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PREVIEW RESPONSE

What Does It Mean to Flourish in Later Life?



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Having grown up in a conservative Christian tradition, I have sometimes struggled with my identity as a public health researcher. I was taught that moral truth is grounded in Scripture, yet in academic settings, I have occasionally felt that I needed to set aside my faith-based convictions to engage in research. Professor VanderWeele's work has encouraged me to see that I need not abandon this part of who I am.

Many health and care policies aim to prevent disease, extend healthy life expectance, and reduce health disparities. Yet the older adults I encountered through my research did not necessarily see living longer without illness as their primary goal. Some lived with several chronic conditions, accepting their circumstances with a sense of peace, while hoping not to burden their families or finding reasons to be grateful in everyday life. What, then, does it mean for them to live a good and healthy life? These encounters led me to question whether the health outcomes we measure adequately reflect what people themselves value in life. I came to see Professor Vanderweele’s concept of Human Flourishing as a promising way to bridge this gap.

His preview also raises a question for me. Given the central importance of spiritual well-being in his Christian understanding of flourishing, I wonder why it is not included as a separate domain in the Flourishing Index and Secure Flourish Index. Was this a deliberate choice to make the measures applicable across different religious and cultural contexts? And could a few broadly worded items on spiritual well-being meaningfully capture what it means to people of different faiths, as well as those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious?

I am deeply grateful for Professor VanderWeele's pioneering work, which has helped me see a way to pursue public health research without setting aside my Christian identity. I hope this dialogue will help us further explore how faith and scholarship can enrich one another.

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