



Flourishing despite Adversity:
What Elephant Man teaches us about Human Flourishing

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Moral Beauty and the Moral Life



What do we mean when we speak of someone having a *good character* or having a *beautiful personality*?



Moral Beauty and the Moral Life



What do we mean when we speak of someone having a *good character* or having a *beautiful personality*?



Joseph Merrick (1862-1890)



- He suffered from neurofibromatosis
- He was considered a human “curiosity”
- Brief career as a professional “freak”
- He became a patient of London Hospital from 1886 until his death - accidentally suffocated in his sleep

Neurofibromatosis: genetic disorder of the nervous system which causes tumors to form on nerve tissues

***The Elephant Man* (1980) – David Lynch**



- Story of Joseph Merrick
- Unattractive appearance – “freak” reaction
- As the movie progresses, Merrick emerges as charming, kind, intelligent, and honest human being

***The Elephant Man* (1980) – David Lynch**



- Joseph Merrick has a *beautiful* personality...but why?
- What allows us to transcend our first potential impression?
- Is there a connection between morality /virtue and beauty?

Here beauty refers to a beautiful soul, an attractive personality, etc.

Important to Keep in Mind...

- Rejection of emotivism => too subjective
 - Emotivism: “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude of feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character”
(MacIntyre, 1984)



How does one flourish when facing adversity?



Literature Review (2022)

The Fertility of a Concept: A Bibliometric Review of Human Flourishing

by Manuel Cabral-Laureada¹, Enrique Yáñez-Muñoz² and Alberto Hernández-Baquerío³

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Table 1. Summary of the data collected from the Scopus database.

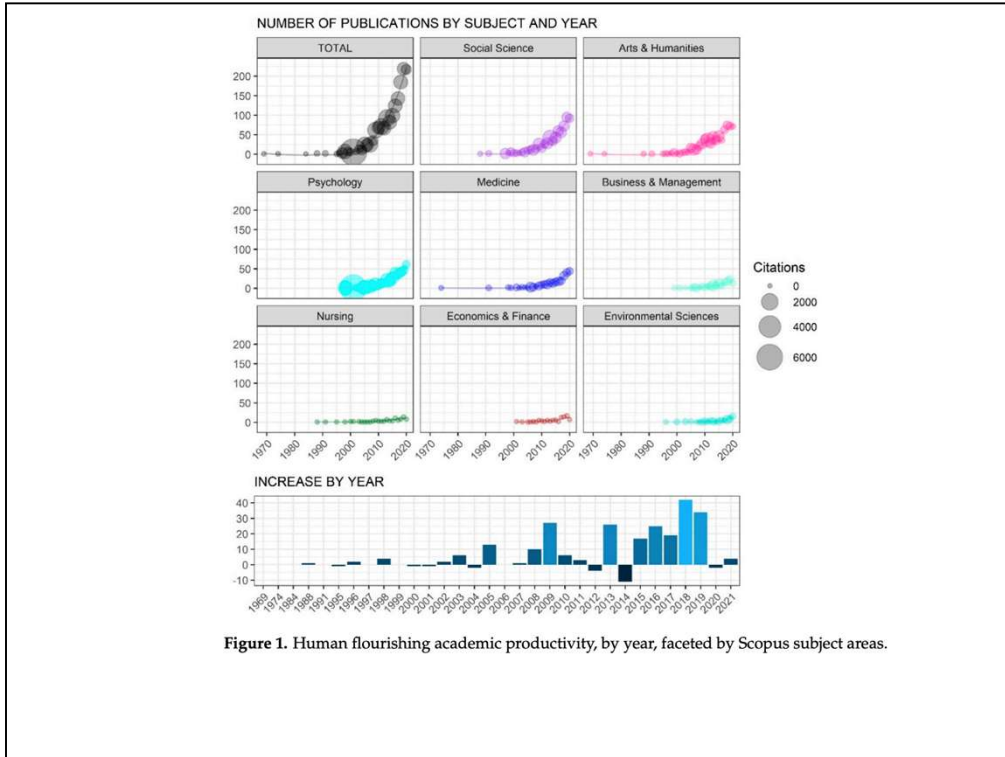
Main Information about Data	
Timespan	1969 to 2021
Sources (journals, books, etc.)	1147
Documents	1829
Average citations per document	15.96
Average citations per year & document	1.728
References	98,993
Document Types	
Article	1253
Book chapter	275
Review	112
Book	90
Other (conference papers, notes, etc.)	99
Authors	
Authors	3105
Author appearances	3750
Authors of single-authored documents	884
Authors of multi-authored documents	2221
Author Collaboration	
Single-authored documents	1024
Documents per author	0.589
Authors per document	1.70
Co-Authors per document	2.05
Collaboration index	2.76
Document Contents	
Author's keywords	4775

Note: The data was collected in September 2021, according to the search TITLE-ABS-KEY ("human flourishing") OR KEY (flourishing).

I want to briefly talk about a recent literature review on the concept of human flourishing published in 2022

The study reviewed 1829 documents in the Scopus database, searching for the term "human flourishing"

International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health



Number of publications per discipline

Pay attention particularly about Arts and Humanities and Medicine ... similar trend

Four Node Clusters

- **Circular Node Cluster - Pink**
 - Widest and strongest connections
 - Includes the most frequent keywords: flourishing and well-being
 - Other keywords: happiness, positive psychology, mental health, psychological well-being, mindfulness, and life satisfaction
 - Internal and subjective perspectives => psychological approach
- **Pentagonal Node Cluster - Blue**
 - Main keyword: virtue
 - Other keywords: Aristotle, wisdom, practical wisdom, common good, theology, Thomas Aquinas, love, justice,

Four Node Clusters

- **Triangular Node Cluster - Red**
 - Represents the constellation of the capabilities approach
 - Driving keywords: social justice, human rights, equality, and human dignity
 - Refers to social and external qualities/capacities
- **Square Node Cluster - Orange**
 - Driving keywords: education, meaning, values, community
 - These keywords mediate between more internal concerns (psychology area – meaning, values, etc.) and more external concerns (capabilities approach – education, disability, etc.)

Table 2. Top twenty nodes in the authors' keyword network on human flourishing.

Keyword	Modularity Class	Weighted Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eccentricity
Flourishing	1	2120	2533.98	0.983607	2
Well-being	1	754	499.48	0.701754	2
Virtue	2	482	450.94	0.693642	2
Eudaimonia	1	212	225.02	0.628272	2
Happiness	1	378	212.17	0.634921	2
Ethics	2	188	196.11	0.615385	2
Positive psychology	1	312	153.13	0.615385	2
Capabilities	3	112	101.03	0.571429	3
Health	1	124	100.04	0.585366	2
Aristotle	2	242	96.84	0.591133	3
Justice	2	126	82.1	0.576923	3
Resilience	1	108	77.01	0.56338	2
Mental health	1	248	70.55	0.566038	3
Education	4	88	69.98	0.566038	3
Values	4	86	69.01	0.56872	2
Subjective well-being	1	162	67.14	0.560748	2
Religion	4	104	59.92	0.56872	2
Meaning	4	106	56.97	0.574163	2
Life satisfaction	1	112	54.52	0.550459	3
Emotion	1	92	44.49	0.555556	2

Note: the rows are ordered according to their betweenness centrality. The weighted degree expresses the total number of connections reaching a node; the closeness measures the average distance from an initial node to all others in the network; eccentricity gives the distance from a node to the furthest one away from it in the network.

The total number of connections

Take-home Message

- **Concept originated in arts and humanities**
 - Influence of positive psychology since early 2000s
 - Most research: arts and humanities, psychology, social sciences
- **Interdisciplinary concept**
 - More fields involved: medicine, business, nursing, economics and finance, and environmental studies
- **Overall focus**
 - Happiness, well-being, health, and life satisfaction
- **Since around 2017**
 - Virtue, ethics, Aristotle's philosophy, eudamonia, justice, and meaning

Various Accounts of Flourishing

- Ancient Wisdom traditions – How to live life well?
 - Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam
 - Path to flourishing: cultivation of virtues
 - Religious, philosophical, narrative, and historical texts
 - Theological/religious in nature
- Positive psychology – How to thrive as an individual?
 - **Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA)** – Dr. Seligman
 - Self-determination theory
 - Three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, connection
 - Individualistic in nature

Various Accounts of Flourishing

- Culture – social ecology – How to thrive within exclusive communities?
 - Criteria: economic structure, population density, residential mobility
 - Segregated groups, polarization, intergroup conflicts
 - Socio-political in nature
- Philosophical traditions – What is the good life?
 - Aristotelian/Neo-Aristotelian approaches
 - Plato
 - Hedonism, Pragmatism, Naturalism, Utilitarianism
 - Transhumanism
 - Philosophical and/or techno-scientific in nature

VanderWeele on Flourishing

- “Flourishing itself might be understood as a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good. We might also refer to such a state as complete human well-being”
- Doing or being well in six domains: 1) happiness and life satisfaction; 2) physical and mental health; 3) meaning and purpose; 4) character and virtue; 5) close social relationship; and 6) financial and material security
- Two criteria:
 - Domains viewed as ends in themselves
 - Domains mostly universally desired

VanderWeele on Flourishing

- Four pathways to flourishing
 - Family
 - Work
 - Education
 - Religious communities

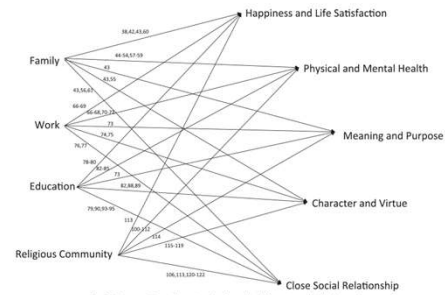


Fig. 1. Diagram relating pathways to various human flourishing outcomes (with references).

- Family: participation in family life, marriage, children – adverse effects of divorce
- Work: employment improves life satisfaction, family/marital satisfaction, mental and physical health - adverse effects of unemployment
- Education: higher level of education increases happiness and life satisfaction, decreased likelihood of criminality,
- Religious communities: happiness, life satisfaction, better health outcomes

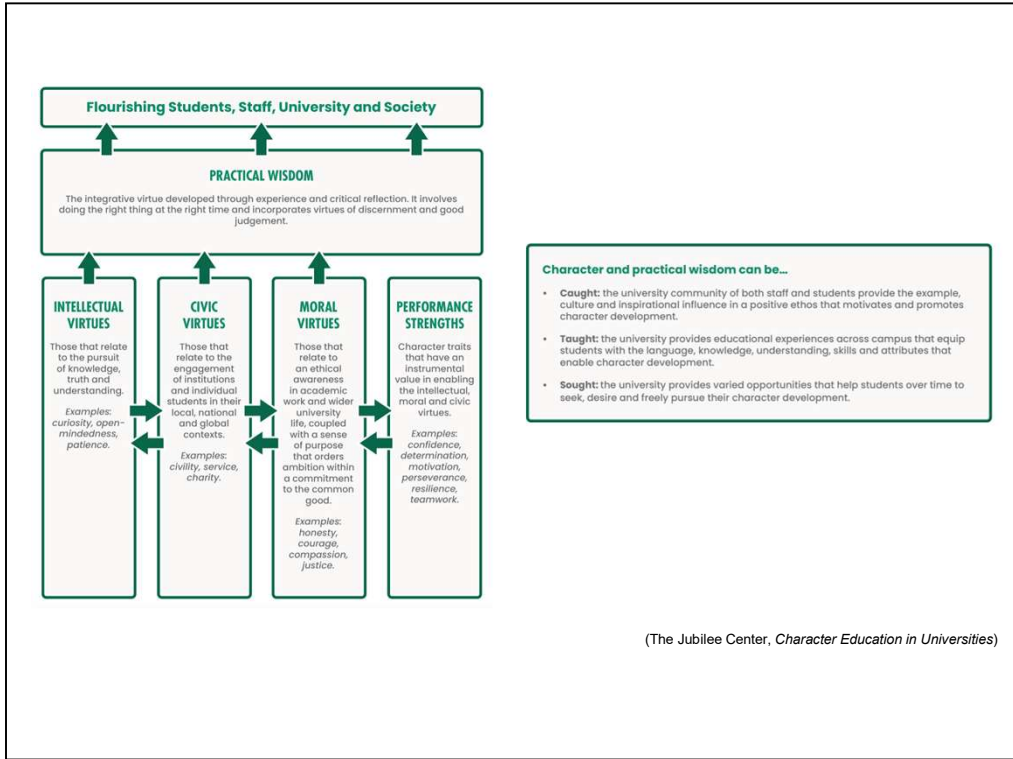
PS: “financial and material security” as domain is not shown in figure 1

Jubilee Center

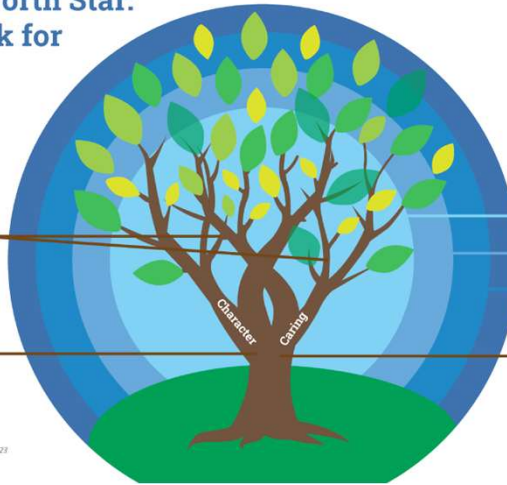
- “Flourishing involves various contingent socio-economic and political factors, but it also relies centrally on the actualization of human excellence through character strengths or virtues: stable disposition that combine perception, cognition, emotion, motivation and action to respond in admirable ways to different situations in different spheres of human life.” (Jubilee Center)
 - Socio-economic factors
 - Political factors
 - Agency – anthropology
 - Cultivation of virtues

Jubilee Center

- Moral, civic, intellectual virtues and performance strengths (enabling character traits)
- Virtues extend beyond the flourishing of individuals themselves => the good of society
- Character is caught, taught, and sought



The KNN's North Star: A Framework for Flourishing



Practical Wisdom

Using acquired experience to discern the right way to do the right thing in a particular circumstance, with a particular person, at a particular time.³

Character

A constellation of characteristics—moral, civic, intellectual and performance—formed over time and manifest in dispositions and practices.³

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Flourishing

Flourishing refers to a wholeness—of being and doing, of realizing one's potential and helping others do the same. It can be measured across the domains of happiness, life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and relationships, and it is most commonly achieved through pathways of family, work, education and spiritual community.²

Individuals

Medical and Other Health Professions Education

Health Systems and Other Practice Environments

Society

Caring

A blend of practices, dispositions and motivations—attentiveness, responsibility, competency, responsiveness and engagement/citizenship—all aimed at ensuring that individuals and populations grow, develop and flourish as best they can.⁴

Flourishing

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This definition is based on VanderWeele definition

The KNN's North Star

- Flourishing: VanderWeel's domains and pathways
- Conditions for flourishing in the medical profession:
 - Character
 - Caring
 - Practical wisdom
- Layers in the ecosystem:
 - Individuals
 - Education (medicine + health professions)
 - Practice (health systems + other environments)
 - Society



The KNN's North Star

- Focuses on medicine and health professions
- Includes the contexts of education, practice environments, and broader society
- Adopts of VanderWeele's definition of flourishing, as well as domains and pathways
- Embraces the Jubilee's approach linking flourishing to the cultivation of virtues
- Considers character, caring, and practical wisdom as essential for flourishing in medicine/other health professions

The 30,000 Foot View

- Metaphysical assumptions and anthropological considerations
- Interdisciplinary concept – since 2017 emergence of philosophical topics
- Various accounts of human flourishing
- Tools to measure flourishing
 - Six domains and four pathways
- Importance of the cultivation of virtues
 - Virtues can be caught, taught, and sought!
- Character, caring, and practical wisdom contribute flourishing in the medical profession/healthcare professions

Accounts of human flourishing

- Religious/theological
- Individualistic – psychological
- Socio-political
- Philosophical / techno-scientific

Domains of human life: 1) happiness and life satisfaction; 2) physical and mental health; 3) meaning and purpose; 4) character and virtue; 5) close social relationship; and 6) financial and material security

Pathways: 1) family; 2) work; 3) education; and 4) religious communities

- **Overall focus**
 - Happiness, well-being, health, and life satisfaction
- **Since around 2017**
 - Virtue, ethics, Aristotle's philosophy, eudamonia, justice, and meaning



How does one flourish in health professions?



Physicians & Good Character

SPECIAL ARTICLE

Patients' Perspectives on Ideal Physician Behaviors

NEELI M. BENDAPUDI, PhD; LEONARD L. BERRY, PhD; KEITH A. FREY, MD, MBA; JANET TURNER PARISH, PhD;
AND WILLIAM L. RAYBURN, MD

We incorporated the views of patients to develop a comprehensive set of ideal physician behaviors. Telephone interviews were conducted in 2001 and 2002 with a random sample of 192 patients who were seen in 14 different medical specialties of Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Ariz, and Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. Interviews focused on the physician-patient relationship and lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. Patients were asked to describe their best and worst experiences with a physician in the Mayo Clinic system and to give specifics of the encounters. The interviewers independently generated and validated 7 ideal behavioral themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. The ideal physician is confident, empathetic, humane, personal, forthright, respectful, and thorough. Ways that physicians can incorporate clues to the 7 ideal physician behaviors to create positive relationships with patients are suggested.

Mayo Clin Proc. 2006;81(3):338-344

patients want a strong relationship with a primary care physician.^{2,3} Not surprisingly, strong physician relationships appear to assume even greater importance during periods of serious illness.^{4,5} The quality of a patient's relationship with a physician can affect not only a patient's emotional responses but also behavioral and medical outcomes such as compliance⁶ and recovery.^{7,8} Consequently, physicians have been urged to improve their communication⁹ and patient education¹⁰ techniques, develop their empathetic abilities,¹¹ encourage participative decision making,¹² and convey respect¹³ and dignity.¹⁴ Barrier et al¹⁵ stress patient-


For editorial comment, see page 294

- Patients' expectations: confident, empathic, humane, personal, forthright, respectful, and thorough

There are expectations

- Study published in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings
- Telephone interviews (20-50 min.), 192 patients, Mayo clinic, 7 ideal behavioral themes emerged

Physicians & Good Character

Pew Research Center 

FOR RELEASE August 2, 2019

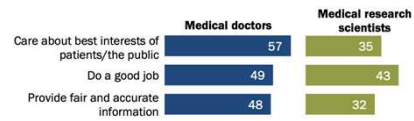
Trust and Mistrust in Americans' Views of Scientific Experts

More Americans have confidence in scientists, but there are political divides over the role of scientific experts in policy debates

BY Cory Funk, Meg Heffernan, Brian Kennedy and Courtney Johnson

Only about one-third of Americans trust medical researchers to care about public's best interests

% of U.S. adults who say medical doctors/medical research scientists _____ all or most of the time



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 7-21, 2019.

Trust and Mistrust in Americans' Views of Scientific Experts

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to this 2019 Pew Research Center study, **only 57%** of Americans believed physicians care about the **best interests of patients/the public**

Learners & Good Character

Carey et al. BMC Res Notes (2015) 8:455
DOI 10.1186/s13104-015-1434-z



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access



Medical student opinions on character development in medical education: a national survey

George B. Carey¹, Farr A. Curlin² and John D. Yoon^{3*}

Table 2 Response totals and frequencies for questions regarding character development (total respondents = 474)

One can still be a good physician even if one is not a very good person			Medical educators are responsible for training medical students to have good character			Medical educators should focus on teaching the science of medicine rather than trying to shape students' character		
Response	N	%	Response	N	%	Response	N	%
Agree strongly	19	4	Agree strongly	83	17	Agree strongly	41	8
Agree somewhat	115	25	Agree somewhat	261	56	Agree somewhat	145	30
Disagree somewhat	211	44	Disagree somewhat	115	24	Disagree somewhat	223	48
Disagree strongly	128	26	Disagree strongly	15	3	Disagree strongly	63	14
Total	473		Total	474		Total	472	

In another national survey asking medical students about character development in medical education when asked

- Question # 1 “One can still be a good physician even if one is not a very good person”70% disagree
- Question # 2 “Medical educators are responsible for training medical students to have good character” ... 73% agree
- Question # 3 “Medical educators should focus on teaching the science of medicine rather than trying to shape students' character”62% disagree

What these studies show is that character matters!

Metaphysical and Anthropological Question

“The puzzle is metaphysical, moral, and aesthetic. Its answer is central to understanding the proper focus of medicine...because it [the character of the humanity of humans] concern[s] the nature of human well-being” (Engelhardt, 2011)

“...no account of the goods, rules and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate that does not explain – or at least point us towards an explanation – how that form of life is possible for beings who are biologically constituted as we are, by providing us with an account of our development towards and into that form of life...” (MacIntyre, 1999)

The point I want to make is that human flourishing is METAPHYSICAL and ANTHROPOLOGICAL question

Physician and philosopher H.T. Engelhardt Jr. remarks that examining the character of the humanity of humans is not only a perennial and urgent question, but also a crucial one for medicine.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* states that

Moral Agency

- *Moral capacity*: ability or disposition to respond morally – affective dimension of moral judgments and moral actions
- *Moral content*: particular conceptions of the good, the right, and the just, beliefs and ideas about the good life/human flourishing

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is “the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality.”

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy

Metaphysics

- Deals with first principles (i.e., fundamental concepts or assumptions about reality)
 - What does it mean to have the capacity to act in and engage with the world?
- Includes abstract concepts: space, time, being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, etc.
 - What kind of being is a human being?
- Provides the scaffolding to build systems of ideas, beliefs, etc. regarding the nature of reality
 - What is the role of beliefs, values in shaping one's reality?

Metaphysics

- It provides meaning and purpose - Flourishing
 - As a person
 - Orientation in life
 - As a professional
 - Personal moral philosophy of clinical practice
 - For a culture/practice like medicine
 - Identity, beliefs, etc.

The Virtues

Virtue: “a habit disposed toward action by deliberative choice [critical thinking]...defined by reason.”

Virtuous person develops when the *knowing* and the *doing* intersect in the *being*

Cognitive dimension and a disposition of character.

The Building Blocks of Character

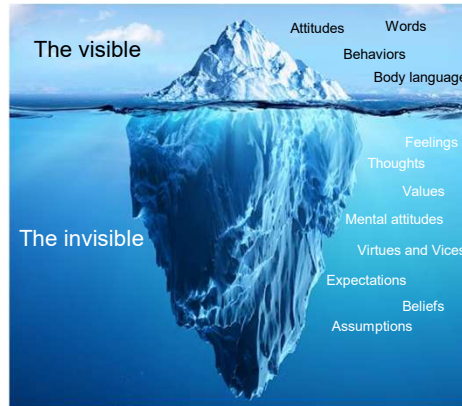
Intellectual Virtues	Moral Virtues	Civic Virtues	Performance Virtues	Jubilee Model	
Curiosity	Gratitude	Social Intelligence	Perseverance	← Values in Action (Character Strengths) as Identified by VIA	
Judgement	Honesty	Kindness	Leadership		
Creativity	Humility	Forgiveness	Teamwork		
Love of Learning	Justice	Fairness	Bravery		
Perspective	Love		Zest		
	Hope		Prudence		
	Spirituality		Humor		
	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence				
Autonomy	Courage	Citizenship	Confidence		Additional values as identified by the Jubilee Centre (Building Blocks)
Critical Thinking	Integrity	Civility	Determination		
Reflection	Respect	Community awareness	Motivation		
Resourcefulness		Neighborhoodness	Resilience		
		Service			
		Volunteering			

Practical Wisdom (*phronesis*) is the integrative virtue, developed through experience and critical reflection, which enables us to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense. This includes discerning, deliberative action in situations where virtues collide.

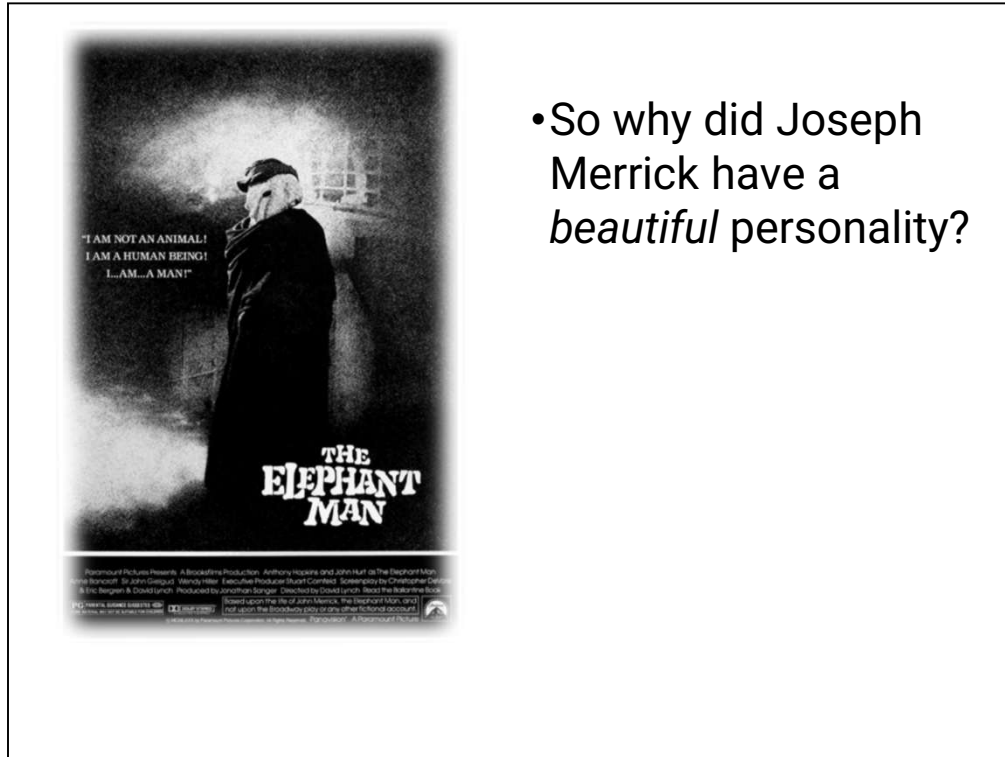


Framework of moral beauty in the context of medical education

Agential Iceberg

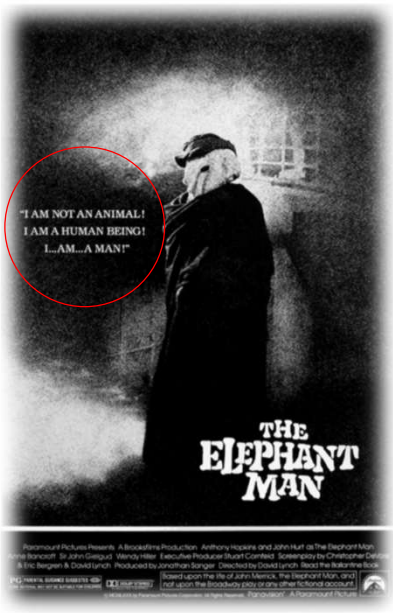


There is the visible part and the invisible part of our agency



- So why did Joseph Merrick have a *beautiful* personality?

“...no account of the goods, rules and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate that does not explain – or at least point us towards an explanation – how that form of life is possible for beings who are biologically constituted as we are, by providing us with an account of our development towards and into that form of life...[A] failure to understand that condition and the light thrown upon it by a comparison between humans and members of other intelligent animal species will obscure crucial features of that development.” (Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues, 1999, p. x)



• So why did Joseph Merrick have a *beautiful* personality?

- Meaning and purpose
- Anthropology
- Virtues/character traits
- Ethics - rectitude of human actions toward others

“...no account of the goods, rules and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate that does not explain – or at least point us towards an explanation – how that form of life is possible for beings who are biologically constituted as we are, by providing us with an account of our development towards and into that form of life...[A] failure to understand that condition and the light thrown upon it by a comparison between humans and members of other intelligent animal species will obscure crucial features of that development.” (Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues, 1999, p. x)

