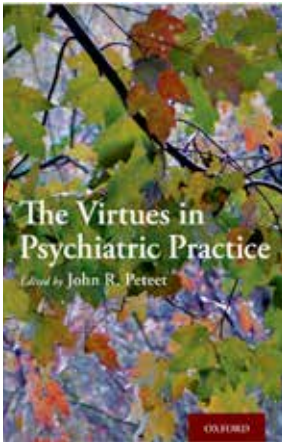


Book reviews

David A. Bennahum, MD, and Jack Coulehan, MD, Book Review Editors



The Virtues in Psychiatric Practice

John R. Peteet
Oxford University Press
January 18, 2022, 296 pages

Reviewed by

Lara Hazelton, MD

Psychiatry is a field with ill-defined, shifting boundaries. Sometimes it is fanatically reductionistic, acknowledging only the neurochemicals and neuroreceptors seen in functional imaging studies as valid ways of understanding human experience. At other times, it veers off into embarrassing flights of fancy, verging on the occult. Psychiatry is often accused of overreaching itself by including within its scope things that may be none of its business.

On the other hand, psychiatric practice is arguably the most complex form of medicine because the psychiatrist is attempting to minister to the mind of the patient; some would say the soul. This complexity is not appealing to everyone (and psychiatry has never been the most popular career choice for medical students). But, if one is willing to embrace it, then it allows for many interesting questions. What does it mean to live well? What does it mean to be virtuous?

For those who enjoy pondering these questions, there will be much to appreciate in *The Virtues in Psychiatric Practice* a collection edited by John R. Peteet and published by Oxford University Press. The book has separate essays by different authors on 11 virtues that are divided into categories: virtues of self-control (accountability, humility, equanimity), virtues of benevolence (forgiveness, compassion, love), and virtues of positivity (defiance, prudence, gratitude, self-transcendence, hope).

The book is reasonably short (282 pages including references), and each chapter can be read in one sitting. However, brevity should not be mistaken for superficiality. Reflection breaks between virtues may be beneficial to the reader, because there is a lot to think about in each chapter.

There are references to Greek philosophers, quotes from the sacred texts of major world religions, data from genetic studies, and even a poem. Because ideas and

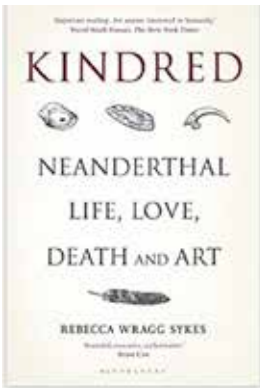
themes are not developed longitudinally, as would be the case in a book by a single author, it is possible to read them in any order one chooses, or to jump to a different virtue if one is proving too overwhelming.

Because the focus is on psychiatric practice specifically, there is a general effort to make the material presented applicable in a clinical setting. (It's perhaps unfortunate that most of the contributors are from the United States. As a psychiatrist in Canada, I found it hard to engage with the sections that seemed to assume all readers were practicing in the U.S. health system.) Many non-psychiatrists will enjoy this book, and most of the clinical pearls can be applied to other areas of medical practice. Evidence is presented to show that, for example, keeping a gratitude journal leads to improved mental health outcomes, which can be useful in primary care.

It would be difficult to summarize all the arguments and perspectives presented in the collection. As is usually the case in an edited collection, there were some chapters that I enjoyed more than others. As someone who was given a copy of Osler's *Aequanimitas* when I started medical school, I found the chapter on equanimity particularly resonant and congruent with my own views on medical virtue. However, I really appreciated the chapters that challenged my thinking about virtue. The one on defiance as a virtue is one that I am sure I will return to re-read more than once.

As a practicing psychiatrist, I can't think of anything I would do differently based on this book; however, that doesn't mean I don't appreciate the invitation to think differently about my practice, my patients, and myself.

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Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death, and Art

Rebecca Wragg Sykes
Bloomsbury Books, New York
2020, 400 pages

Reviewed by Jack Coulehan,
MD (AΩA, University of
Pittsburgh, 1969)

I grew up thinking that *Homo neanderthalis* was a brutish species quickly pushed out of the way when our brainier and more artistic ancestors arrived on the scene. Museum dioramas confirmed this stereotype, as did popular books on paleontology. I imagined Neanderthals as dark, hairy men with clubs who pulled their women around by the hair, as they still do in cartoons. I learned to discard this stereotype over time as evidence of Neanderthal culture and lifestyle accumulated, culminating in 2010 with the Svante Pääbo's sequencing of the Neanderthal genome, for which he won the 2022 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine.

We now know that modern humans and Neanderthals interbred, and most people alive today have between 1.8 and 2.6 percent Neanderthal DNA. Since Neanderthal genes live on, their extinction was not completely a one-way street.

In *Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death, and Art*, Rebecca Wragg Sykes provides a comprehensive summary of all that we have learned about these long-lost relatives since their bones were first discovered in 1856. While each chapter provides historical background, the book's focus is on the remarkable advances made in recent decades. The detailed conclusions drawn from the study of bones, stone tools, hearths, living spaces, pigments, and especially ancient DNA are breathtaking. Sykes leads the reader, chapter by chapter, through every aspect of Neanderthal life, demonstrating that *Homo neanderthalis* was a highly successful species that developed a distinct culture and survived multiple climactic crises over a span of at least 200,000 years.

What were Neanderthal people like? They were shorter than *Homo sapiens*, with robust and heavily muscled upper bodies, possibly an adaptation to life in frigid climates, although skeletons from temperate regions exhibit the same body type. Despite their compact size,

Neanderthals weighed on average about 15 percent more than modern humans, and had slightly larger brains. Their distinctive skull shape revealed a sharply receding forehead, no chin, and a bony protrusion of the posterior skull called an occipital bun. Their skin color varied from pale to light tan, and based on DNA evidence, most Neanderthals may have had reddish hair.

Neanderthal sites are present throughout Europe and in parts of southwest Asia. The species emerged more than 300,000 years ago, but most available evidence dates from the 175,000 to 40,000 year period, after which they became extinct. Their widely dispersed population was always very small, possibly no more than 10,000 to 25,000 at its peak.

Teeth and bones teach us a great deal about Neanderthal lifestyle and culture. Skeletons reveal a high prevalence of bony trauma in adults of all ages, but many individuals experienced incapacitating injuries, yet survived for months or years, indicating long-term support and care by others.

The study of tooth calculus provides DNA evidence of a diet containing plants, a conclusion supported by charred residues in hearths of "seeds, nuts, leafy plants/fruit, pea family plants, unidentified roots/tubers, fungi, and grasses." p162 Nonetheless, their preferred food was the meat of large mammals, especially deer.

Neanderthal living surfaces with hearths are found in caves, where small groups of 10 to 15 individuals made their home. Their human-like vocal chords, presence of the FOXP2 gene, and complex social behavior indicate they must have had spoken language. Studies of their living space organization demonstrate variety in different regions and over time, but remained similar enough for paleontologists to group the "tool kit" as representing Mousterian culture, named for a site in France, where such tools were first discovered. This stability over perhaps 200,000 years differs dramatically from *Homo sapiens*, who developed a sequence of progressively more refined stone tools in a only a few thousand years. Dr. Sykes concludes, "Put all this together, and you perceive Neanderthals as *hominins* at the top of their game. Their lithic technologies seem to have buffered them from all but the toughest climatic and environmental challenges, potentially even stimulating new inventions." p119 "From 150 ka onwards there is a strong impression that they evolved ever-more creative solutions as their geographical range expanded." p123

Despite practical adaptations in their tool kit over the millennia, why is there so little evidence of major cultural

advance, like the development of religion, art, or new technologies? The author presents interesting examples of possible aesthetic or even symbolic artifacts. In a cave at Bruniquel, France, there are two rings of broken-off stalactites that date from 174,000 years ago. The larger ring measures more than six meters by four meters in size, with its pieces neatly aligned. Did the rings have symbolic meaning?

Red, yellow, and black pigments occur in more than 70 Neanderthal hearth sites. Many bones and shells also bear pigment. Hand prints outlined with red ochre on cave walls and individual bones with deeply etched parallel lines are also indications of Neanderthal art. In the aggregate, however, the evidence for artistic creativity is sparse and speculative.

No universally accepted burials have been discovered, but the fact that so many nearly complete Neanderthal skeletons have been discovered indicates that bodies were often placed in out-of-the-way sites, which could suggest respect for the deceased person. For example, an adult skeleton was placed in an almost inaccessible area of a cave near Altamura, Italy, as was the body of a newborn baby in another cave.

There are also cases in which Neanderthal bones show evidence of cannibalism: butchering and human teeth marks. For example, at Krapina, Croatia, 900 pieces of

bone from at least 23 individuals were found in one pit. Some of these bones were butchered.

Modern humans coexisted with Neanderthals in Europe for about 5,000 years, beginning around 45,000 years ago. This was well within the last Ice Age, when both groups were faced with dramatic climatic stress. Neanderthal range and population gradually declined during this period, while modern humans became much more numerous. This must have been due to higher Neanderthal mortality and lower birth rates, probably from a multiplicity of causes, including malnutrition and disease. *Homo sapiens* were probably out-competing them for animal protein. Whatever happened, it was a slow process in terms of lifespans, albeit rapid in geological terms.

Kindred is fascinating not only because of the light it sheds on the lifeways of our mysterious predecessors, but also on the elegance and power of the science that makes those revelations possible. In the end, though, a fundamental question remains: What was it like to be a Neanderthal? We'll never know.

Dr. Coulehan is a member of *The Pharos* Editorial Board, and one of its Book Review Editors. He is Emeritus Director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University in New York. His E-mail address is john.coulehan@stonybrookmedicine.edu.

Dr. Bennahum steps down from *The Pharos* Book Review Editor position

After more than 35 years on *The Pharos* Editorial Board, 20 years of which were spent serving as one of the journal's Book Review Editors, Dr. David A. Bennahum (AQA, University of New Mexico School of Medicine, 1984, Faculty) has decided to retire from his book review editor duties.

His *Pharos* career includes numerous personally written book reviews and articles, in addition to his demanding editorial duties.

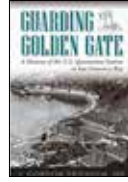
Dr. Bennahum's contributions to *The Pharos* have been numerous and impressive. While we will miss his knowledge, expertise, and insights, we can visualize him in his comfy chair in his New Mexico casita's reading room, surrounded by his beloved books, enjoying reading for pure recreation and pleasure.

Thank you Dr. Bennahum for everything you have done for AQA, book authors, and the profession of medicine. Enjoy your retirement!

More books by AΩA authors



Cracking Chests: How Thoracic Surgery got from Rocks to Sticks, by Alex Little, MD (AΩA, The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, 1974); Sdp Publishing, November 4, 2022; 242 pages.



Guarding the Golden Gate: A History of the U.S. Quarantine Station in San Francisco Bay, by John Gordon Frierson, MD (AΩA, Weill Cornell Medical College, 1961); University of Nevada Press, May 24, 2022; 240 pages.



Care: How People of Faith Can Respond to Our Broken Health System, by G. Scott Morris, MD (AΩA, Emory University School of Medicine, 2017, Alumnus); Eerd-mans, October 27, 2022; 174 pages.



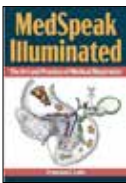
Anesthesia and the Classics: Essays on avatars of professional values, by Robert S. Holzman, MD (AΩA, George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, 1978); CRC Press, March 7, 2022; 254 pages.



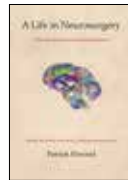
Are We the United States of America?: Can We Hold Together as One Country?, by John Geyman, MD (AΩA, University of Washington School of Medicine, 2010, Faculty); Copernicus Healthcare, August 5, 2022; 218 pages.



Finding My Sunshine Again: After Loss and Survival, by Deborah Ishida, MD (AΩA, David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California, Los Angeles, 1969); Gate-keeper Press, February 18, 2022; 78 pages.



MedSpeak Illuminated: The Art and Practice of Medical Illustration, by Francois I. Luks, MD (AΩA, Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, 2007, Faculty); The Kent State University Press, July 26, 2022; 218 pages.



A Life in Neurosurgery: From Air Studies to Genomic Medicine Meeting the Twenty-first Century Challenge in Neuroscience, by Patrick Elwood, MD (AΩA, University of Illinois College of Medicine, 1954); White Oak Court Press, February 20, 2019; 367 pages.



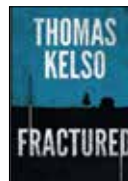
Good Medicine, Hard times: Memoir of a Combat Physician in Iraq, by Edward P. Horvath, MD (The Ohio State University College of Medicine, 1971); Trillium; July 15, 2022; 240 pages.



Hyperion's Fracture, by Thomas Kelso, MD (AΩA, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 1991); Jolly Robin Press, 2019; 394 pages.



Fever, by Janet Gilsdorf, MD (AΩA, University of Michigan Medical School, 1999, Faculty); Beaufort Books, June 21, 2022; 299 pages.



Fractured, by Thomas Kelso, MD (AΩA, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 1991); Jolly Robin Press, March 18, 2018; 338 pages.