The background features a dark blue gradient with intricate white circular patterns. These include concentric circles, dashed lines, and radial scales with numerical markings such as 40, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 220, 230, 240, 250, and 260. Some circles have arrows indicating a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction.

WORKING VIRTUES, SESSION 5: LIFESPAN VIRTUES

FEBRUARY 13, 2020

"THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN"
ANTHEM, LEONARD COHEN

LARRY R. CHURCHILL
LARRY.CHURCHILL@VUMC.ORG

LIFESPAN

Part I: Virtues that are important for considering *life as a whole, the life span*; a consideration we usually only get to with elderhood.

“We live our lives forward, but we understand them backwards.”

--Soren Kierkegaard

Part II: Virtue practices that extent *beyond the lifespan*, our ripple effects into the future we will not live to see.

The virtue of caretaking is the central motif: caring for ourselves and caring for the earth

LIFE AS A WHOLE: VIRTUES OF BEING AN ELDER

1. Getting past the negative stereotypes; elders as residing in a land nobody wants to visit, much less make home. Invisible, unproductive, diminished, a lesser self, retirement romanticized as endless leisure, or sentimentalized as gentle and sweet; Youth as a model for happiness; staying “young” while getting old, etc. “Successful aging” too often means not getting old; fears of decline, uselessness, unattractiveness, loss of independence
2. Models of being an elder— Erik Erikson’s Stage 8 (roughly 65+) conflict between integrity and despair, when resolved leads to wisdom
3. Important to ask: What is the experience actually like for people? Mix of negative/positive, loss/gain; we often don’t experience what younger cohorts think we do, or should. . .

LIFESPAN VIRTUES

- Cherishing the Present
- Accepting the Past
- Investing in the Future

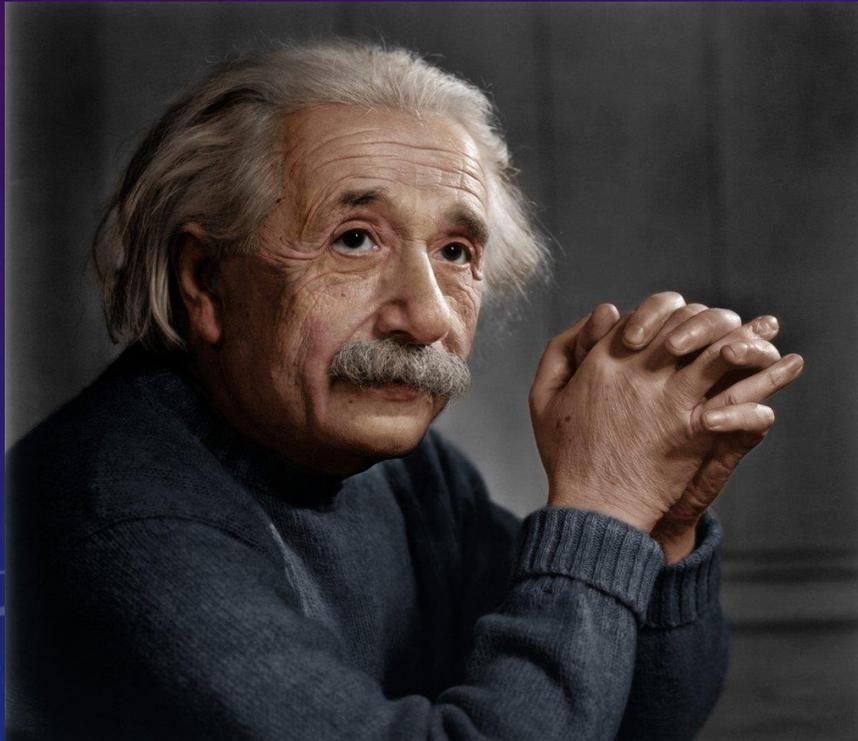
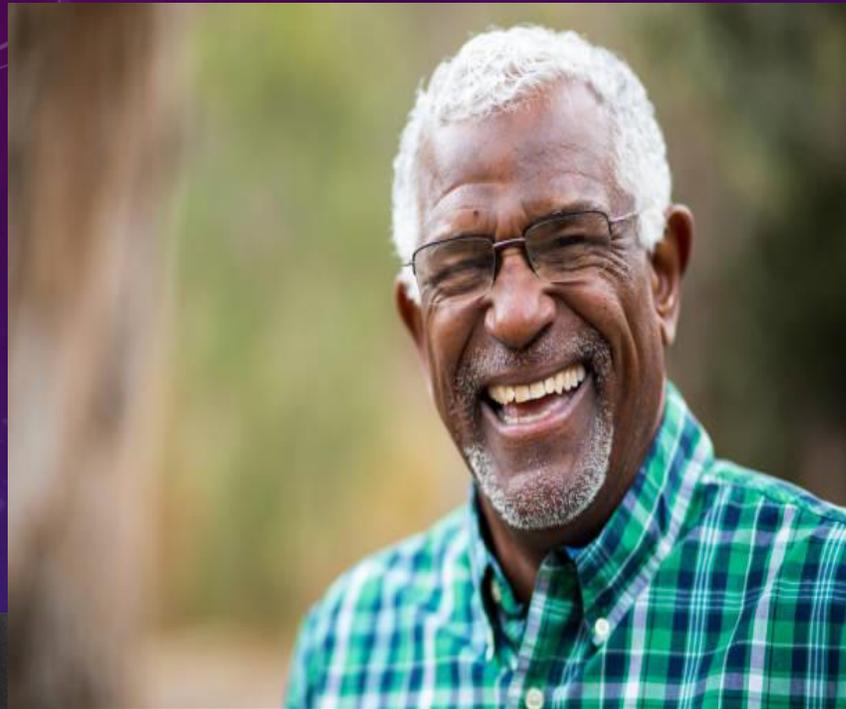
-- model adapted from Judith Andre, *Worldly Virtues* (2015)

CHERISHING THE PRESENT

What is the **creative space** opened up by being older?

1. Changed understanding of death; sad but no longer tragic; perhaps a gift
2. Less buffeted by events
3. Keener sense of what is in my control and what isn't; and ability to let some things so
4. Diminished energy means I am less involved in competition
5. Appreciation of the everyday; less instrumental thinking; less means-to-an-end activity
6. Greater patience generally, but also less willingness to "suffer fools gladly"
7. Beauty no longer confined to youthfulness
8. Sense that the time left is "gravy"
9. Involvement in projects that consolidate the past

THE BEAUTY OF AGE





GRAVY

No other word will do. For that's what it was. Gravy. Gravy, these past ten years. Alive, sober, working, loving and being loved by a good woman. Eleven years ago he was told he had six months to live at the rate he was going. And he was going nowhere but down. So he changed his ways somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest? After that it was *all* gravy, every minute of it, up to and including when he was told about, well, some things that were breaking down and building up inside his head. "Don't weep for me," he said to his friends. "I'm a lucky man. I've had ten years longer than I or anyone expected. Pure gravy. And don't forget it."

Raymond Carver

ACCEPTING THE PAST: TELLING STORIES

1. My life as something more than the sum of its parts
2. Meaning not confined to my resume, my social/professional persona, or fact that I am my children's father/mother, or my spouse's partner
3. Task of learning to tell my story. Telling stories is one of the ways we come to understand the meaning of events in our lives; the stories we tell signal the meaning we claim as ours: "my story" or "the real story" or "the true story"; there are often stories behind the stories. . . like a palimpsest

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

By JOHN BURNET
BISHOP OF SALISBURY
AND
OF THE HISTORY OF THE
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BISHOP OF SALISBURY
AND

Printed by J. Sturges, in the Strand, 1704.

THE PAST AND STORY-TELLING

4. Stories are rarely told start to finish, but in snippets, little scenes, small nuggets of meaning dispensed occasionally; no big unified account needed; we can't tell it all, and my family and friends know parts of my story better than I do.

5. Understanding and embracing my story bear the fruits of self-acceptance, peace, equanimity; an openness to my past (the good, the bad and the ugly), and then, openness to the stories of others

6. Stories always include some suffering:

“All sorrow can be borne if it can be put into a story” Isak Dinesen

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: MY PERSONAL FUTURE

1. Making plans, having goals, while adjusting my goals to my capabilities
2. A future less shaped by the requirements for getting others launched
3. More time for family and friendships means a future with more potential for an expanded interior life
4. Being OK that some of goals cannot be achieved in my lifetime

LIFESPAN VIRTUES PROFILE

What virtues stand out in my effort to celebrate the present, accept the past, and invest in the future?



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: BEYOND OUR LIFESPAN, A FUTURE WITHOUT US

1. What we do now ripples into the future, sometimes roars into the future, far beyond our near progeny, and into the future of the species and the planet. . . and the cosmos
2. Thinking about the planetary future presents our greatest challenge in achieving integrity and avoiding despair

GLOBAL WARMING AND SEA LEVEL RISE

- Paris Accords aim for rise of only 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels by 2100 (currently 1.1 degree C) = 1-2.5 feet rise
- At 2 degrees C = 3-6 feet (130-245 million climate refugees)
- At 4 degrees C = 22-35 feet
- If all ice on Earth melts = 216-260 feet

Sources: International Panel on Climate Change, NASA, European data



Calgary

Ontario

Vancouver

Seattle

Washington

Montana

North Dakota

Minnesota

Oregon

Idaho

South Dakota

Wyoming

Wisconsin

Ottawa

Montreal

Maine

Toronto

Chicago

Detroit

New York

Boston

Nebraska

Iowa

Denver

Colorado

UNITED STATES

Illinois

St. Louis

Ohio

Philadelphia

Washington

San Francisco

Nevada

Utah

Kansas

Missouri

Kentucky

Virginia

California

Los Angeles

Arizona

New Mexico

Oklahoma

Arkansas

Tennessee

North Carolina

Texas

Dallas

Atlanta

Georgia

Houston

Monterrey

Miami

Gulf of Mexico

MÉXICO

Havana

CUBA

Guadalajara

Mexico City

Port-au-Prince

Santo Domingo

US NAVY map of future America



Blue show where new coastlines will be.

5 TOXIC FEATURES OF OUR CURRENT THINKING

(THAT IN THEIR PRACTICE ARE VICES)

1. Exclusive Focus on the Present
2. Political Ineptness
3. Humans as the Crown of Creation (and/or Evolution)
4. Consumerism
5. Mechanistic Views of Nature (Including the Human Body and Earth)

-- L. R. Churchill, *Ethics for Everyone* (Oxford, 2020)

LOVE AS A MOTIVE FOR SAVING THE PLANET



STEPHEN J. GOULD (1941-2002)

“We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature --- for we will not fight to save what we do not love.”



KINDS OF LOVE: THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR (MOST OF) IT

Eros ἔρως--passionate, physical love, longing and desire, “falling in love”

Philia φιλία--love between friends, high-minded affection of people who recognize something valuable in each other

Agape ἀγάπη--spiritually-inspired, egoless love, mystical love

Storge' στοργή-- the affection that emerges from the mutual care of daily life, as in a family; not “falling in love” but “standing in a place of love.”

Biophilia – love of humanity for nature; innate need to find connections between humans and other forms of life -- Eric Fromm; E. O. Wilson

BIOPHILIA +

- The most amazing fact about us is that we are here at all.
- The immense improbability of you and me, here and now . . .
- Earth as our only home; a creaturely love for habitat; this yields. . .
- A kind of knowledge only possible through love, like the knowledge of other people, like the knowledge of myself; knowledge of myself residing in (not on) the Earth, a place that I learn to care for. . .

FROM “PATRICK’S BREASTPLATE” (CELTIC HYMN)

I bind unto myself today

The virtues of the starlit heaven

The glorious sun’s life-giving rays

The whiteness of the moon at even

The flashing of the lightening free

The whirling winds tempestuous shocks

The stable earth, the deep salt sea

Around the old eternal rocks

GETTING PRACTICAL AND AVOIDING NIHILISM

- “Ditch the Shame”
- Focus on Systems as well as Individual Choices
- Join an Effective Group
- Be Aware that the Damaged Environment is connected to other Socially Unjust Policies
- Be Politically Active

--Emma Marris, “How to Stop Freaking Out and Tackle Climate Change” *NYT*, Jan. 10, 2020

WHO WILL LEAD US?

“
You say you love
your children above
all else, and yet you
are stealing their
future in front of
their very eyes.

Greta Thunberg



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National Academy of Medicine 2016

QUO VADIS? HOW TO SPEND SESSION 6

- Love
- Patience
- Truthfulness
- Courage
- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Reverence
- Kindness
- Probing Curiosity
- Loyalty
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Equanimity
- Capacity for Awe/Wonder
- Relinquishing/Surrendering
- Resilience
- Hopefulness
- Generosity