

Chapter 4

Reverence for Childhood and Old Age

ABSTRACT

Chapter 4 draws from one of the authors' dissertations to highlight an injustice some call ageism. The epoch known as childhood is going extinct as the need for more and more education reaches into infancy for the earlier brain growth needed to compete with the velocity of science. The epoch known as old age is undergoing a metamorphosis from something to look forward to, to something to fear. Only the productive middle of an otherwise unproductive lifespan seems to be of value to society. This chapter compares the withholding of regard from children until it's earned, to the withholding of reverence for nature until it perishes. The authors issue a call to honor the very young and the very old, because those are the precious sunrises and sunsets of the human lifespan.

INTRODUCTION

*“Hold childhood in reverence, and do not be in any hurry to judge it for good or ill . . . Give nature time to work before you take over her business”
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

In this chapter, the authors will propose that every moment matters. The authors will use this axiom to explore that missing reverence for each and every moment that humans are fortunate to have. The authors will use this

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axiom to explore the supposed stages of the lifespan . . . and in the process, propose that *every* stage of the lifespan matters just as much as every other stage. These authors will not uphold the common belief that childhood is here mainly so humans can grow up; these authors will not uphold the idea that old age is here because some humans survived long enough to look back. Instead, the authors of this book about reverence for Life, will hazard that the stage looked upon as “childhood” is just as valuable as the middle and final stages of the human lifespan, whether everybody grows up or not. These authors will venture that it is just as vital not to pity the old for living “too long,” as it is not to grieve over a child who dies “too young.” If one has lived, surely that was better than not having lived at all? If one does not attain some ideal “stage” or achieve some monumental thing before death, has one’s life been lived in vain? No. Viktor Frankl, a famous psychiatrist/survivor of the Holocaust, said no (Frankl, 1990). Life itself is an achievement.

For these reasons and more, every stage of the lifespan matters. Human beings are not here to disparage childhood because children need to start working and earn their keep. Human beings are not here to work until they are too old to work and constantly worry whether they will become an inconvenient burden to their hard-working children. Childhood and old age are not “liabilities.” The human species is not here to get a job (Gray, 2013; Meinecke, 2017). It is when adults teach their children they need to “accomplish something or else!” that a perfect child from a perfect family unexpectedly takes her own life (because being a child was not enough to bring her parents joy . . . they expected *more* from her than simply being their child; Meinecke, 2017). In the same way, it is when people expect to live an entire year and live just nine months, that they forget how grateful they were for each and every day.

The reader will recall that this was the premise in the last chapter, too, when the authors proposed that every other species is not here for the sake of the human species. Nor is any member of any species expendable in order to protect or preserve the idea of its species from perishing. Recall that a “species” is an idea, whereas an individual being is not an idea (until it dies). Every individual matters. Humans have produced memorable films emphasizing this idea (Ford, 1945). There is no one exactly like that one unique being in all the world, and never will be again. In this is reverence (for Life). In this is love (of Life). In this simple understanding of the value of the least of things, humans may (perhaps) save the greatest of things (this beloved planet) from an early death. It is not the human habit of putting things into categories that makes each member of that category seem more indispensable,

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