



WORKING VIRTUES SESSION 5:  
LOVE, IN ITS MANY FORMS,  
VIRTUES FOR ELDERS

*"THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN"*

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## KINDS OF LOVE: THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR (A LOT OF) THEM

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

Philia φιλία--love between friends, affection of people who recognize something valuable in each other, and in the relationship

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 “residing in a place of love.”

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



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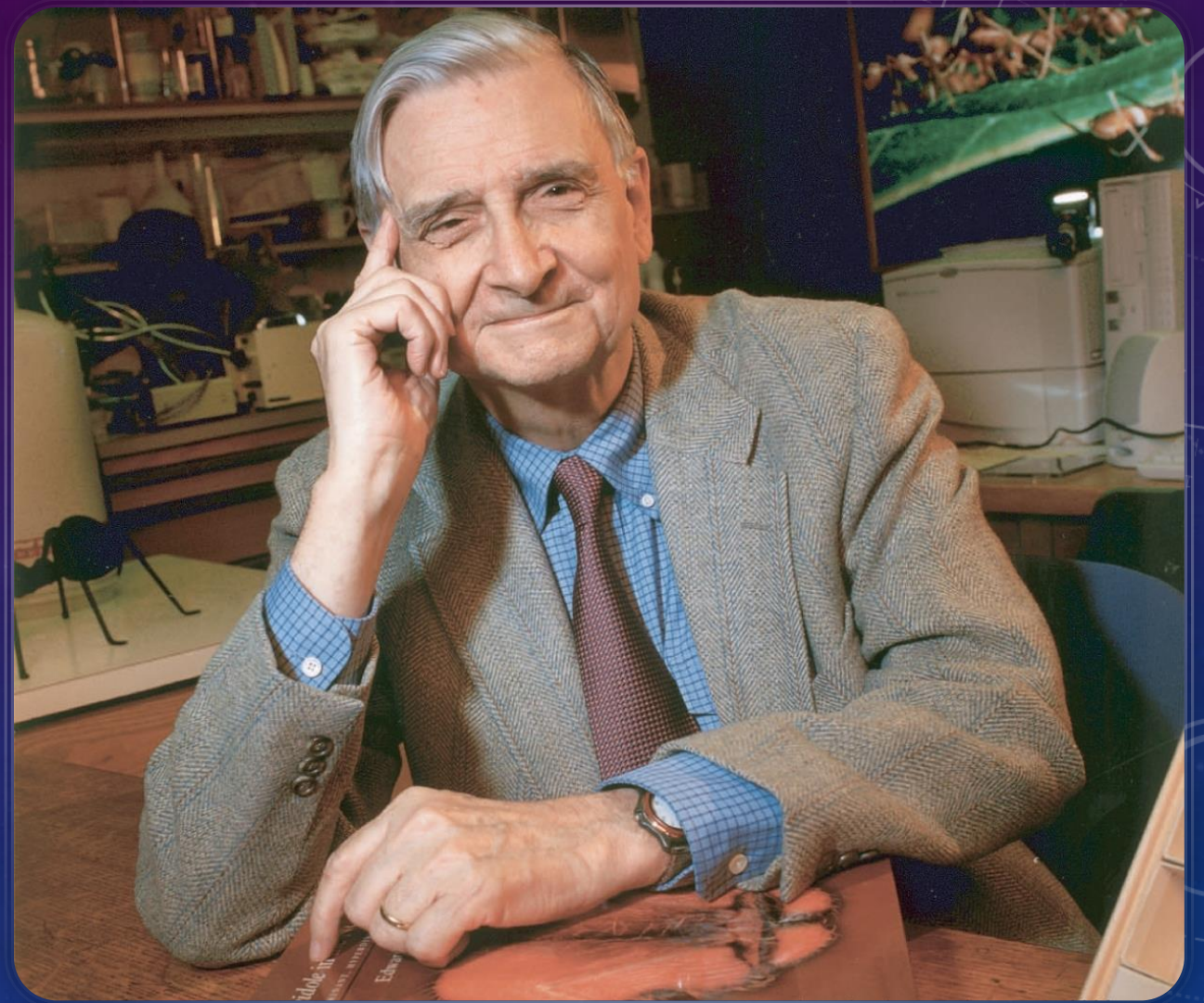
## ERIC FROMM'S (1900-1980) 'BIOPHILIA'

- The opposite of necrophilia, which is a “psychic crippledness”
- “A reverence for life that enhances growth, and unfolding” (Albert Schweitzer)

--from *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 1973

## E.O. WILSON'S (1929-2021) 'BIOPHILIA'

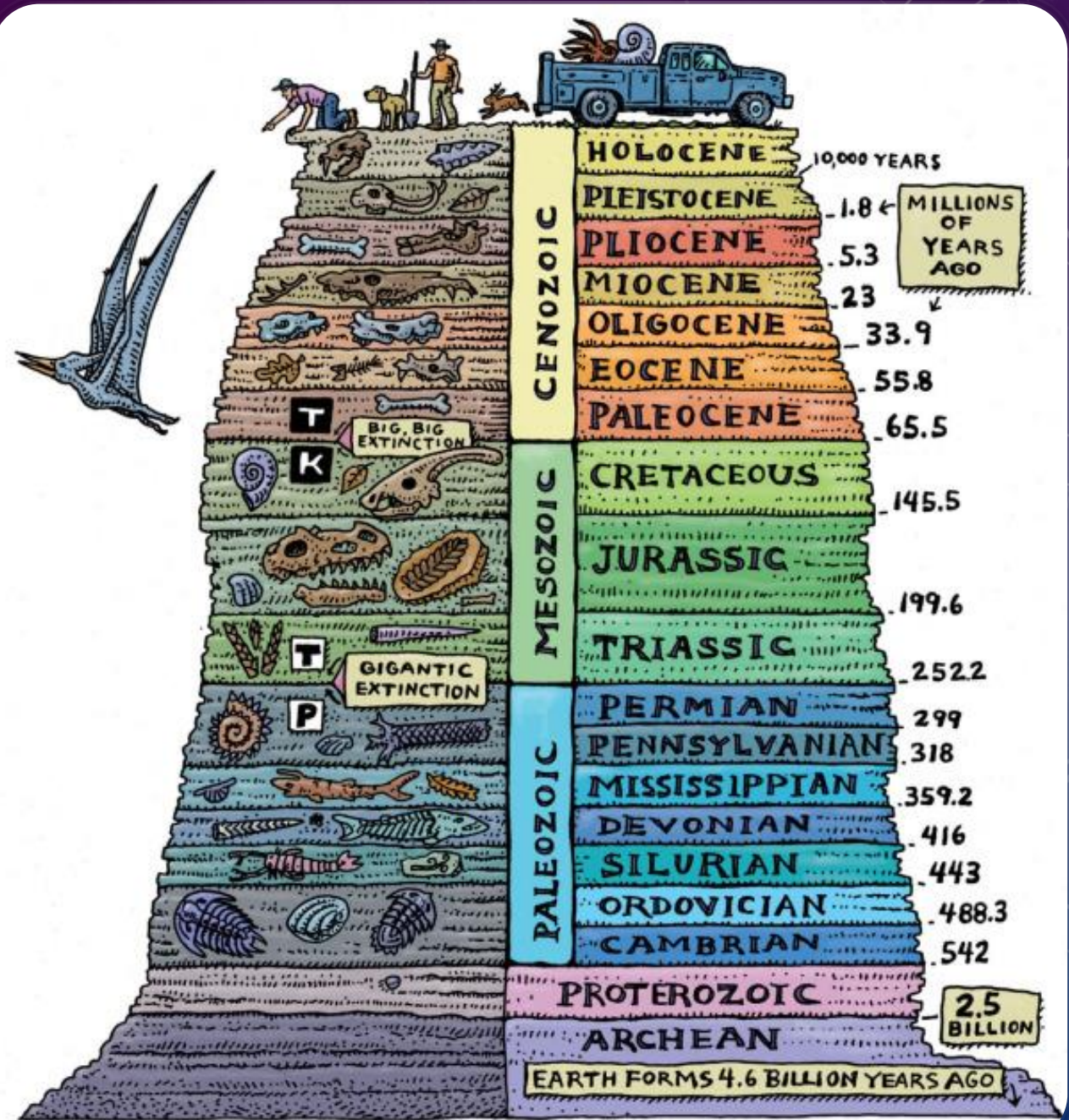
- “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Innate means hereditary and hence part of ultimate human nature.”
- “we are human in good part because of the particular way we affiliate with other organisms. They are the matrix in which the human mind originated and is permanently rooted.”



# LOVE (BIOPHILIA) AS A VIRTUE DIRECTED TOWARD OUR PLANET



# BIOPHILIA AS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR OUR ERA OF GLOBAL WARMING





# VULNERABLE CITIES: MOST LIKELY TO BE UNDERWATER

## Underwater by 2030

Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Basra, Iraq

New Orleans, USA

Venice, Italy

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Kolkata, India

Bangkok, Thailand

Georgetown, Guyana

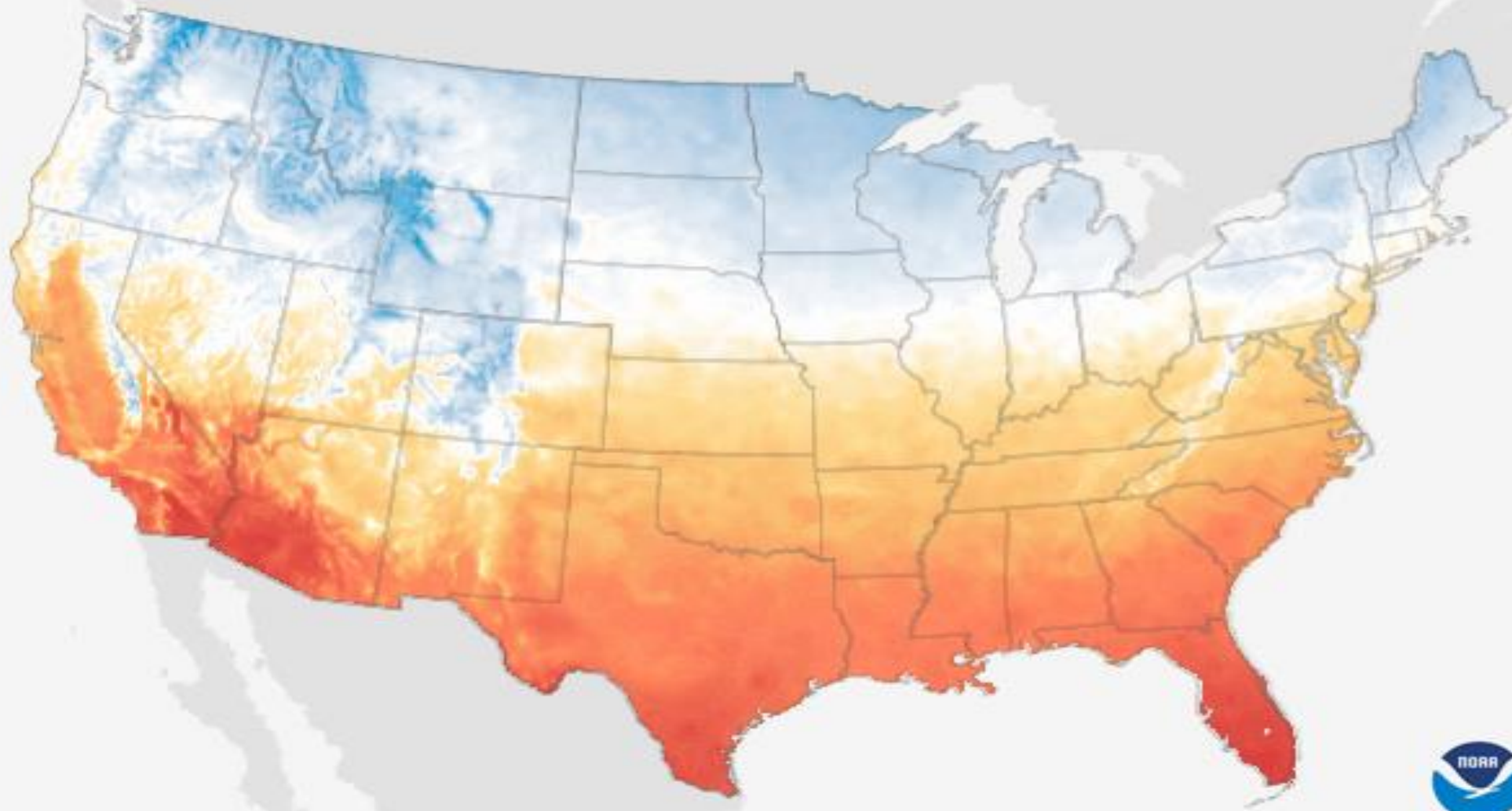
Savannah, USA

## Underwater by 2050 (U.S. only)

- Miami
- Hoboken
- Honolulu
- New York
- Los Angeles
- San Diego
- Charleston
- Atlantic City
- Galveston
- Seattle







November 2090-2099  
High emissions  
(RCP 8.5)

Average maximum temperature (°F)



Climate.gov  
Data: LOCA

UNCHECKED  
GLOBAL  
WARMING ALSO  
INCLUDES THE  
FOLLOWING  
WITHIN THE NEXT  
30 YEARS

- Massive deaths in the world's most vulnerable populations, roughly 500 million to billion people
- Massive migrations due to uninhabitable land, food shortages, breakdown of governments and economies
- Water and food shortages almost everywhere
- Health crises: pandemics much worse than Covid-19; syndemics



WONDER AND AWE --  
ESPECIALLY FOR NATURE — AS  
LINKED TO BIOPHILIA



# HOW CAN WE PRACTICE BIOPHILIA?

- Reducing our carbon footprint.
- Making preservation of our planet part of our politics.
- And...?



## VIRTUES FOR ELDERS

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.”

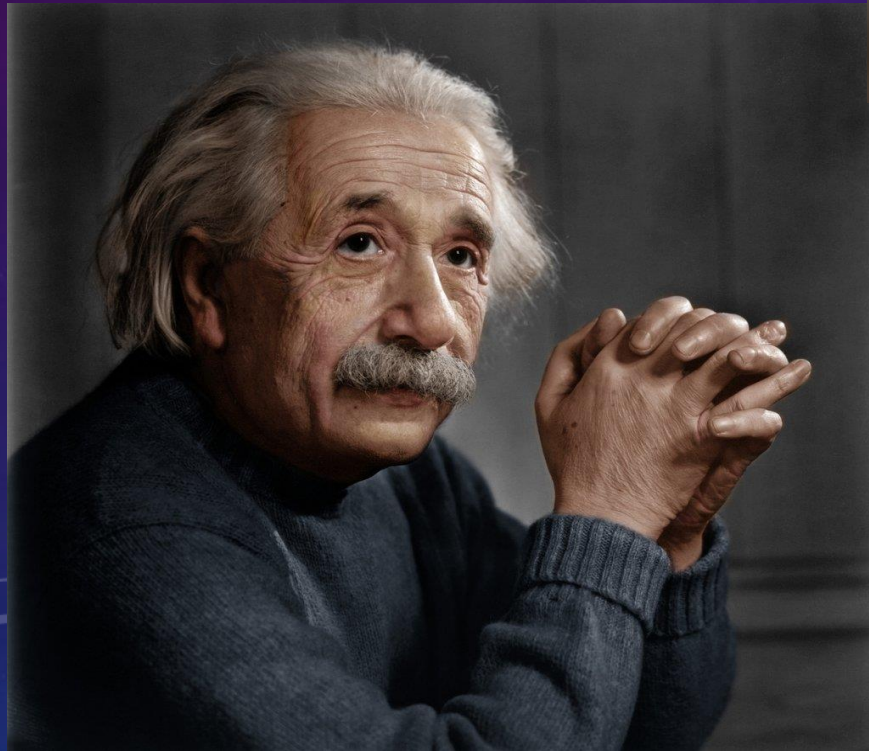
--Soren Kierkegaard

# SOME STEREOTYPES OF THE ELDERLY

1. Benign tranquility—Passive, harmless, kindly....out to pasture
2. Greedy Geezers --taking up too much space, using too many of society's resources
3. Patients—largely defined by their medical needs, chronically ill
4. Un-young—and thereby defective, stigmatized by age and its limitations and disabilities, aesthetically unpleasing, ugly, invisible



# THE BEAUTY OF AGE



# THE MORE REALISTIC PICTURE OF THE ELDERLY

1. Many elders work arduously to simply live tolerable lives and help others to do so.
2. Many of the elderly live on Social Security income alone, or with very modest pensions or savings, making do with incomes just above the poverty level. The average income of persons 65 and older in 2023 was \$75,274, yet the median income for this group was \$47,620, while average expenses for elderly were \$48,872.

# THE MORE REALISTIC PICTURE OF THE ELDERLY

3. Many elders remain politically active and champion issues that affect future generations.
4. Stereotypes portray the elderly as not only as one-dimensional but also static, as no longer growing and changing and especially, growing in personal and spiritual domains not previously open to them when they were younger.

# LIFE AS A WHOLE: VIRTUES FOR BEING AN ELDER

1. Getting past the negative stereotypes
2. Models of being an elder— Erik Erikson’s Stage 8 (roughly 65+) conflict between integrity and despair, when resolved leads to wisdom
3. Joan Erikson added a 9<sup>th</sup> stage, which she called “gerotranscendence”, and “a sense of oneness with the spirit of the universe.”
4. Important to ask: What is the experience of aging like for people? Mix of negative/positive, loss/gain; we often don’t experience what younger cohorts think we do, or should. . .
5. Are there things we can’t understand until we are older—and a virtue set—not evident in youth and middle age?

# ELDER VIRTUES

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

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

# CHERISHING THE PRESENT --FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE

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 go
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

# PATIENCE

- Patience is about time: annoyance or frustration about slowness of time in achieving a goal, or others using or wasting “my precious time” —so fundamentally, a matter of disengaging the ego
- Making time a friend, rather than an enemy
- Time works for me when I can be in the present fully, “being here now, being somewhere else later”; when I can at least neutralize the tyranny of clock time, exchange clock time for living time....when every time has its own beauty, wonder and meaning
- *Some of the best things happen when I am waiting around for other things to happen*



## 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 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

Making plans, having goals, while  
adjusting my goals to my capabilities

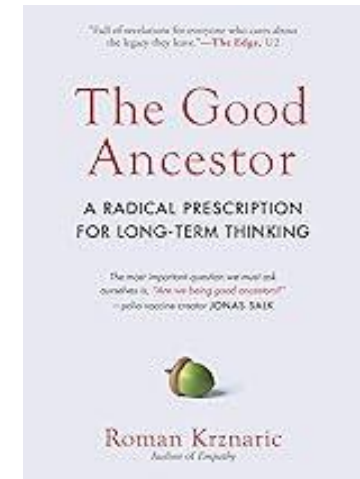
A future less shaped by the  
requirements for getting others  
launched

More time for family and friendships  
means a future with more potential  
for an expanded interior life

Being OK that some of goals cannot  
be achieved in my lifetime

# INVESTING IN THE LARGER FUTURE, THE MANY GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW US, AND IN THE EARTH

1. Deep time humility
2. Intergenerational justice
3. Cathedral thinking



-- Adapted for Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*

# DEEP TIME HUMILITY

Our time on earth, as humans, is a blip

- “Consider the earth’s history as the old measure of an English yard, the distance from the king’s nose to the tip of his outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle finger erases human history.”

--Roman Krznaric

- In a full-length motion picture (2 hours) of the universe, the history of our species would flicker by in the last fraction of a second.

--Michael Polanyi

## DEEP-TIME HUMILITY

### HUMAN LIFE ON EARTH AS ONE PASS OF THE EAGLE OVER MT. EVEREST

- Kalpa—a unity of time in Hindu mythology; the length of a single cycle of the cosmos; a “day of Brahma”; roughly 4,320,000,000 years
- Time period it would take an eagle, flying over Mt. Everest and brushing the top, to wear down the mountain



# INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Weighing future lives as equally valuable to our own, if for no other reason because futures lives will far outnumber present ones.

Cumulative generations of the dead throughout history =

100 billion

Currently living account = 8 billion

Future generations, even modest predictions = tens of trillions.

We who are currently alive are a fleck of dust on the population apple.





# CATHEDRAL THINKING

The great cathedrals of Europe were built over many generations. Those who lay the cornerstones could only imagine the completion of their work in a distant future.

Building to last: Water tunnel in Gonabad, Iran, built in 700-500 B.C.E., still in use.



Interior of a qanat in Persia

# ELDER VIRTUE PROFILE

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

# QUO VADIS? HOW TO SPEND SESSION 6

- Love
- Being with Oneself
- Being with Others
- Truthfulness
- Courage
- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Reverence
- Kindness
- Probing Curiosity
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Equanimity
- Capacity for Awe/Wonder
- Relinquishing/Surrendering
- Spirituality
- Hopefulness
- Patience