

ERIK ERIKSON

Artist of Moral Development

Edward F. Mooney

INTRODUCTION

Erik Erikson was born in Germany 1902. He died in Massachusetts in 1994, having produced a rich body of work that included the widely read Young Man Luther, Gandhi's Truth, and Childhood and Society.¹ He is best known for a theory of identity-formation achieved through stages of development from infancy through old age, and is credited with coining the notion of “identity crisis”, and its off-spring, “mid-life crisis”. Although the themes of self-knowledge and self-realization are as old as any literature we possess, casting them in terms of a now ubiquitous discourse of “identity”, even of “identity politics”, owes a great deal to the popular and academic discussions of Erikson's work in the 50s and 60s when he achieved something of celebrity status.² Erikson's conceives of the several stages of development as a tenuous equilibrium between opposed forces that remain in dynamic conflict.

The sketch that Erikson provides of any single stage in development is “dialectical” rather than “essentialist” and static. Likewise, relations among unfolding

¹ See Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: Norton, 1950, 1963), Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (New York: Norton, 1958), and Gandhi's Truth: On the Origin of Militant Nonviolence (New York: Norton, 1969).

² The best account of Erikson's life, writing, cultural sources and impact is Lawrence J. Friedman, Identity's Architect: a Biography of Erik Erikson, (New York: Scribners, 1999).

stages are dynamic and dialectical. Later stages take up or subsume earlier ones (and their tensions) rather than supplanting, superceding, or erasing them. An infant's battle between trust and mistrust, for example, continues in various reconfigurations throughout a life. Kierkegaard readers might think here of a particular section title in Kierkegaard's Either/Or II, "The Balance between the Ethical and the Aesthetical in the development of the Personality". We can imagine Erikson having a section-title introducing "the balance between intimacy and isolation in the development of love as central to personality in early adulthood".

There is a basis in Erikson's experience for rough parallels between his interest in moral-psychological development and Kierkegaard's interests. His mother, a Danish Jew, read Kierkegaard aloud to Erikson in his early years.³ Late in life, Erikson began taking notes for an extended study of Kierkegaard, but his powers were failing.⁴ He published nothing from these notes. In the mid-70s he was asked by his Episcopalian Parish in Tiburon, a small town just north of San Francisco, where he had settled for retirement, to give an informal seminar on Kierkegaard's theology. He asked his neighbor, the Kierkegaard scholar Arnold Come, to join in the effort. He confided to Come that what he most admired in Kierkegaard was his critical acumen and exploratory, open-ended imagination. As a psychoanalyst, Erikson recognized and admired Kierkegaard's great skill in taking up the deepest moral-religious issues while steadfastly avoiding credal or simplistic conclusions that would shut off dialogue. As Erikson read him, Kierkegaard's "answers" were always tantalizingly incomplete and never one-sided – that is, never

³ See Friedman, 29-31, 41. It is indicative of the creative literary and moral-religious temperament that rubbed off on her son that she read Brandes and Emerson, as well.

⁴ See Friedman, 448-9.

undialectical. In Erikson's view, that was a great virtue.⁵

For Erikson, this focus on negotiating tensions in the achievement of identity reflects a Kierkegaardian temperament fostered informally in childhood. More explicitly, it reflects his initiation into Viennese psychoanalysis, a movement dedicated to exploring the self (or soul) especially in its torments or sickness, with an aim toward health and healing. Erikson's sense that achieving personal equilibrium was a life-long task and a passage through stages has roots in his early life, which set for him an unusually dramatic context for working toward identity.

LIFE AND WORKS

For most of his early school years and into young adulthood, Erikson was Erik Homberger. He became "Erikson" only after becoming a United States citizen in 1939 (he emigrated in 1933). He was born out of wedlock to Karla Abrahamsen, daughter of prominent Danish Jewish parents, the family known for philanthropy toward Jewish refugees from Russia. At the time of his birth, she was married to a German Jewish stockbroker. His biological father was a Dane known mysteriously only as "Erik". For the duration of her long life, and to Erikson's chagrin, his mother adamantly refused to reveal anything about his biological father. Her Danish family remained silent, as well.

At birth, Erikson was officially registered as "Erik Salomonsen", reflecting his mother's married name, and became "Erik Homburger" at the age of seven when his mother remarried and he was formally adopted by his step-father. At that point he forfeited

⁵ See Arnold Come, letter to the editor, New York Review of Books, Vol. 46, #18, 1999. See also the discussion of Kierkegaard's importance to Erikson in Carol Hren Hoare, Erikson on Development in Adulthood: New Insights from the Unpublished Papers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 83, 176-79, 183, 212.

any chance to claim Danish citizenship through his mother. Hitler was making Germany and Austria uninhabitable by the 30s. Denmark provided a few months' haven before his emigration to the States. Raised an orthodox German Jew, he was teased by Christian classmates for being Jewish, and at temple-school for being tall, blond, and blue-eyed -- a 'goy'. Like William James, another prominent psychologist, early on he pursued a wandering artistic career as a painter. In his 20s, he became attracted to the budding practice and theory of psychoanalysis, a movement that focused, of course, on ameliorating inner conflict; he began the regimen of daily analysis.

His burden, quite clearly, was to sort out the several conflicting strands of his complex inheritance. He had three fathers, we might say, one utterly unknown, one known only in his earliest years, and a step-father who for all his kindness could not fill the gap created by a man who had abandoned him and whose identity had been absolutely erased. He had a Danish mother, now German, twice married, and carrying the blemish of bearing a child out of wedlock. That would color his own sense of legitimacy. He was protected from the facts until he left home, but his blond hair and blue eyes must have raised his suspicions much earlier. He was accepted neither as fully Jewish nor fully German.

In mid-life Erikson converted to Christianity; his wife, Joan Serson, was Episcopalian, daughter of a minister. A Canadian-American, she was studying modern dance in Germany and Austria in pursuit of a Ph.D. from Columbia. Upon discovering that she was pregnant, they were married in 1930 in Germany in Civic, Christian and Jewish ceremonies. To compound the question of religious, familial, and national identity, he then faced the question of what it was to become American. He took up the task with characteristic energy and resolve.

It was a formidable, and as he would come to see it, a creative task to sort through these inherited and adopted social and cultural traditions, and to mull over the imprints, longings, and aspirations related to them. The job was ongoing -- to weave a viable sense of self. He would see his never-finishable project not in terms of overcoming sickness, neurosis, or pathology, but as an artistic endeavor. We might think that he was saddled with an unusually complicated inheritance at an unusually tumultuous time in history – a kind of chaos from which to compose an identity. One can sense from the writing that flowed from his practice as an attentive child analyst, however, that he came to see that it is broadly human to inherit a convoluted past that then accompanies a child or youth into their future. The child is father and mother to the man or woman who will be.⁶

Erikson undertook training analysis with Anna Freud. He graduated from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute in early 1933, the year that Freud's books (along with others) were burned. Anti-Semitism was increasing by the day. As a Jew associated with a “decadent Jewish school of thought”, he was at risk and left with his wife and young son first for Denmark and then for the United States. In December 1933 he became the first child analyst at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. There was a growing interest in psychoanalysis in the States and few analysts from Vienna. He was a talented practitioner and teacher -- and always restless. The next year Erikson accepted an appointment in the Medical School at Yale. Subsequently, his interest in child development and education took a cross-cultural and anthropological bent. He traveled West to participate in a study of Native American ways of childrearing, living on-site among the Sioux in South Dakota.

⁶ Wordsworth says famously, “The child is father to the man.” Kierkegaard says “In faith a man becomes his own father”. Erikson inhabits a German romanticism that sees “giving birth to oneself” as a poetic task, and the most important task one might ever undertake.

Some years later, with the help of the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, he learned from the Yurok in Northern California.

In 1939, Erikson accepted a position at The University of California, Berkeley. His widely read Childhood and Society came out in 1950. It became a widely used college text in departments of sociology, anthropology, and education, as well as in psychology – increasingly when it came out as a paperback in the mid-60s. Refusing to comply with the McCarthy-era demand for anti-communist loyalty oaths from all faculty, he resigned from the University in 1950. Erikson subsequently taught for a number of years at Harvard and worked with troubled children at the Austin Riggs Center in western Massachusetts. He returned to the San Francisco Bay area in the early 70s, living in Tiburon with his wife, daughter, and sons. A dozen years later he returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts, by then an old man in physical and mental decline. He died and was buried on Cape Cod in the tiny village of Harwich.

Although he was always connected with research institutions, Erikson considered himself less a “scholar’s scholar” known for rigorously conducted studies, than as an innovative teacher, observer, and healer, and what today we would call a public intellectual.⁷ He could claim among his older enthusiastic supporters in the 30s and 40s the broadly interdisciplinary and widely-discussed anthropologists, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict.⁸ Both encouraged his fledging efforts to write in a way that would be

⁷ In addition to Childhood and Society, Young Man Luther, and Gandhi’s Truth, other of his works were widely read and discussed, among them, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: Norton, 1959, 1980), and Insight and Responsibility (New York: Norton, 1964). See also Ideas and Identities: The Life and Work of Erik Erikson ed Wallerstein, Robert S., & Goldberger, Leo, (Indiana University Press, 1998), The Erik Erikson Reader ed. Robert Coles, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), and Erikson’s Vital Involvement in Old Age (with J.M. Erikson and H. Kivnick (New York: Norton, 1986) .

⁸ See Friedman, p. 131-39.

broadly accessible and that would mesh psychological with social-psychological and anthropological developmental configurations. Later, he would return the favor, playing a formative role in the careers of Robert Coles, Robert J. Lifton, and Carol Gilligan.⁹ Like Erikson, each of these psychologists were concerned with an interdisciplinary approach to the development not just of children or youth but of adults, a moral trajectory that would open possibilities for moral growth and for that sort of conviction on which a viable identity can be built.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AS MORAL ITINERARY

Taking an extended historical perspective, Erikson's sketch of psychological growth is an elaborate schema of virtues. One needn't picture "virtues" as moralistically demanding or punishing ideals imposed and sanctioned by a culture or religious institution. One can think of them as Erikson does, as the strengths or capacities that a sensitive observer will find in the make-up of persons who achieve some degree of fulfillment in their lives. Their authority does not lie in institutional edicts or in the privileged insight of specialists, but in the grain of commonplace experience (though the lessons of such experience may remain underappreciated and underdescribed). Sometimes their authority lies in the transcendent luminosity of transcultural exemplars like Jesus, Socrates, or Gandhi. At the level of ordinary experience, we could safely venture that any relatively fulfilled life will achieve some degree of love or intimacy, some capacity for sustained work and play, some knack for hopefulness and trust even as these are haunted by doubt or despair. Erikson offers a

⁹ See Coles, Robert, Erik Erikson, the Growth of his Work (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1970); Gilligan, Carol, In A Different Voice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Lifton, Robert Jay, The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

schema of such virtues as desiderata that are more or less universal. The theme of a minimally fulfilled life would be based in observation and one's reading, and be offered as something factual that simultaneously has normative force. It's better to have families that instill trust in infants than families that instill doubt and mistrust. Of course there will be cultural variation in the balance of these virtues and in the modes of their expression. The full list of virtues, the sort of schema Erikson sketches in his eight stage overview of the life-cycle will surely vary especially as he moves past childhood to early adulthood and maturity. But it's highly plausible, perhaps as certain as any generalization about things human can be, that the ideal that infants attain basic trust is a cross-cultural universal. In any case, the bare possibility of variation in moral schemata doesn't lessen the plausibility of there being core virtues. Erikson's schema can be taken as a provisional universal, the burden placed on the critic to show that societies can flourish without infants developing trust (say), or hope, and a sense of initiative and purpose (for instance). He offers a heuristic, an alluring invitational proposal for understanding moral maturation. It remains open to elaboration, exploration, and experimental (or experiential) critique, confirmation, and refutation.¹⁰

Plato proposes wisdom, moderation, and courage as basic virtues. The Gospels add faith, hope, and love (or charity). Aristotle would add friendship. Erikson's schema will seem more psychological than Plato's or Aristotle's, and less religious than those of the Gospels, but there is considerable overlap. For instance, Erikson has a place for neighbor

¹⁰ If not exactly a scientific confirmation, the wide appeal of his schema is registered in the appearance of a television film based on his work. See Hubley, John, "Everybody Rides the Carousel" (documentary film 1976, DVD 1999). That broad appeal is also registered in the appearance of Kit Welchman's Erik Erikson Worked For His Life, Work, and Significance, (Philadelphia: Open University Press) 2000.

love, eros, and philia – though these are not his terms of art.¹¹ And he expands “the virtues” in relatively new directions. For instance his elaboration of love would include a prominent place for maternal, paternal, and intergenerational generative bonds of affection. If his schema can reach back to Classical Greek and Gospel traditions, it also has more recent 19th century predecessors. It bears comparison, as we’ve seen, with Kierkegaard’s quasi-developmental theory of stages on life’s way, and when Erikson underlines the importance of play in development, we should hear echoes of Schiller’s “play impulse” and of Nietzsche’s proposal that a childlike free play is essential to adult creativity.¹²

In the last third of his career, Erikson moved beyond studies based on observation of children and youth to take up the formation of history-shaping moral-religious leaders. The eight-stage schema of moral maturation still animates his thinking, but writing Young Man Luther and Gandhi’s Truth required the skills of a biographer and historian as well as of a developmental psychologist. These books were received by some as contributions psycho-history, a term that had some cachet at the time. His choice of figures to study is not accidental. Erikson hoped his depictions of moral-religious greatness could illuminate and energize an American culture that especially in the 60s and 70s was in tumultuous and often violent search of its own identity.¹³ The country had recently suffered the assassinations of Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy,

¹¹ The recent raft of publications on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love can be seen as framing Kierkegaard broadly in a virtue tradition. For just one study, see M. Jamie Ferreira’s Love’s Grateful Striving, A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For accounts of the virtues in Kierkegaard, see also, Kierkegaard after MacIntyre, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

¹² Nietzsche’s three-stage schema of moral development, camel-lion-child, is found in the first sections of Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

¹³ The 1970 biography of Erikson by Robert Coles is dedicated to California migrant worker organizer, Caesar Chavez. Chavez, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King epitomized for Erikson the hope of non-violent social change, an alternative to the disasters of Nazism, McCarthyism, Stalinism, and the more violent fringes of the new left and Black Power movements.

cities were burning, and violent anti-war protests had begun, bringing many deaths in their wake. These events would resonate with Erikson's experience 30 years earlier. While in Vienna he had begun taking notes on Hitler's extraordinary ability to captivate wayward, otherwise directionless youth. These became a chapter in Childhood and Society. What would a counter-Hitler look like? His books on Gandhi and Luther, written during America's time of troubles, and his later lectures on Jefferson and notes on Jesus, were attempts, in effect, to display the charisma of luminously effective moral-religious leaders.¹⁴ Their early experiences and inner "self-work" was meshed in his narratives with the historical context of the societies that challenged and shaped them. He was dedicated to the study of moral individuals of great stature. He was equally dedicated to bring useful beacons of hope to a country still struggling to find itself, to settle its moral itinerary. Although Erikson never presumed to speak even as a minor prophet in his adopted country, many took his diagnosis of moral failure and more importantly, his positive vision of transforming change and healing, as deeply and religiously inspiring.

THE NATURE OF A DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

Each stage (or phase) in moral growth is a rough equilibrium achieved through struggle, an equilibrium that contains or moderates the parties to that struggle and that serves as a platform for further growth. For example, in the first year of life an infant struggles with trust and mistrust. Adults come and go, give warmth and then leave, provide food and

¹⁴ "The Galilean sayings and the sense of 'I'", Yale Review 70, 3, (April 1981); "Reflections on Dr Borg's Life Cycle", Daedalus 105, 2 (Spring 1976). Erikson was invited to give the prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lectures in 1973, following Lionel Trilling who gave the first set of annual lectures. Trilling's topic was "Sincerity and Authenticity". Aptly enough, Erikson chose to speak on Jefferson. They were published as Dimensions of a New Identity: The Jefferson Lectures in the Humanities (New York: W.w. Norton, 1974).

withhold it, prevent pain and cause it -- or at least fail to dependably remove it. An infant's success in handling issues of trust and mistrust in the first months of life will be crucial to its flourishing as an infant, as a creature who learns more or less to handle the dark, aloneness, hunger, and pain. And it's clear that success or failure at this early stage of maturation can have massive consequences for the success of the adult in handling adult matters of trust/mistrust. There is struggle early on that reappears all the way through the extended life-cycle.

Now achieving a minimally happy resolution or negotiated equilibrium in the infant's struggles with mistrust and trust will depend greatly on general circumstance – material conditions, for instance adequate food and protection from temperature extremes – and on the specific ability of caregivers to provide reliable patterns of nourishment, security, and comfort. A caregiver's predictable attention and responsiveness is crucial if the infant is to trust that someone leaving a room has not left for good, or that weaning is not utter abandonment. Degrees of mistrust may remain, but one works for a predominance of trust. Erikson calls the successful negotiation of this earliest conflict the emergence of hope - a necessary virtue if one is to take the world then and later on as at least partially reliable. Mothering or fathering that is erratic, inconsistent, or decidedly deficient can instill a lasting and inordinately intense sense of anxiety and worthlessness. We might think of teenage suicide as partly a matter of failure to find the world trustworthy: one can't find heart to trust life, to trust common reasons to live, or to trust those whom one knows: there is no reason not to die.

Given the fluidity and amorphous nature of shifts through trust and mistrust, one might want to expand the vocabulary available to mark this struggle. Trust is plausibly

allied with courage and patience; mistrust, with anxiety, doubt, and fear. Hope is plausibly allied with self-confidence and optimism. We could expand, more or less indefinitely, the array of descriptive terms available to anyone seeking to capture this early struggle. This suggests that “trust” and “mistrust” are labels giving focus to a loosely constructed, open-ended associative field. But there are limits to credible expansion of descriptors. An infant can be pleased by music, but its orienting associative field can’t include the concept of Beethoven’s 139 being pleasing, or of a stroke victim’s first steps being an occasion for delight. Erikson's immediate trio of trust, mistrust, and hope, are suggestive starting points for understanding an infant’s work with an elusive and often disappointing world.

A Kierkegaardian might be excused for sensing a too-neat three-step dialectic, as if we were witnessing a sort of Hegelian itinerary of human spirit’s struggle to find itself among others. In Childhood and Society one finds the progress of moral maturation depicted in a schematic checker-board chart of three-step progressions. This chart is predictably reproduced in summaries of Erikson's views. The eight-tiered, three-step chart functions like a set of telegraphic abbreviations, or power-point bullets. The heart of the matter lies in his thick descriptions, as he knew. Erikson knew that in actual cases, things are seldom so simple. The pair “trust/mistrust” is a shorthand for an array of associated terms and phenomena. Development is nuanced, subtle, and elusive in the particular case - - not a lockstep across well-marked parade grounds. It is telling that late in his career, Erikson came to chart his own moral itinerary. He schematized his development in six stages (as we will see below) and particular stages were no longer titled in terms of the virtues laid out in Childhood and Society and so much discussed in the 60s. The eight-stage schema was not set in stone.

Exploring the full complexity of trust or mistrust, shame, guilt, autonomy, or courage, can be the goal of a lengthy piece of literature, especially as these underlie post-childhood lives. An extraordinary imagination might make headway in giving a narrative of a single infant's or child's struggles – Erikson gives us a keen observer's account – but infants can't tell us much about their rudimentary experience, even though pre-verbal cries, coos, and gestures (the brightness of a smile, the tightness of a fist) can give us clues. In the hands of a great novelist, the struggles between trust/mistrust, autonomy/shame, or initiative/guilt can come into vivid relief in narratives of the experience and behavior of more developed individuals. The Brothers Karamazov, for example, can be read as a masterpiece in the depiction of these early-established virtues (and their contraries) as they flower (or fade). Even such a massive work of genius, however, teaches us humility in our presumed knowledge of the human heart. It can raise as many questions as answers about moral-psychological development. And if this is true of Dostoevsky's work, it must also be true of developmental accounts generally. Subtle portraits of the self, soul, or personality in transit can seem strangely unfinished, open-ended -- even as trust or love, shame or self-doubt have an open-ended structure. Erikson's scheme of conflicting self-factors and their ideal resolution or tempering must be taken as heuristic in pointing us toward ever-more refined sensitivities to patterns of perception, affect, and comportment that nevertheless remain elusive and complex.

AN EIGHT-STAGE CYCLE

Infancy is the first stage of the life-cycle. As we've seen, in good enough circumstances the struggle is between trust and mistrust, and issues, optimally, in confidence and hope. A

Kierkegaardian will trace the interplay doubt and mistrust that will surface later in a sense of melancholy or despair. The virtue of basic trust, or a knack for hope, serves as an underlying platform, stable or unreliable, for the next phase of development.

A stage-two toddler (roughly, age one and a half through two) struggles with autonomy and shame. She will advance from crawling to running here and there, testing the world and herself. If she is successful, she will have a sense of autonomy rather than a will-shattering shame (at failures) and doubt. Self-initiative or will is developed even in following out the simple impulse to dash across open space towards the safety of an immovable couch. Erikson designates will (or self-initiative) as the virtue providing the platform for the next phase of growth.

The third stage of growth, the pre-school years falling between three and five, is marked by the struggle between initiative and guilt, and its successful negotiation Erikson calls purpose. A preschooler struggles with the tasks of dressing herself, building with blocks, or playing make-believe with others. Guilt attaches to an inevitable sense that there is much that is expected that one can't accomplish, and that the initiatives one undertakes are so often ill-conceived and poorly executed. One feels "guilt" if one cuts oneself with a paring knife, or tumbles painfully while racing down the stairs. Success in these struggles issues in a sense that one can undertake tasks and see them to completion – eating an apple (if not paring it), racing on the lawn (if not down the stairs). One develops a fledgling sense of purpose.

The grade-school child inhabits stage four. Stacked on the continuing challenges of earlier stages, the task now is to sustain initiative and purpose in larger projects, where industry vies against a sense of inferiority. One measures one's performance against peers,

in the classroom, say, or on the athletic field. A successful negotiation of the industry/inferiority struggle yields the virtue of competence. Erikson's choice of "industry" as his operative label for this stage brings to mind as its contrast the neglected Medieval vice of acedia - a listlessness, apathy, or melancholy. Perhaps the familiar doldrums of adolescence have their roots in an earlier stage-four failure of industry. What Erikson calls "inferiority" may be related to a later, adolescent listlessness.

A stage-five teenager will face the issue of identity head on (though in a wider sense, identity has been at issue all along). One begins to come into one's own, paradoxically, by negotiating one's loyalty to others. Identity, for Erikson, is never a solo achievement, but always a dialogical or relational affair, where connection with others is an essential part of the process. A teen-ager faces options for identity, previously unavailable. One can consider and negotiate loyalty to one's parents versus loyalty to one's rebellious pals, loyalty to one's parent's patterns of religiosity, consumerism, or grooming -- or dogged loyalty to their opposites. One can consider, more or less explicitly, how much one's family's class standing or ethnicity matters, and how much, and how much to pledge to develop one's academic, artistic, or athletic talents. Then there is the dramatic and intense matter of gender differentiation. If one is biologically male, will one chart a super-masculine course or a more nurturing "feminine" one? Are there inklings or strong feelings of same-sex attraction? Biological females will face parallel struggles in working out gender identification. Erickson sees the struggle as between identity and role-confusion, and the achieved equilibrium he calls "fidelity" -- a relatively stable identity that establishes a sense of where one 'fits in' or 'belongs', that rests on what one shall care about, to what or to whom shall one be faithful.

At this stage, differences of culture, class, and ethnicity, even of living in this decade rather than that, become massive and inescapable. However complicated it may be to describe practices across cultures for instilling trust in infants, the matter of describing the attainment of gender identity presents challenges of an altogether different order. Here place-specific descriptions of practices and options will outrun attempts at broad generalization. And this increasing requirement to account for variation and particularity in a moral itinerary will carry on through the remaining stages of the life-cycle.

The young adult (stage six) has the challenge of balancing intimacy and isolation. On the one hand, there is a felt-need, at least in European-based cultures, for aloneness and isolation to consolidate identity on one's own; on the other hand, there is the pull of intimate relations in work, family, and romance. When successfully negotiated, one achieves the virtue of love. This is a broad virtue realized in a youth's budding romantic relations, and also in intergenerational familial love (of younger siblings or cousins, who reciprocate, and of aunts and grandparents, whom one trusts will also reciprocate). It is realized in love of work with others, a capacity for affinity (or philia) in one's relations with teammates, neighbors, and co-workers, and in one's knack for cultivating friendships. The struggle of intimacy and isolation arises as one negotiates who one should date, if anyone, and what sort of life appeals (the relative isolation of a scholar or the more gregarious life of a saleswoman). When, if ever, will one settle down? In modern democratic nations, the option of staying in school well past adolescence can be a tactic for ducking or delaying a conventional expectation that one settle into building a career or enjoying a sustaining intimate relationship, or raising a family of one's own. Love, as a resolution, accordingly, encompasses far more than romance. It is the glue of sociality

across many fronts as one matures into full adulthood.

Erikson's stage seven, mid to late adulthood, is marked by what becomes known as the mid-life crisis. If love successfully emerges at the threshold of adult life, as a care for work and others that is vitally sustained, in mid-life the challenge is to maintain that care against the encroachments of tedium, boredom, and decline. Erikson tags this crisis as the struggle between generativity and stagnation. One assesses what one has accomplished in life, what remains to be done, and where one has failed. Erikson sees a sense of fulfillment arising as one transfers energy from one's own career to assisting a younger generation.

Old age, stage eight, offers the chance to enjoy a measure of wisdom as the foreknowledge and actual impingement of disease and death arrive. Erikson frames the struggle as between integrity and despair. The challenge is to sustain poise through the adversities of age rather than falter in bitterness, disgust, or despair. Some handle death and decline reasonably well. Others can be bitter, unhappy, dissatisfied, not only with their infirmities (loss of hearing or sight or continence, for instance) but also with the dark sense of what they have failed to accomplish within their life time.

HOPE FOR THE SOUL

Long after the eight-stage life-cycle was first outlined in Childhood and Society, and its mid-phases elaborated in the books on Luther and Gandhi, Erikson found he had more to say about old age, as he entered that phase of life. His thoughts appear strikingly in an essay on Ingmar Bergman's film, "Wild Strawberries".¹⁵ The film depicts an old Doctor facing death, reliving memories of youthful love, and wondering if an honorary degree he

¹⁵ See note 14 on Bergmann's Dr Borg, above.

is about to receive can mean much in the face of personal uncertainty. The essay reads as his reflections on his own wanderings through mists of non-being, through the shadows of death. In notes for this essay, Erikson praises the film for exhibiting “the most perfect combination of artistic form and psychological comprehension + existential religiosity.”¹⁶ It is not hard to imagine that Erikson would want these words to convey the ambition of his own later writing.

The spiritual and existential, even religious hues of his reflections on the film are more explicit in notes he published on the theme of Jesus’ Galilean proverbs and sayings. These notes relied on scholarship that attempted to sort what the historical figure said from later additions and revisions. Erikson proposes that Jesus inaugurates a new sense of “I”, and “I” related to an other, and free of those boundaries the protection of which leads one person to oppose, combat, or stand at cross-purposes with another. A kind of universal acceptance and openness to something like the Quaker “inner light”, and perhaps something like Quaker peacefulness and patience, and capacity to listen beyond rancor or judgmentalism, seemed to pervade this new sense of “I”. Perhaps Erikson explores and offers this new “I” as a more luminous sense of identity than any he had yet elaborated, and a sense of “I” that he must have hoped he came some distance toward inhabiting.

In the psychoanalytic community, Erikson has been labeled a Neo-Freudian and "ego psychologist". His amendments to Freud would include his expanding the stages of psychic development beyond childhood into adulthood and old age, and his stress on healthy negotiations of psychic conflict. In addition, Erikson accords significant initiative to a well-developed ego that needs to concede oversight neither to the passions of the Id (or

¹⁶ Friedman, p. 444.

libido) nor to the super-ego (the punishing moralist and conscience, as well as the guardian of ideals). The stress on the ego's capacity to muster a strength of its own against encroachments of either id or super-ego are part and parcel of Erikson's alertness to more or less successful negotiations of psychic struggle at each stage of the life-cycle.

Although a reader of Kierkegaard will have “stages on life's way” in mind as he takes up Erikson's map of personality development, Erikson sees himself not as a theologian and not primarily as a religious writer (though he veered in this direction later). Professionally, he takes himself for most of his career to be a psychologist or psychoanalyst expanding Freud's stage theory of infancy far beyond childhood, through to old age.¹⁷ He seeks narratives, after Childhood and Society, of entire lives, and also expands Freud by stressing the social, political, and religious contexts of development. It's noteworthy that Erikson gave momentum to the fledgling field of psychobiography and psychohistory with his studies of Luther's conversion and what he called “Gandhi's Truth”. He cast these lives not as laboring under religious illusion (as a rigid Freudian would insist), but as exemplary, broadly successful, spiritually and morally luminous.

He describes Gandhi's success in terms that side-step a secular-religious divide. Hope, for example, is both a religious and a secular virtue. Anxiety and doubt can appear in a religious as well as in a secular register. Where Kierkegaard might see anxiety as a rebellion against God, or as a refusal to avow the self one is, Erikson would see anxiety as a pervasive undercurrent as one negotiates (or fails to negotiate) the struggles that impinge at any stage in the life-cycle, an undercurrent as one undergoes the struggles between trust

¹⁷ For a late, quasi-religious essay, see “The Galilean sayings and the sense of ‘I’”, Yale Review 70, 3, (April 1981).

and mistrust, initiative and guilt, and so forth. In addition, Erikson seemed to highlight the successful negotiation of inner struggle, rather than its failure in neurosis or pathology. With Kierkegaard, success in negotiating inner-struggles is elusive at best. Ways to fail at becoming a self are easier to tally than ways to achieve a satisfying balance in self-development.

Erikson had spent a lifetime describing the life-cycle generally, and the lives of Luther, Jefferson, and Gandhi, in particular. He found himself late in life sketching out the stages of his own moral (and spiritual) development. As we've mentioned, he felt no need to make this sketch conform to the schema that he had made famous. In place of an eight stage emergence of virtues, he characterized his development in stages that do not mention virtues. In non-technical terms that any conventional biographer might adopt, Erikson divides his life into six phases:

- 1) Childhood, Youth, Early Adulthood (1902-27);
- 2) Training in Freud's Vienna (1927-33);
- 3) Making of Childhood and Society (1933-50)
- 4) Clinician of Voice and Identity (1950-60) ¹⁸
- 5) Professor – Ethical Philosopher (1960-75) ¹⁹
- 6) Old Age (1976 -) ²⁰

In 1987 an article on Erikson appeared in The New York Review of Books, aptly titled “The Artist as Analyst”. The author was the prominent developmental psychologist Jerome Bruner. He wrote that “Erikson must surely be the most distinguished living

¹⁸ During these years, Erikson worked at the Austen Riggs Center for troubled adolescents, in western Massachusetts.

¹⁹ This period was at Harvard and later in Tiburon, California

²⁰ The Eriksons moved from Tiburon, to Cambridge, MA, in 1987, where they shared a house with Dianne Eck, a young professor of religion, and her spouse, the Rev. Dorothy Austin.

psychoanalyst.”²¹ Erikson hoped that despite reasons for despair, he had matured as a teacher holding out the promise of health, a non-creedal answer to “the sickness unto death”. In tone, he had none of Kierkegaard’s pervasive irony, and was seldom as prophetically polemical or as darkly pessimistic, embattled and acerbic as Kierkegaard became toward the end of his life. Yet Erikson was neither uncritical of his times nor of theories of self and society. It was no accident that out of a lifetime admiration, Erikson, began work specifically on Kierkegaard in his years of retirement. That work remained no more than notes and a short typescript, unfortunately.²² Overall, we might see at the core of Erikson’s gentle sensibility a generous, kindly hope. That is the virtue that most conspicuously threads through his career as a psychologist, anthropologist, ethical philosopher, and even, for many of his admirers in the post-war decades, a (minor) prophet. At the least, he was a man of wisdom and a consummate teacher and healer.

²¹ Jerome Bruner The New York Review of Books, 1987.

²² See note 3, above.

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