

UNITED WISDOM

Self-Image and What Our Behavior Leaves Behind

The Person and the Inner World

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Epigraph

> *“but the actions produced by them”*

Epictetus, Enchiridion 46, a fragment concerning actions following digested philosophical theorems, in Elizabeth Carter's translation. The Russian rendering is the author's translation through Carter. “Them” refers to philosophical propositions, not any announced intention.

What this article is about

Our self-image draws on words, memory, intentions, and recognition by different people. Behavior leaves other material: a message sent, an action performed, an available result, a change in someone else's possibilities. Such information may confirm, refine, or challenge a self-description. But an outward trace contains no whole person either. Conversation frequency does not equal respect, a good outcome reveals no complete motive, and one unsuccessful episode establishes no permanent character. Through an invented shared-garden case, we examine William James's social self, research by Simine Vazire and Matthias Mehl, Aristotle, and Epictetus. Their concepts differ: a scientific behavioral criterion, ethical ideal, and social recognition answer different questions. Comparing them helps connect our words about ourselves with a particular task without replacing self-knowledge with self-promotion or endless monitoring, or presenting an accessible action as the entire truth about a personality.

I. “I Am Hospitable” and a Particular Invitation

Imagine Anton, who helps care for a shared garden. He considers himself hospitable and tells acquaintances, “Come on Saturday; we will welcome new people.” Regular participants know where the entrance is and who meets visitors. Two newcomers read the message, arrive at another gate, and wait until one asks for directions. Anton sincerely wanted to see them, but the invitation lacked information regular participants already possessed. This is an invented situation, not an observation or experiment. It distinguishes the image of a hospitable person, an intention to invite, a message sent, and a newcomer's ability to use it. There are no grounds yet to judge Anton's entire personality from this encounter.

Different elements are available in different ways. The message can be read; the route to the gate can be described; waiting is known through a visitor's account. Anton reports his own

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intention. The connection between missing directions and difficulty entering can be discussed through this information without establishing a complete motive. Regular participants might understand the invitation easily; this proves no sufficiency for newcomers. A visitor might fail to find the entrance; this proves no deliberate exclusion. The same text worked under different conditions of knowledge. The behavioral trace here is not a photograph of a hidden soul. It supplies particular information about what was done and what became available to others.

“I am hospitable” can remain a stated value while its relation to the task is refined. Anton can say that he wanted to welcome people but wrote as though everyone already knew the place. This is a limited correction. It requires neither renaming himself inhospitable nor dismissing the problem because his intention was kind. The next invitation needs entrance information rather than a more persuasive explanation of goodwill. This is a specific comparison between image and trace: what meaning someone presents in words, and what possibilities their action creates. Sometimes they correspond; sometimes connecting them requires work that naming a quality does not perform. A self-description can identify a commitment without proving that every related task has already fulfilled it.

II. One Image Is Not Presented Equally to Everyone

In Chapter X of The Principles of Psychology, James describes the social self through recognition by others and different images within different groups. Differences can be a harmonious division of roles or experienced as conflict. This is historical psychological discussion, not a current measured classification. It helps specify the audience of Anton's self-description. Regular participants know him through shared work and customary meetings at a familiar gate. A newcomer primarily sees an announcement and first visit. These pictures need not differ because of deception. Different relationships and actions make them available. A favorable impression within one group should therefore not automatically refute another's particular difficulty, or vice versa. The pictures address different histories of access.

Anton may use words understood within an established circle. “The usual entrance,” “after watering,” and “as always” tell acquaintances enough while saying little to first-time visitors. Feeling open does not reveal who can use that language. Checking an invitation requires considering an addressee unfamiliar with earlier arrangements. This is an author application of James's distinction between audiences, not a claim that his text researches garden instructions. The relevant question asks which social image rests on which history. Replacing it with “Who sees the real Anton?” loses information about differing conditions in a search for one final witness. That witness may be unnecessary for improving the particular message whose accessibility is at issue.

Different images are not equally accurate for every question. Someone present at many meetings may know recurrence; a newcomer may describe a first-entry obstacle more

precisely. Their knowledge concerns different subjects. Anton can hear both accounts without selecting one winner. Agreement among regular participants does not make their information independent of shared habits and earlier knowledge. Assessing an announcement's accessibility to new people requires the conditions of a new addressee. Moving the viewpoint demands neither abandoning personal experience nor accepting every general assessment. It asks which action, for whom, is being called hospitable here. The question can remain narrow while still identifying a consequential mismatch between an intention and the information supplied to others.

III. A Behavioral Criterion Is Selected Too

In Vazire and Mehl's 2008 article, self-ratings and close others' ratings were compared with daily action frequencies. Selected Study 2 used intermittent audio samples collected over four days and coding of activities and interactions detectable by sound. It was no continuous recording of an entire life. The authors describe the comparison's structure and discuss its limits. What matters here is that behavior becomes a research criterion through particular ways of obtaining and organizing information. These determine what it can show. Findings about selected action frequencies cannot be read as findings about all intentions, moral properties, or consequences. Calling a criterion objective does not eliminate the choice of subject and observation method. The choice remains part of interpreting the conclusion.

The selected phases describe undergraduates, self-reports, informant reports, and collection of behavioral information. Participants were informed about privacy and could review and censor recordings before releasing them to researchers. Coding concerned audible categories; some behaviors were excluded because the criterion did not adequately capture them. These are substantial methodological elements, no permission to repeat observation on acquaintances. Our practice proposes no conversation recording. The procedure is examined to reveal how evidence is structured: selected times, access, categories, and handling rules. One everyday note about an invitation becomes no equivalent sample merely through a careful date and plausible explanation. Its value must be assessed through the particular question it can address rather than an imitation of the study's authority.

The trace in Anton's story has another structure. There is an invitation and a newcomer's voluntary report of not understanding the entrance. Checking the text's content requires establishing which information it contained. Understanding what happened at the gate requires participants' accounts. Asking about his character overall exceeds this material. Different questions do not require identical data. This avoids two extremes: treating every outside account as complete truth or treating it as worthless through incompleteness. Limited material can answer a limited question well. A clearer subject makes it easier to distinguish a supported

conclusion from an addition to it. The absence of a full biography does not prevent determining whether one message supplied directions or whether those directions matched the place.

IV. Action Frequency and Human Meaning

Vazire and Mehl's Limitations explicitly note that the method misses many higher-level actions, such as helping or showing respect. Conversation sounds and frequency do not exhaust meaning. The authors also retain the significance of a person's subjective, coherent experience, which their criterion does not fully describe. This boundary separates an available trace from a general self-image. Anton might talk often with guests, but a count of remarks does not automatically determine hospitality. A quiet participant might help find the path; less frequent conversation makes that assistance no less existent. These possibilities are invented for comparison, not independent findings from the study or measured facts about people. They illustrate the importance of matching a category to its question.

Discussing human meaning requires an appropriate additional question. We ask not only how often an action occurred but what it involved, for which task, and what became available to another participant. Meaning still need not be identical for everyone. A newcomer might want brief directions, a regular participant a long conversation, Anton shared work. Each form of participation can be examined through its expectation. Counting does not resolve different purposes. Yet rejecting one number does not make all interpretations equally grounded. Missing entrance directions can be established through a text; anxiety at the gate is someone's testimony about their experience. The author's intention remains a separate subject. Different kinds of evidence can contribute without being made interchangeable.

The study also distinguishes ideas of an average person, a restricted activity range, and possible method overlap. The authors discuss generalization beyond American undergraduates. These bounds show why “Others see our actions more accurately” is too broad. The abstract reports accuracy varying across behaviors and both perspectives contributing unique information. This establishes no observer's complete access to human meaning. The garden case benefits more from retaining specific testimony about entry than making the newcomer Anton's chief hospitality judge. Witnesses can report what they encountered without determining a biography. Anton can add context without depriving an outside account of value simply because he knows his intention. Both sources of information remain limited, and each can still matter for the task under consideration.

V. A Principle Still Needs Carrying Out

In instruction 46 of the Enchiridion, Epictetus recommends acting according to philosophical propositions rather than proclaiming oneself a philosopher or displaying undigested theorems. The digested-food analogy connects philosophical assimilation with actions rather than displaying what was heard. This is a Stoic ethical text with its own audience and ideal, not a habits experiment. It asks about the difference between naming a quality and carrying it out. Anton's hospitality claim may express an important principle. Enabling a newcomer to enter requires an action relevant to that task. The principle alone replaces neither a gate's location nor a meeting time or means of asking directions. An announced value can guide a choice without already providing the practical information another person needs.

This makes no speech universally superfluous. In an invitation, words are part of action: without a message, someone may never know about the meeting. Publicly explaining arrangements can be necessary. Epictetus's criticism of display should not become an obligation to remain silent in every present situation. Speech's addressee and function matter. One message helps someone navigate; another merely strengthens a desirable image of its author. They may mix: Anton sincerely writes that everyone is welcome while leaving arrangements unclear. Correction then concerns the invitation's content rather than obligatory abandonment of the value's expression. Kind words can remain alongside information making participation possible without an earlier garden history. The problem is incomplete execution, not the existence of words as such.

Comparison with Aristotle places action in time. Book II of the Nicomachean Ethics connects qualities with activity while distinguishing good and bad practice. Repetition alone implies no improvement: the selected argument allows the same field of activity to produce different states depending on performance. This is normative ethics, no established modern habit program. Anton might send an unclear invitation repeatedly and reinforce his circle's customary arrangement. He could choose another form accounting for a first visitor. The action's quality matters alongside recurrence and correspondence with attractive self-description. One changed attempt establishes no stable trait but permits a particular task to be performed differently. Examining the task is possible before reaching a conclusion about the whole quality of the person performing it.

VI. One Right Result Is Not Entire Virtue

In II.4, Aristotle qualifies the claim: an appropriate action does not by itself make its performer virtuous. Knowledge, choosing the action for its own sake, and a firm character matter. He distinguishes conditions of an artistic product from those of moral conduct. This prevents using activity's role to assess an entire character through one visible result. Anton might accidentally write a clear invitation or borrow someone else's text without considering participation conditions. The outcome can be useful while supplying no full knowledge of its author's quality. Conversely, an incomplete outcome tells no complete story of inward choice. Questions remain between outcome and character. The qualification limits both an inflated compliment and an inflated accusation based on appearance alone.

Action-frequency research and Aristotle's argument address different subjects. The first compares assessments with selected categories of observable behavior. The second examines conditions of moral quality in an action and its performer. Audio coding cannot be declared a virtue measure; absence of a recording proves no absence of an intention. Such merging gives a scientific method an unrelated ethical authority and makes a philosophical ideal look measured. Our garden needs a narrower conclusion: a clear invitation is an available result to examine; choice and stable quality require other questions. A useful result can be acknowledged without knowing an entire character. Refining the result also gives no entitlement to declare a good intention fictitious in advance. Different questions require their respective evidence and grounds.

The distinction retains responsibility without a comprehensive verdict. Learning about an unclear entrance, Anton can update the message and discuss the difficulty. He need not first prove himself entirely virtuous. A newcomer need not establish hidden inhospitality to request clear directions. A particular correction also proves no complete personal transformation. It addresses a specific mismatch between invitation and conditions for participation. The action can be assessed for that task while broader conclusions remain open. Aristotle's qualification thus limits hasty rejection as well as hasty praise: an outward result matters without constituting the sole content of moral or personal knowledge. Taking a practical problem seriously does not require claiming that its solution will reveal everything about the person responsible for it.

VII. A Trace Includes Others' Possibilities, Not Every Cause

Behavior leaves traces beyond texts or completed work. It changes what others can do with what they receive. In the garden story, an invitation without entrance directions created different possibilities for a regular and a newcomer. This concerns an invented case. Real discussion would require establishing message content, an addressee's knowledge, and the action that occurred. Someone's inconvenience cannot be declared a precise measure of cause beforehand. Nor does it disappear because its author did not intend it. Anton can retain his intention while acknowledging insufficient information for a new visitor. These claims are compatible and require different testimony, which need not entirely coincide. Knowing one part of the encounter does not automatically supply the rest.

Describing a trace should not complete another person's experience for them. Reporting a wait at another gate does not imply humiliation or unwillingness to return. Such feelings should be heard from the person rather than added for narrative force. Anton likewise should not substitute an assertion of the newcomer's inattention for the reported difficulty. Available information needs examining first. One consequence can raise a question about conduct without determining either author's or recipient's sole motive. Precision reduces the temptation to create symmetrical labels instead of investigating what helped or hindered using that day's invitation. A specific description may be less dramatic than an account of hidden attitudes while being more useful for understanding and improving the message actually sent.

Changed possibilities are not guaranteed outcomes. Even a clear entrance promises no arrival, continued attendance, or feeling of acceptance. People may choose for reasons unknown to Anton. The next step should concern what he can carry out: write an exact location, provide the stated meeting time, or check whether another contact arrangement is needed. These are author possibilities for an invented situation, no established hospitality technology. They change some conditions rather than governing another person's reaction. This boundary helps self-image: someone can choose value-consistent actions while retaining uncertainty about the response, without making another's independent decision proof of personal success or failure. A limited practical improvement can matter even when the larger hoped-for outcome does not occur.

VIII. Material Appropriate to the Question

A self-image can be compared with an available trace without making life a continuous report. Choose the question first. Anton examines one invitation, not his entire hospitality history. The text, entrance information, and a voluntary participant account suit that question. Collecting every negative impression changes the subject into incomparable cases easily mistaken for a general verdict. Keeping only regular participants' praise loses the new difficulty. Relevance, rather than pleasantness or quantity, determines useful material. Even limited information can reveal missing directions in one text. It does not become a representative character portrait, and correction needs no such portrait. Identifying what the evidence is for helps prevent the inquiry from growing beyond the task that made it necessary.

Vazire and Mehl discuss their criterion's limits: audible actions, a short period, and material participants agreed to release. A material boundary enters the conclusion. Everyday limitations differ: memory, unknown conditions, willingness to discuss, and message privacy. They can be specified without imitating research precision. A personal note contains no measured frequency if cases were not collected accordingly. It may contain a worthwhile question or particular memory. Using relevant information needs no status it does not possess, nor more private data simply to make the conclusion look impressive. Sometimes clarifying the subject of existing material is enough. A careful account of incomplete evidence can be more informative than a larger collection whose relevance and selection remain unclear.

Privacy is no obstacle to overcome at any cost. Someone can read their own invitation and voluntarily discuss a meeting without covert recordings, published messages, or surveillance. A question may remain unanswered if another person declines to speak. That limits information without proving a general version. Anton can improve the text's clarity without obtaining a visitor's complete story. The study used particular participation and recording-handling arrangements; our example transfers no such method into private relationships. Comparing image and trace retains people as participants in choice rather than objects of compulsory collection. Freedom not to know everything is compatible with responsibility for the available part of an action. A bounded question may still yield a useful answer under those conditions.

IX. A Specific Step Instead of a New Signboard

Anton could replace “the usual entrance” with an exact gate description and specify when someone will meet visitors. He could check whether his words match what he can actually provide. If no one can meet them, changing the invitation is preferable to implying arrangements are ready. These are possible choices in the example, no compulsory formula for every community. They concern a message's content and performance rather than a new declaration: “Now I am truly hospitable.” Checking the correction requires determining whether needed directions were added and a new promise fulfilled. Even a successful meeting supplies one episode rather than final proof of a human quality in every circumstance and relationship. The practical improvement does not need that larger claim.

A correction may also respond to the earlier trace. Anton can acknowledge that the invitation did not explain the entrance and ask whether the visitor needs further clarification. He need not offer unwanted help or demand a return visit to confirm goodwill. Someone can accept the explanation without attending again. Their independent decision cancels no correction while proving no complete resolution of participation. A completed step differs from a desired response. Self-image tied only to praise or another person's return depends on something not fully controlled. An image related to a chosen action can be examined through understandable, available grounds. Those grounds concern what was provided, not a requirement that others react in the manner the provider hoped for.

Later cases may refine the account. One instruction helps in familiar circumstances while another situation needs different information. This proves neither a value's failure nor an obligation always to write everything possible. Addressing the particular recipient and task remains important. Aristotle's account of activity quality and Epictetus's distinction between proposition and execution support this question on their own normative grounds. They guarantee no habit formation after several repetitions. A present choice may need only limited knowledge: what was done, what difficulty remained, and what is unknown. A revised self-description can be more modest: someone seeks to welcome visitors and is learning to make arrangements understandable. It leaves room for action rather than merely defending a quality's name, and for information that may change the account later.

X. Image and Trace Can Refine Each Other

Self-image need not serve only praise. It can name a value, intention, history of choices, or desired role. Behavioral traces need not serve only exposure. They can show an action, support limited praise, reveal a mismatch, or clarify a task. Treating them as rivals demands choosing inward truth or outward evidence. The sources retain finer distinctions. Personal experience is no complete explanation; a visible result is no whole personality. Correspondence has a subject: which statement about oneself relates to which action, and what grounds support that relation? Without a subject, even a convincing behavioral account can be another image rather than a test. Precision concerns both the words used to describe ourselves and the material proposed to examine them.

James helps identify groups and recognition histories. Vazire and Mehl compare perspectives with a bounded behavioral criterion and explicitly identify what it misses. Aristotle connects qualities with activity while retaining choice and character conditions. Epictetus distinguishes displaying a proposition from actions following its digestion. This forms neither one psychological model nor a personality-measurement instruction. The comparison rests on different questions: social image, action frequency, moral quality, and philosophical practice. Each source offers a distinction, not an answer supplied for someone else. A particular trace can refine self-description without becoming the only authority to speak about a person. Self-description can convey meaning without cancelling examination of its enactment. These contributions remain different even when considered together for one task.

In the invented garden, the possible result is a clearer invitation and a more limited statement of Anton's hospitality. This proves no stable trait, complete visitor knowledge, or guaranteed successful meeting. It connects words with one available task. Someone can retain an important value while acknowledging incomplete enactment. They can consider another's account while leaving unknown motives open. They can change a text without renaming an entire personality or demanding immediate confirmation from others. Image and trace then work together: the first supplies meaning and a question; the second brings information about performance. Their connection remains checkable within the situation and revisable through new relevant information. The account can be useful without being the final story of the person whose behavior it examines.

What this means in practice

1. Choose one self-description and one relevant, accessible action—for example, a statement about clear communication and your own invitation. Separate the stated value, action's content, known result, and proposed motive. Do not fill unknown parts with another person's imagined feelings. Specify the limited question to examine and which materials actually bear on it.

2. Read the available text or recall the action while marking memory's limits. If another person freely offers information, ask about one specific moment. Seek no final personality assessment or hidden recordings. Distinguish observation, personal experience, and causal explanation. Leave a missing answer absent rather than making it confirmation of a desired conclusion.

3. Choose one available change or retain a description with a clearer boundary. Examine the step's performance for its task rather than through compulsory praise or another's response. This voluntary, author-created exercise has no studied efficacy, diagnosis, or promise of a new habit. A particular result may help while remaining an incomplete picture of someone.

Key quotation

> *“we become just by doing just acts”*

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics II.1, a fragment of W. D. Ross's historical translation. The Russian rendering is the author's translation through Ross, without Greek collation. II.4 retains performer conditions distinguishing one appropriate action from stable virtue.

Connections between traditions

1. **Social image — behavioral criterion.** James X, Social Self, different audiences; Vazire/Mehl (2008), abstract and Limitations. An image relates to selected actions and access conditions. Social selves are not research ratings, and a criterion includes no whole personality.

2. **Quality through activity — digested propositions in action.** Aristotle II.1; Epictetus 46. An announced principle can be compared with available performance rather than only presentation. Normative teachings differ and establish no contemporary exercise efficacy.

3. **Conduct conditions — frequency's boundaries.** Aristotle II.4; Vazire/Mehl (2008), Limitations on higher-level acts and subjective experience. Outcomes and frequency reveal no entirety of choice or moral quality. Audio categories measure no virtue; unseen intention is not declared nonexistent.

4. **Different relationships — different information.** James X, Social Self; Vazire/Mehl (2008), abstract and selected Study 2 phases. Match observations with the domain in which someone was seen. A group finding makes no acquaintance an accurate expert or one perspective final.

5. **Recognition domain — material selection.** James X, different groups; Vazire/Mehl (2008), Phase III and Limitations. Specify which trace is available and what categories can show. A personal episode is no representative sample; research recording authorizes no covert observation.

6. **Quality changed through activity — action instead of a signboard.** Aristotle II.1, good and bad practice; Epictetus 46. A next step can be examined for its task while general character remains open. No guaranteed habit, therapeutic effect, or complete equivalence of outward trace and inward meaning.

Primary sources

1. William James. The Principles of Psychology, X, Social Self. Original English, 1890, York University transcription. This author's actual reading of the entire selected Social Self passage and framing in earlier preparation is reused. Historical discussion of recognition and audiences, not a current measured classification or entire chapter.

2. Simine Vazire, Matthias R. Mehl. Knowing Me, Knowing You. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 95(5), 2008, 1202–1216, doi: 10.1037/a0013314, original English via the author's observed link. The complete abstract, selected Study 2 phases I–III, and entire Limitations were read. Full Measures/Results and Study 1 are not claimed as read. Short samples of audible action capture neither entire subjective experience nor all intentions, respect, or character; no effect estimates are presented here.

3. Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics II.1, II.4. W. D. Ross's historical English translation; both selected chapters read in full, without Greek collation or a claim to the complete work. Normative argument about activity and virtuous performer conditions, not a trial of a modern habit-forming method. The Russian key quote is an original rendering through Ross.

4. Epictetus. Enchiridion 46. Elizabeth Carter's historical English translation; the entire selected instruction was read and reopened before this article. A Stoic distinction between philosophical display and actions following digested propositions, not a ban on necessary public explanation. The Russian epigraph is an original rendering through Carter; no Greek collation.

Tags

#SelfImage, #Behavior, #SelfDescription, #SelfKnowledge, #Action, #Intention, #Trace, #Result, #Consequence, #Audience, #SocialSelf, #Recognition, #Context, #Observation, #Criterion, #Frequency, #Sampling, #Virtue, #Choice, #Practice, #Hospitality, #Invitation, #Privacy, #Responsibility, #Correction, #James, #Vazire, #Mehl, #Aristotle, #Epictetus

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