WORKING VIRTUES
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Larry R. Churchill
larry.churchill@vumc.org
Virtues speak not to actions but to being, not to what we do, but to who we are...

Virtues focus on the agent behind the action, the interior aspects of the external choices, the person behind the judgments and decisions.

Virtues, together, define character. . .qualities of heart & mind that predispose to certain actions/choices

Virtues address who we are in the routines, when no big problems are at hand.
By Contrast: Other Aspects of Ethics

- **Rules** --- tell us exactly what to do, they are directive, or imperative, e.g., “Don’t lie.”

- **Principles** --- tell us what values to look for and uphold, e.g., “Respect the autonomy of others.”

- **Theories** --- tell us how to justify principles and choices, e.g., utilitarianism
Virtue-Oriented Ethics:

- Moral standards are largely learned through having skilled mentors.
- Making good choices is more a matter of good character, developing the right habits, than a matter of using the right rules or principles.
- *Being* good leads to *thinking* appropriately, and then, to *choosing* rightly.

*It takes a good person to appreciate moral reasoning.*

--- Aristotle
Virtues are things only understood through practice; we can’t think our way into an understanding. Similar to skills. . . head work follows successful practice

How they work, or function; differentiating them from their near relations, correcting misunderstandings.

What the work of virtues accomplishes; where it leads. The telos, or purpose. . .
What are the Important Virtues?

CATHOLICISM’S CARDINAL VIRTUES

- Temperance
- Prudence
- Courage
- Justice
- Faith
- Hope
- Love

7 VIRTUES AND (7 VICES)

- Humility (pride)
- Kindness (envy)
- Temperance (gluttony)
- Chastity (lust)
- Patience (wrath)
- Charity (greed)
- Diligence (sloth)
4 Sublime Attitudes or Divine Abodes

1. Loving-kindness --- active good will
2. Compassion --- identifying with suffering of others
3. Empathic joy --- joy in the happiness of others
4. Equanimity --- impartiality toward everything and everyone
What do Winston Churchill and Maya Angelou agree on re: virtues?
The Primacy of Courage

- Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities... because it is the quality that guarantees all the others.

  --Winston Churchill

- Courage is the most important of the virtues, because without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently.

  --Maya Angelou
Hector, defender of Troy

- . . . for our country, 'tis a bliss to die./ The gallant man, though slain in fight he be,/ Yet leaves his nation safe, his children free;/Entails a debt on all the grateful state;/ His own brave friends shall glory in his fate;/ His wife live honour'd, all his race succeed, And late posterity enjoy the deed!'  
- Homer, The *Iliad*
“Self-command is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the other virtues seem to derive their principal luster.”

_The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 1759_
“The Christian faith from the beginning, is sacrifice, the sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of spirit, it is at the same time subjection, self-derision, and self-mutilation.”
— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Gordon Gekko
*Wall Street, 1987; Money Never Sleeps, 2010*

- "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good"
What are the Important Virtues?

- Virtues as Life Skills; What virtues are needed to survive and flourish under the demands of living a life?

- Are these the same for everyone? Do certain occupations or life situations call for special virtues?

- Are there age-appropriate virtues, e.g., different for the 20 year-old and the 70 year-old? Different for grandparenting than for parenting?
What Virtues are Most Important to Me Now?

- What I need to survive and flourish:
  Age_____
  Health_____
  Personal History_____
  Resources/talents_____
  Commitments/obligations_____
  Larger context of my life_____
  Ambitions/Ideals_____
“Virtue is its Own Reward”: Yes & No

- Being good will not make us rich or famous. . .

- The practice of the virtues leads to a superior form of happiness; something better than bigger houses, faster cars or older whisky. . . E.g., deeper understanding of ourselves and joy of relating well to others; satisfaction of personal integrity; more authentic spirituality. . .

- Virtues are, to be sure, a means to an end; but cannot be practiced as a means to an end, e.g., happiness.
“The end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty; and, by proper representations of the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue, beget correspondent habits, and engage us to avoid the one, and embrace the other.”

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1751
The Case of David McNeely

What are the missing virtues?
The Case of Mary Pilgrim

DAY 1
- Patient, Mary Pilgrim, presents with recurrence of cancer
- One year ago treated by amputation of lower left leg
- Surgeon is optimistic about treatment and recovery

DAY 2
- Patient refuses any further intervention
- Speaks of “being a healing witness,” “doing the Lord’s work” which would be interrupted by any further medical treatment
The Case of Mary Pilgrim

- What virtues are evident in her thinking?
- What virtues do you hope the physician caring for her possesses?
Questions to Consider for Developing a Virtue Profile

- What virtues are most important for me now?
- What are the traits of character, the virtues I most admire in others?
- What virtue deficits do I think are most damaging?
- What are my virtue “growth areas”? 
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Unlike music and mathematics, acquiring the virtues requires experience, reflection, trial and error, and a supportive community.

Moral maturity is a developmental process, “growing up” ethically means being curious and reflective as we move through passages and processes; as we change so do our moral values and virtues we will need.

Probing skill is necessary, a curiosity about the changes in one’s life and values
Moral Prehistory

- Everyone has a moral prehistory
- Moral Prehistory is learned *unreflectively* in one’s family of origin, in one’s early experiences in school, religious organizations; a moral backpack
- Moral Prehistory is typically thick with virtues
- Every prehistory is inadequate in various ways
The first and most basic move in ethics; a skill fundamental to all the others;

Unzipping the backpack, examining its contents, wondering “Why these virtues and not others?”

Occasions for probing: realization of difference, or inadequacy
Inevitable changes over the Lifespan

1. Physical
2. Social/Interpersonal
3. Vocational
4. Geographical
5. Cultural

Different virtues become important at different points in life’s journey
How Virtues become Vices

- Was Aristotle Right? Virtues are always an intermediate between two extremes.

Rashness -------- Courage -------- Cowardice

- Or that any virtue needs to be balanced in a larger constellation of virtues, which together make for a “good” or “happy” life?
Exercise for the Virtue Profile: Name 2 Virtues

1. Name a virtue from your prehistory that you continue to see as valuable. . .

Describe an occasion on which the value of this virtue became apparent.

2. Name a virtue about which you can say, “I acquired that from out of my own experience” . . . something different, or in additional to, my inheritance from my family of origin

Describe an occasion on which the value of this virtue became apparent.
Looking Ahead: for Session 2

- Empathy
- Compassion
- Humility