or furniture maker, it's just in the quality of our being, you know, how we live our life in any way and what we bring in to the world.

Dr. Dave: And it seems to me that part of what your call to action is, here, under "Creation", is kind of foundational for activism in the world.

Tobin Hart: Yeah, I think it is too, and in fact the last chapter is about "Calling" and you know it's a place where, I'll borrow a quote here but... "It's that place where our deep gladness meets the world's great need". And our calling is composed of two different functions I think and one of them is "what it is that we have to offer the world", that's just our particular unique way of doing that, but the other is "what is it that we have to learn", and these things together really blend and serve each other. So "Calling" isn't just about, you know, being some martyr for some cause, necessarily, it is that place where we can find real joy, and not just happiness, oh that's feel good, but this really profound joy that ultimately I think we're all sort of hungry for and searching for.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, indeed. Hey, do you have another book you're working on?

Tobin Hart: I do actually, it's just gone off to the publisher and it is called "The Integrative Mind", hum... "Transformative Education for a World on Fire". And it takes some of these very same principles but it essentially is saying... it's essentially written for education...

Dr. Dave: Hum hum

Tobin Hart: ... especially. I'm feeling as though that's one of the places where we are absolutely stuck (laughs).

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Tobin Hart: And so what it argues for is a way of knowing rather than a set of knowledge. And that way of knowing is a shift from the kind of objectivist modernist approach to one that incorporates a more integrative and participative kind of knowledge and... anyway, so, maybe we'll talk about that?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, there's a good chance that we will talk about that down the line. As we wrap up here, I wonder if there are any final words you wanna... anything you want to say, anything we didn't touch on that maybe you would like to get out?

Tobin Hart: The book has a website and the website is: thefourvirtues.org and .com and .net, I think

Dr. Dave: Oh! You got them all? Okay

Tobin Hart: Yeah (laughs). And hum... on the website it's some summary of the book and so forth, but also what will be up there, and it should be already but it will be, I think, just within a few days, hum... and, one of the features of the book is that it actually has a series of little quizzes throughout and these are, you know, sometimes, we think of these as just little cute things... but they're a way of kind of reflecting on our own state, and our own strength, and on the website will be a self-scoring sort of comprehensive quiz somebody can just go in and for free they can just spend several minutes and it will give a plot of each of these sixteen different dimensions that are within this. And it provides a kind of trailhead for growth for folks.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, this has been wonderful to have the chance to talk to you again. And, so, Dr. Tobin Hart, I really want to thank you for being my guest again on Shrink Rap Radio.

Tobin Hart: Thank you very much Dave, it's my pleasure."

I think many of you will agree with me that this will be yet another very memorable interview with Dr. Tobin Hart. Even though the title of his book, "The Four Virtues", might sound like it might be a bit preachy, it's not. One of the things I really admire about his presentation and his way of being in the world is that he is not at all dogmatic, rather he points at a number of time-tested ideas and practices that are likely to stand one in good stead in this journey of life. This is a 300 page book so even though I lead him through the main bones of it, we really only scratch the surface. There is so much wisdom and also science, I was blown away in our interview by the ease with which he's able to speak about profound issues of the soul in an impromptu format such as this interview. There's not a big gap between the way he expresses himself in speaking and

writing. Both are clear, wise, and down to earth. Let me give you a sample by reading a few paragraphs from page 309 where he's discussing the idea of one's calling. And I quote: "I see three general ways that we try to make sense of this question of direction or "calling". The first is the "acorn theory". The acorn already has within it the programming for what it is to be and given the right conditions it will grow over time into a big oak. Applied to us, the acorn theory implies not only that our DNA predisposes us toward a certain height and hair color, but our soul's code, as psychologist James Hillman calls it, has a message for us to hear and follow about our calling. We can make sense of this as a gift from the Divine or as a duty to fulfill or perhaps as the consequence of karma, some seed sown in a previous life. Whatever the source, the notion is that we are already programmed toward certain directions. Our work is to hear that call and live it out in order, we might say, to make our life come true. The second idea has to do with chance. The Ancients thought the fates might be playing with us, that the gods spun the wheel of fortune to see what our life would be. This implies not so much that we have a calling to fulfill but that life is a roll of the dice. Today we think less about the fates and more about statistical probability, random chance, or just plain luck. Through this lens, our life is beyond our ability to control or direct it very much. Stuff happens. What will we do with what we're given? The third idea is that this is our life to choose. We have free will and agency to be able to imagine and create the life we will. Whether or not we get out of bed in the morning and brush our teeth is our choice. Even how we feel about our day ahead or the diagnosis of disease we've been given may be our choice in the sense that the meaning we make of something in-shape our thoughts, feelings, health and actions. Based on how our wise friends describe their own experiences, and taking into account that the theme of integration that is present throughout this book, let's consider calling as a mixture of: seed, that which is already within us; circumstance, the life and the situation that's given; and choice, what we commit to and create with what we're given." Well I'm not sure if my reading did justice to this passage but I just love the economy with which he presents these three big alternative ideas, and then integrates them rather than leaving them mutually exclusive choices. If you decide to order Dr Hart's book, which I heartily recommend, let me remind you to use the amazon.com widget in the righthand side bar on our site.