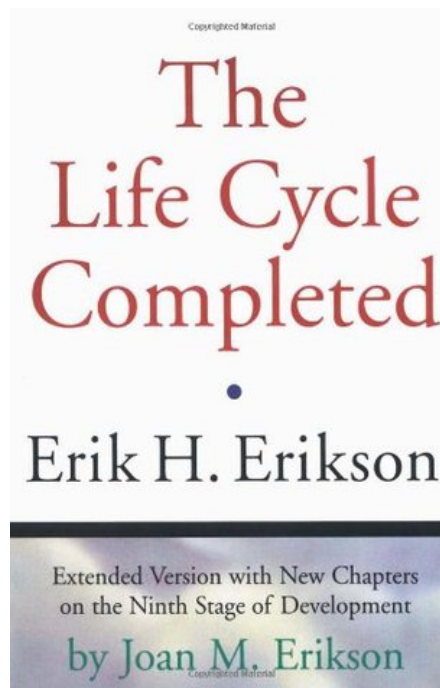




The Life Cycle Completed

Erik H. Erikson

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For decades Erik H. Erikson's concept of the stages of human development has deeply influenced the field of contemporary psychology. Here, with new material by Joan M. Erikson, is an expanded edition of his final work. *The Life Cycle Completed* eloquently closes the circle of Erikson's theories, outlining the unique rewards and challenges—for both individuals and society—of very old age.

The Life Cycle Completed Details

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From Reader Review The Life Cycle Completed for online ebook

Billie Pritchett says

Erik Erikson's *Life Cycle Completed* is a book I'd been looking forward to reading for a long time. Having had some experience reading about Erikson's theory of personality, which mostly involves his eight stages of human development, I thought this might be an illuminating read. It wasn't. It's pretty horribly written, and unnecessarily abstruse.

I'll give you an example of what I mean. Here's a quote from the book that I chose randomly from the earlier portion which is representative of the Erikson's writing:

In summary, the process of identity formation emerges as an evolving configuration—a configuration that gradually integrates constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles. All these, however, can only emerge from a mutual adaptation of individual potentials, technological world views, and religious or political ideologies.

The spontaneous ritualizations of this stage can, of course, appear surprising, confusing, and aggravating in the shiftiness of the adolescents' first attempts to ritualize their interplay with age mates and to create small group rituals. But they also foster participation in public events on sports fields and concert grounds and in political and religious arenas. In all of these, young people can be seen to seek a form of ideological confirmation, and here spontaneous rites and formal rituals merge. Such search, however, can also lead to fanatic participation in militant ritualisms marked by totalism; that is, a totalization of the world image so illusory that it lacks the power of self-renewal and can become destructively fanatic.

Erikson, Erik H.; Erikson, Joan M. (1998-06-17). *The Life Cycle Completed* (Extended Version) (p. 74). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.

One of the obvious problems with the writing is not only that it's jargon-filled but that he loves to nominalize--make words into or rely heavily upon abstract nouns. As a little exercise here, I'll try to put into plain English as best I can what he said above. Here goes.

Forming your identity is about drawing upon different areas of your life that make you 'you.' From your innate characteristics and your basic drives toward food, clothes, shelter, and love to the capacities you've cultivated in yourself or the groups and roles you identify with and on down to your defense mechanisms--all of these play a role in making you 'you,' and there's this complex interplay with all these factors and your ever-changing (political, religious, technological) worldview.

This period of identity formation is difficult and turbulent for adolescents but it can also be a great time for new kinds of spontaneous activity to emerge. Of course, we should always be mindful of how some of the habits we form during this period could be bad in the sense they became dangerous or become such a matter of ritual that they're conformist.

By the way, if you don't like my paraphrase, at least I gave a shot at clarity, which is more than I can say for Erikson's writing.

My advice to the reader who would like to read this book to absorb Erikson's theory is to read from Chapter 5 onward. As far as I can tell, this is the portion of the book that his wife Joan Erikson wrote, and it's very

lucid and explains Erikson's theory much better than anything else in the earlier, chunkier part of the book.

Mahir ?anl? says

Özellikle ilk evre ve 8. evrenin anlat?m? çok güzel. 8. evremde bilge olmal?y?m. :)

Theresa Southam says

This book will be central to my thesis, especially the later stages of life ego/integrity and generativity/stagnation. What's really special though is the last chapter of this extended version where Joan Erikson proposes a ninth stage of human development!

Chris says

Erik Erikson can drive a person mad with his florid language and abstractions, and his antediluvian sexual stages are nearly nails in his coffin (lo-rest-his-so), but the man and his wife were a force of nature. He never finished his bachelor's degree, but he knew what it meant to be human. Who does that? The sense kept washing over me that he was jumping ahead of empirical data and taking hold of a reality-in-itself that transcended his case studies. I can't help thinking that, even when he was wrong, he was right. I personally think he's bigger than psychology, perhaps fitting more the philosopher-sociologist type with his wide-sweeping anthropologic and reality-unifying theories.

His 8 stages are brilliant, but I think they are basically restatements of the pulse of human 'becomings.' The stages represent an opportunity for each person to 'become more' or 'become less' in the world.

- Trust (becoming more) vs. Mistrust (becoming less)
- Autonomy (more) vs. Shame (less)
- Initiative (more) vs. Guilt (less)

You get the picture. Apparently Joan did too when she wrote, "I am persuaded that only by doing and making do we become." Each stage either sees a person desiring to become larger with more involvement in the universe by confirming and building on the freedom and success from an earlier stage, or the person desires to withdraw and cover their wounds, to avoid becoming an inflated target and insulate themselves against the hostile environment that is slowly (or quickly) eroding their ego and sense of capability. As an aside, I was explaining this to my 8-year old daughter, and when I asked her what she thought would happen if an infant doesn't trust its world and begins to withdraw, she answered, "They won't learn!" This is true, and perfectly describes the stunted growth of a psyche that fears the world and its presence in it. Sartre and the existentialists would have had a few things to say about this, as their definitions of an inauthentic and dysfunctional human being relate closely to those who are attempting to escape from their essential freedom and suffering in the world (without success).

And I have to give a shout out to Joan Erikson (sup Joanie babe!!) for being willing to go back and modify the 8th stage based upon her first-hand account of it which neither she nor Erik could have augured from their 40-year-old-or-so perspectives when they wrote Life Cycle Completed. Like a boss—at 93 years old—she scrawled out a new definition to 'wisdom' and 'integrity', representing them not merely as

virtues—wispy, spiritual attributes of the distanced-from-life—but as qualities of someone who is ‘in-touch’ with life and it’s meanings in a very intimate and mystical way. She kicked ass for old people the world over, and made her voice heard above the melee of the young, proud, and heedless. Joanie babe, if you weren’t dead and rotted, I’d kiss your un-rotted face for your bravery and un-rottedness!

Quotes From the Book:

Epigenesis—step by step growth and gradual differentiation of parts. In embryology as well as psychology, each organ or trait has its time of origin—a factor as important as the locus of the origin. If the eye, said Stockard, does not arise at the appointed time, “it will never be able to express itself fully, since the moment for the rapid outgrowth of some other part will have arrived.” If the organ misses its time of ascendance, it is not only doomed as an entity, it endangers at the same time the whole hierarchy of organs. The result of normal development, however, is proper relationship of size and function among all body organs. (summary with quote)

A sense of defeat [in early childhood]...can lead to deep shame and a compulsive doubt whether one will ever be able to feel that one willed what one did—or did what one willed. (37)

[Ritualization is a way of saying] ‘this is how we do things’...[and has] adaptive value...in the social process...that must do for human adaptation what the instinctive fit into a section of nature will do for an animal species. (42)

[Parents are the first to] help evoke and to strengthen in the infant the sense of a primal other—the I’s counterpart. (44)

The mutual recognition between mother and infant may be a model of some of the most exalted encounters throughout life. (45)

I submit that this first and dimmest affirmation of the described polarity of the ‘I’ and ‘Other’ is basic to a human being’s ritual and esthetic needs for a pervasive quality which we call the numinous: the aura of a hallowed presence. The numinous assures us, ever again, of separateness transcended and yet also of distinctiveness confirmed, and thus of the very basis of a sense of ‘I’. (45)

Play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning. (51)

[Adults, too, play] with past experience and anticipated tasks, beginning with that activity in the atmosphere called thinking. (51)

Hope connotes the most basic quality of “I”-ness, without which life could not begin or meaningfully end. (62)

In old age a retrospective mythologizing...can amount to a pseudointegration as a defense against lurking despair. (65)

An immense power of verification [in mature adulthood] pervades this meeting of bodies [sex] and temperaments after the hazardously long human preadulthood. (70)

It seems that the stage of generativity, as long as a threatening sense of stagnation is kept at bay, is pervasively characterized by a supremely sanctioned disregard of death...Youth and old age, then, are the times that dream of rebirth, while adulthood is too busy taking care of actual births and is rewarded for it with a unique sense of boisterous and timeless historical reality—a sense which can seem somewhat unreal to the young and to the old, for it denies the shadow of nonbeing. (80)

The problem is such that so basic a sense of centrality [of the ego] depends for its renewal from stage to stage on an increasing number of others: some of them close enough to be individually acknowledged as an ‘other’ in some important segment of life, but for the most part a vague number of interrelated others who seek to confirm their sense of reality by sharing... (89)

I am persuaded that only by doing and making do we become. (Joan Erikson, 127)

Jerry Williams says

I don't know how long ago this text was published, but it appears dated. The style is more informative than inspirational, however it falls short from an educational standpoint.

Cathy says

A fascinating text, at times very slow reading, such intense and deep thoughts, insights & vocabulary!

Helene says

Here is yet another book from the back bookcase read. Having pledged to read a book a month from the books languishing there, I am on track with a brief hiatus to read some educational books for a seminar I was scheduled to teach.

I had never read any Erikson despite being in education for these many years. I may still have to read *Childhood and Society*, but at least I can now say I've read one.

Though this is a philosophy book, it was not so dense that I could not follow or make sense of it. It is thankfully brief but I appreciated his organization and references. Both helped the context by having order and a base in the field. His stages are easily understandable and he explains them well.

I'm not a philosophy buff but for those who are, this would be an even more interesting book.

Toby Newton says

If you're going to read it, read it carefully. Otherwise it's just things you imagine you already know.

Take the time to stop and reflect, and it unlocks so much.

Brilliant.

Roslyn says

This book had nothing new to say. But is that because it is so famous and referenced so often that it was unnecessary to read because I feel as if I have already read it?

On the final stage of life, by Joan Erickson, very old age—it was shallow.

She says that no one is really alive after the age of 85, it takes your whole day at that point just to get up, dress, eat, etc. There is no time left to DO anything. You cannot have a purpose. I was thinking, "Done, I will take morphine at 85."

Then she shares the classic:

"In our northern Arctic wilds, appropriate patterns have been devised. If Eskimos travel to distant areas as communities in order to find better hunting or fishing, they set out with sleds and dogs, equipment, and enough food for all. No stopping for any length of time is possible; the cold is cruel. Should an aged one not be able to keep up, an igloo must be fashioned with ice—big enough for one. He or she will be settled in and left behind. That person will understand and know in advance that this is a potential farewell and will probably wish it so. To freeze to death is better than to hold back and jeopardize the whole community. No doubt people prepare throughout their lives for this eventuality. Where this necessity is understood, elders are celebrated and revered. All can take part in venerating the occasion and the elder."

Again, I am thinking, that the obvious conclusion is that in our society we are bad at dying, and that our aged are discouraged from dying and encouraged to jeopardize their families and communities so that they might ... live as basically dead people with mental abilities of a three year old. I am thinking she will write that we need to learn to be more death accepting, to prepare for our death, to plan for it, to make it meaningful to die, etc.

Instead she blathers on about how we need to make old people feel relevant. It just doesn't follow. It's like she lost the courage to say what she wanted to say. (Or am I misunderstanding her?)

Anyway, I also liked this quote about middle age:

"Youth, in alliance with available ideologies, can envisage a wide spectrum of possibilities of 'salvation' and 'damnation'; while the love of young adulthood is inspired by dreams of what one may be able to do and to take care of together. With the love and care of adulthood, however, there gradually arises a most critical midlife factor, namely, the evidence of a narrowing of choices and conditions already irreversibly chosen—by fate or by oneself. ... Adult care thus must concentrate jointly on the means of taking lifelong care of what one has irrevocably chosen, or, indeed, has been forced to choose by fate."

Merkurius says

Det nästsista (?) avsnittet om åldrande var det finaste <3

Becky says

I'm so glad I read this. I found it by way of Michael Britt, who hosts a podcast named The Psych Files (it's very good and enjoyable). Britt is interested in psychology and memory so he filmed a video episode illustrating the peg system of memory devices by showing one way you could memorize Erikson's eight stages. I learned the stages but didn't know what they represented and I wanted to know more, particularly as it reminded me of that bit of Carl Jung's ideas about the domains of development, that limitations in any one area can hold back the rest.

I think I may spend some more time with these stages, see how they 'fit' my perspective of things. I may want to read more of his work.

Camigo says

Ok. I didn't find the meaning nor logic in this book. This was a required reading for university. I wouldn't have read 144 pages of this otherwise.

Richard Wu says

A case study in model overfitting and unnecessary abstraction marked by sparse on-point observations, albeit those of the stopped-clock varietal. Acknowledges its historical but not its cultural contingency; appropriates science metaphors loosely:

Relativity, too, at first had unbearably relativistic implications, seemingly undermining the foundations of any firm human "standpoint"; and yet, it opens a new vista in which relative standpoints are "reconciled" to each other in fundamental invariance. [p.96-97]

Assumes greater invariance than exists in its arena; asserts factoids flatly false, here on both counts:

On the other hand, does not Lao-tse's name mean "old child" and refer to a newborn with a tiny white beard? [p.78-79]

And marshals them as evidence (the weakest kind) of a "life cycle" conveniently conceived... the very definition of confirmation bias.

Am I still the sort to seek a story for my time to take a sense? Are you?

Cynthia says

Erikson's dense and dull writing gets in the way of the information he tried to impart. There are some useful ideas in here, once you wade through the repetition and florid language.

Ana Ruiz says

Who am I to judge a famed psychoanalyst who probably got more done in a year of his life than I will, ever. It would be just a little bit pretentious.

I can, however, refuge myself in an old yet true critique of psychoanalytical theory: I HATE THIS SHIT. I hate how far-reaching it is, how stupid, how overblown and oh did I mention how stupid? I know that Erikson is like the best thing you can get in psychoanalysis, because he centers his theory on the ego and bla bla bla. I know this when it is taught to me, but when I read his ongoing blathering about the organic modes of incorporation and its consequences on *everything* I seriously consider changing majors because psychology can be so full of crap.

There. Rant over.
