Working Virtues, Session 3
TRUTHFULNESS,
FORGIVENESS, KINDNESS
The Territory Ahead

- **Session 4 & 5** -- *Spirituality* (attunement, awareness), *Caring and Caregiving*: Local & Global, *Hopefulness*, *Varieties of Love*, *Virtues especially germane to Aging* (Older Age)

- **Session 6** -- *Virtues YOU think are important* and want to discuss, leftovers from previous sessions, and related ideas. . . I am making a list.
Virtues are a web...
Relation between virtues not linear, not a chain. . .
There are many interconnections, and many points of entry. . .
Practicing the virtues creates a home
That home, the place where we live, and from which we act, supports us. . .
Empathy, Compassion and Humility as De-Centering Moves

De-Centering is the Copernican Move in Ethics

- Taming moral vanity, unprivileging myself
- Seeing others as just as real, complex, interesting, and valuable as me
- Caveat: De-centering does not lead away from self-care, nor to lack of self-respect
Practicing Virtues Shifts the Center

PTOLEMAIC SYSTEM

SOLAR SYSTEM
Truthfulness: What is Lying?

- Intentional Deception -- a willful misleading; violating the presumption of honesty in order to further one’s own ends. . .
  Not inaccuracy, or deviation from fact per se

Commission/Omission
Why We Deceive Others: Some Reasons and Rationalizations

- To spare someone’s feelings
- To deceive an evil-doer
- To preserve our privacy; sometimes to preserve our health, or choices
- Because we think the truth will be misunderstood
- Because we think the truth will be damaging
- Because we think the truth is unwanted, even when requested
- Because we have contracted in advance for a lie
People from Whom We do not Expect Honesty

- Robo callers
- Used car dealers (“Show me the Car Fax!”)
- (Some) Politicians?
- Some “news” programs (no longer separating fact from opinion)
- People under extreme pressure
The Moral Harm of Lies

- Using others for our own ends. . .many lies are assertions of power. . .

- Disrespecting the maturity or capacity of others (when adults). Beneficent lies can be infantilizing to those we lie to. . .
The Moral Harm of Lies

- Lies chip away at the standard of open or candid exchanges, and caring relationships.

- “It’s easy to lie, but hard to do it only once” --Sissela Bok

- Lying as morally corrosive to the liar.
Truthfulness as a Personal and Social Anchor

“SOLITARY, POOR, NASTY, BRUTAL AND SHORT”

- The uprooting of honesty leads to cynicism and egoism as the prevailing norm--every man for himself--and personal and social chaos.
  --Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651
“Post-truth politics is a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points in which factual rebuttals are ignored.”  

Facebook officially permits lies so long as they are “newsworthy”
Post-truth: Facts less important than what I believe...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truth</th>
<th>Post-truth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think therefore I am</td>
<td>I believe therefore I'm right!</td>
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[Image of two cartoon characters, one with a Philosophical expression, the other with an expression of certainty and a 'Shove!' label]
Confirmation bias: to accredit evidence that confirms our already established beliefs

The echo-chamber effect: to seek our information and opinions that buttress our established beliefs

The backfire effect: tendency to dismiss “corrective information”, leading to entrenchment of original belief
Task is not just being committed to truthfulness, but committed to interrogating my propensity to be attached to beliefs that I find emotionally satisfying, or in which I have a lot invested, and thereby tend to take as truth.

Noticing how and when this happens for me.
Truthfulness makes us Trustworthy

- To be honest is to forgo deception, and makes us transparent to both others and to ourselves, and thereby worthy of trust.

- Trust anchors relationships and builds open & flourishing communities. . .rather than tribalism, which builds on suspicion and fear of “others,” nurtures anger and hatred.
Truthfulness Profile

- When have you been most tempted to deceive?
- What sort of deceptions are the most damaging?
- Is self-deception different from deceiving others? Connection with humility...
What ethical work does forgiveness do? How to go on... how not to be destroyed or paralyzed.

An alternative to revenge...

An alternative to keeping score...

Frees us from forming our identity around an injury
Miss Havisham -- the story line of her life is built around an injury that she cannot (or will not) move beyond. . .
Hannah Arendt, 1906-1975

THE HUMAN CONDITION
Hannah Arendt on Forgiveness

- “Trespassing is an everyday occurrence”
- Forgiveness is the releasing that allows relationships to begin anew, it is “freedom from vengeance”
- Forgiveness enables us to tell different stories about ourselves, both to ourselves and others... Reconciles us to the injured self, if not always the injuring party.
Buddhist Teaching on Forgiveness

- **Forgiveness** is about letting go of the anger and resentment you hold in your heart, that causes you so much pain, and can lead to conflict with others. This process of letting go helps you to develop compassion for yourself and others.
1. Can or should we forgive in the absence of an apology, or efforts at restitution?

2. Are there unforgiveable sins?

Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower*
Is Divine Forgiveness Contingent?

“Forgive us our trespasses as [to the extent that?] we forgive those who trespass against us...”
Further aspects . . .

- Forgiving others
- Forgiving oneself
- Accepting forgiveness (getting past guilt, shame, and self-punishment)
1. What instances of forgiveness populate my moral prehistory?

2. What instances of forgiveness stand out in my life?
“Kindness”  Naomi Shihab Nye
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
You must travel to where the Indian in a white poncho
Lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you.
How he too was someone
Who journeyed through the night with plans.

“Small Kindnesses,”  Danusha Lameris
Assignment

- Describe a kindness recently experienced.