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Working Virtues, Session 3

TRUTHFULNESS,

FORGIVENESS, KINDNESS

The Territory Ahead

- **Session 4 -- *Spirituality and Hope***
- **Session 5 -- *Life Span Virtues, Elderhood***
- **Session 6 - -*Your agenda, what we haven't discussed that you would like to, leftovers, etc.***

Literary Fiction as Enhancing Capacity for Empathy

- Study of Castano and Kidd, New School for Social Research, NY, published in *Science*, October 4, 2013. As reported in *Scientific American*, October, 2013.
- Literary fiction requires intellectual engagement and creative thought from its readers.

Virtues are a web...



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Web metaphor

- Relation between virtues not linear, not a chain. . .but reticular, interlaced. . .
- 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. . .the Buddhist “divine abodes”

Empathy, Compassion and Humility as De-Centering Moves

De-Centering is the Copernican Move in Ethics

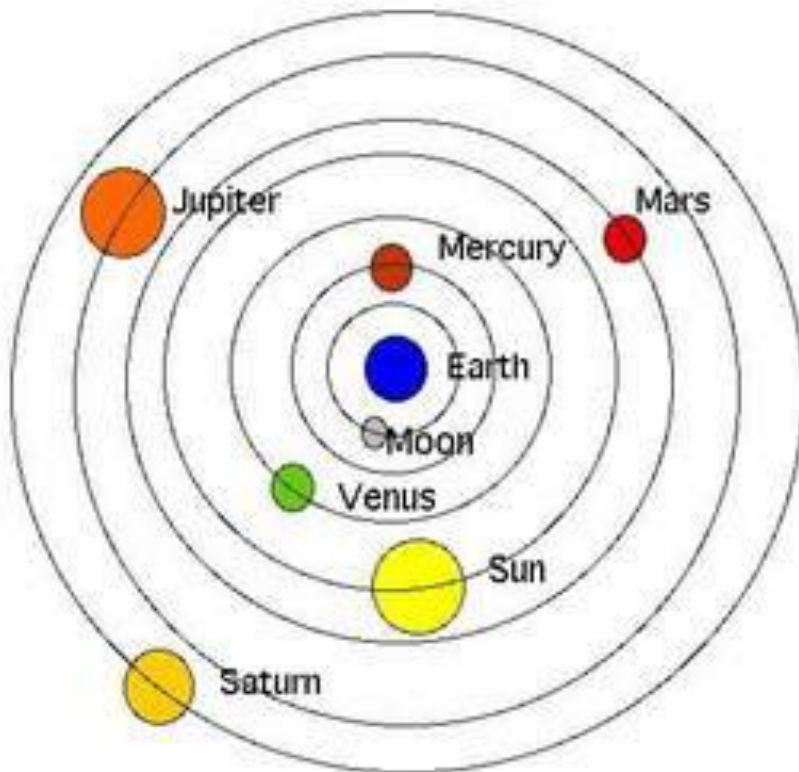
- Taming moral vanity, or
- Holding my moral vanity with loosely, and with a bit of irony. . .

- 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

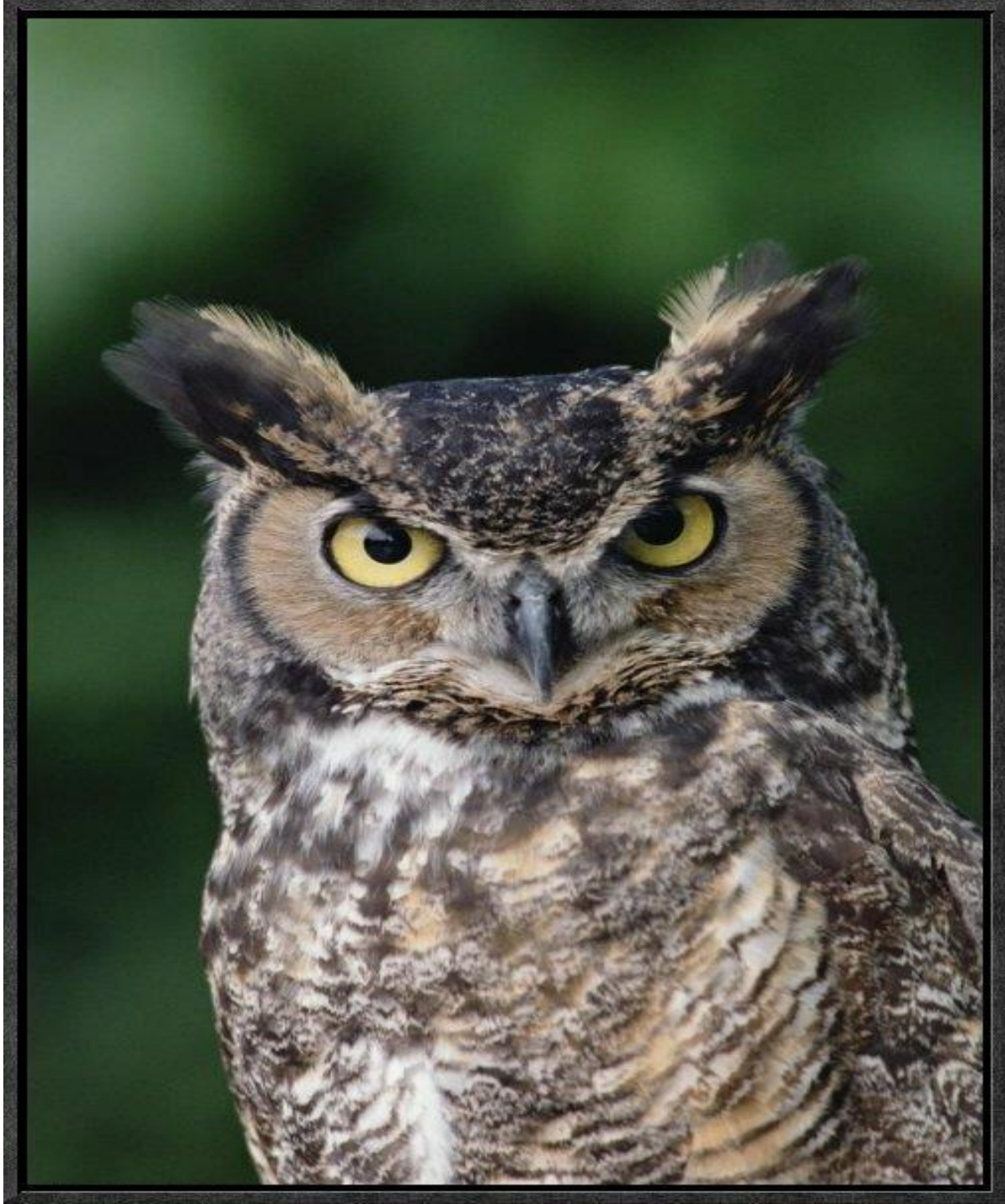
Practicing Virtues Shifts the Center

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
- Advertisers
- Used car dealers (“Show me the Car Fax!”)
- (Some) Politicians?
- Some “news” programs (no longer separating fact from opinion)
- People under extreme pressure

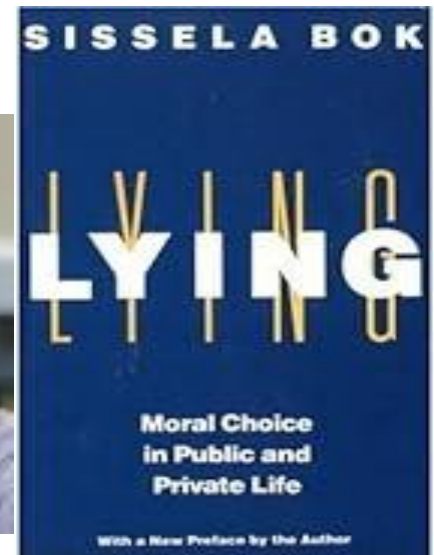
The Moral Harm of Lies

- 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
- Lying as morally corrosive to the liar
- “It’s easy to lie, but hard to do it only once”

--Sissela Bok



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

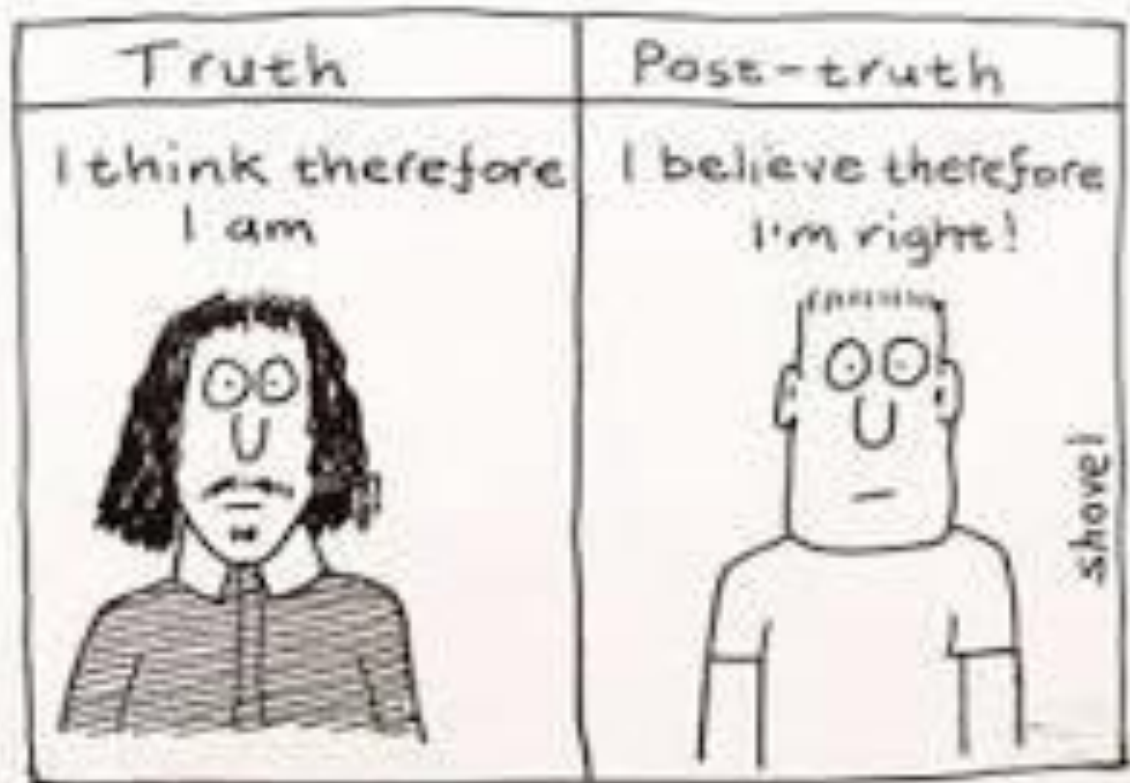


'Post-truth'

The OED Word of the Year, 2016

- “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.” *Wikipedia*
- Many social media sites officially permit lies so long as they are “newsworthy”

Post-truth: Facts less important than what I believe...



Vulnerability to Lies to which we are emotionally attached

- 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

Being truthful requires a second level of reflection

- Task is not just being committed to truthfulness, but also 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.
- “We should have suspected this” ... “That makes sense to me” ... “I never trusted him anyway”
- 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” and nurtures anger and hatred

Truthfulness Profile

- When have I been most tempted to deceive?
- What sort of deceptions are the most damaging?
- What sort of deceptions are the most satisfying?
- Is self-deception different from deceiving others? Connection with humility...



Forgiveness

- What ethical work does forgiveness do?
Allows us to go on. . .to not be stuck or paralyzed.
- Allows us to drop anger, stop harboring our wound, forego revenge. . .
- Permits us to stop keeping score. . .
- Frees us from forming our identity around an injury

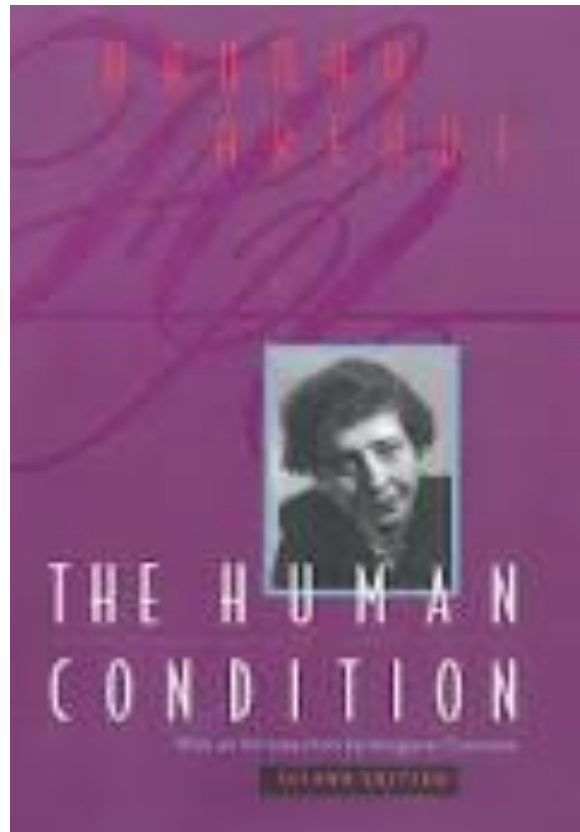
Dickens' *Great Expectations*

- 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.

Forgiveness is an evolutionary gift

- Sense of fairness, cooperation, reciprocity, forgiveness and reconciliatory behaviors were all learned from our primate ancestors.
--- Frans de Waal



Buddhist Teaching on Forgiveness

- **Forgiveness** is about letting go of the anger and resentment we hold in our hearts, that causes us so much pain, and can lead to conflict with others. This process of letting go helps us to develop compassion for ourselves and others.



Forgiveness involves moving beyond a triple injury

- The original injury, or offense we feel
- The injury to the person who inflicted the wound
- The self-injury of holding a grudge, holding anger in my heart

Japanese proverb

- “He who seeks revenge should dig two graves”



Further Questions

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*



In Christianity: Is Divine Forgiveness Contingent?

“Forgive us our sins as [to the extent that?] we forgive those who sin against us...”

Further aspects . . .

- Offering forgiveness to others
- Accepting forgiveness (getting past anger, grudges, and righteous indignation)
- Forgiving oneself (when I am the offending party, means getting past guilt, shame and self-punishment)

Forgiveness Profile

1. What instances of forgiveness populate my moral *prehistory*?
2. What instances of forgiveness stand out in my life? What have I learned from them?



Kindness: A Start

- “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 Lamerius

I’ve been thinking about the way, when you walk down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs to let you by.

Or how strangers still say “bless you” when someone sneezes, a leftover from the Bubonic plague. “Don’t die,” we are saying.

And sometimes, when you spill lemons from your grocery bag, someone else will help you pick them up. Mostly, we don’t want to harm each other.

“Small Kindnesses”

We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot, and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile at them and for them to smile back.

For the waitress to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder, and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.

We have so little of each other, now. So far from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.

“Small Kindnesses”

What if they are the true dwelling of the holy,
These fleeting temples we make together when
we say, “Here, have my seat,” “Go ahead — you
first,” “I like your hat.”



Assignment

- Describe a kindness recently experienced.