

2. Meanings of Adulthood

The title of this chapter as well as the title of this book uses the word "adulthood." At first sight the word may appear unambiguous enough. Everyone has a fairly good idea of what is meant by adulthood. Or do they? Since this book describes education as a movement toward adulthood, we have to be clear about the meaning of this goal.

As a beginning clarification, there is a difference between "adult" used to designate an age and "adult" used as a psychological or social description. In the first or chronological sense people are called "adult" whenever they reach some stipulated age. A chronological meaning of adult is usually part of a legal system. Secular law in the West has never tried to define adulthood but only to decide at what age one is an adult.¹

Chronological age is a very clear category, but there is no agreement on which is the year that distinguishes child from adult. As far back as Blackstone's *Commentaries* (1765), which were so influential in the United States, there has been acknowledgment that one became an adult at different ages for different things.² This ambiguity remains a part of contemporary society. A person might inherit wealth at 21 but be able to vote at 18. In many places one can drive a car at 16; in the 1960s the recording industry began defining adult as 14 or older.

The second meaning of "adult" is more difficult to tie down. It implies a psychosocial ideal and therefore something desirable. Although this usage of adult or adulthood is very common today, it is actually a recent invention. As of 1968 the *International*

Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences had articles on "aging" and "adolescence" but none on "adulthood."³ Obviously, the writers of the encyclopedia recognized that there was a condition called "adult," but its status as a concept of the social sciences was apparently not clear at all. Only in this century has an ideal of adulthood been distinguished from chronological adulthood and systematically examined. "We have moved, over the years, from condition to process. In our culture, adulthood as a condition used to be simply assumed; as a process, it now seems to demand explanation."⁴

Most people, if they reflect on the matter, recognize these two meanings of "adult." They can see that these two meanings are constantly used in conversation and writing. What may not be so obvious is that these two meanings overlap in ways that can be confusing. In this book I will regularly use "adult" as a noun in referring to the fact of a chronological stage. I will use "adult" as an adjective to describe experiences, institutions, and persons with a distinctive quality to be defined in this chapter. When a corresponding noun is needed for adult as a psychosocial ideal, I will use "adulthood." My choices here are not wholly arbitrary. Common speech reflects this distinction between chronological adults and acting in an adult way. As might be expected, common speech is not always consistent in this usage.

The inconsistency and ambiguity find their way into educational writing. Church people refer these days to the "adult community." Does that phrase mean a community with the quality of adulthood or a community of grownups? It would appear that often the user is not aware that there are two meanings, let alone have thought through their relation. If church documents today say that "adult baptism" should be the norm, this phrase can mean two things: a) grownups are the ones for whom baptism is generally intended; b) an ideal of adulthood should guide the baptism of children and adults.⁵

Does "adult education" mean education of a certain quality or education of people who are not children? Historically, the two things have been confusedly related. Clearly, "adult education" has meant the education of people who are not children. When that question is at issue, we would do better to refer to the "edu-

cation of adults." Otherwise, when "adult education" is used, there is also implied in the term a meaning of adulthood that is left unquestioned.

"Adult education" acquired its twentieth-century meaning within an economic and institutional setting that governed the meaning of the adjective "adult." "Adult education" came to refer to that small part of the population who were to receive the education. "Adult education" also implied what that part of the population was to be educated for. Those people who did not have institutional slots were to be given a way to fit. If the ideal of adulthood remains unexamined, then "adult education" will function to fit people into the existing slots. Those who manage machines may be better off than those who operate the machines, but both groups will be dominated by a restricted meaning of adulthood. That is the reason for Karl Marx's paradoxical statement that "in a capitalist society no one is (an) adult."

I have already introduced a further distinction in addition to that between "adult" as chronological fact and "adult" as psychosocial idea. Within the adjective "adult" there can be some radical differences of opinion. Within United States society there are two strongly contrasting ideals in the use of adult as a quality of personal life. I think that the less adequate one tends to dominate the discussion of adulthood. The difficult step is getting to the point where these two ideals are recognized and people can see that there is a questionable ideal of adulthood which controls our myths, institutions, and reform movements.

I have now suggested three meanings of adult in contemporary uses of the term. I shall presently add a fourth and look at the meanings and their interrelationship. Before that, however, I wish to point out the key that helped me to see these different meanings of adult and the inadequacy of the one that dominates our culture. The key was old people. It struck me that the meaning we often give to adult implicitly excludes old people. If our society is supposedly set up "to produce adults" and yet people can, as it were, grow out of adulthood, then both our society and its old people would be in trouble.

One frequently sees the statement that there are three parts

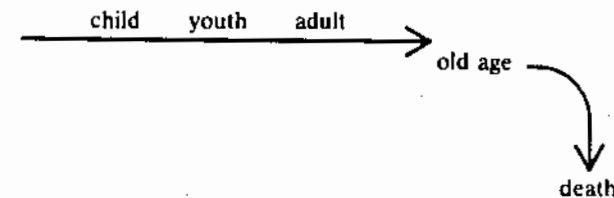
to life: child, youth, adult. The statement could simply be a description of chronological fact except that certain characteristics are regularly connected with each of the three categories. Thus, children are supposed to play, youth to study, and adults to work. This description might not be so bad either except it is also assumed that adults retire from work when they reach a certain age. If one has been (an) adult, that is, a worker, but is no longer working, what does one become? Artificial categories (e.g., senior citizen) cannot hide an attitude of condescension. The person became an adult but is no longer an adult. The simple fact is that old age is an insoluble problem for our image of what it means to be adult. Children can grow up, women can be liberated, criminals can be rehabilitated. But there is nothing one can do to "re-adult" the old. The closer to death one moves the more obvious becomes the terrible flaw in our common meaning of acting adult.

The question was crystallized for me in a book by John Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory*.⁶ Here as in much of his writing, Dunne meditates on the significance of death in the human search for life's meaning. In most descriptions of life there are three parts to life's journey: the child, the youth, and the adult. "Perhaps," writes Dunne, "we could actually say that there are four metamorphoses if we count the child at the beginning as well as the child at the end. . . . This would mean that what is ordinarily called 'second childhood' is a kind of parody of what the old man can be."⁷ Dunne is using childhood here to describe a fourth stage. This stage circles back to the beginning and calls into question what we have "grown up" to in the second and third stages. Do we in fact ever grow up and leave childhood behind us? The end of life puts the whole process in question.

Between the first and fourth stages there is a similarity which allows the word "child" to be used for both. However, the child at the end "is autonomous by appropriating his entire life, by accepting both the period of his alienation and that of his autonomy, both the period of his dependency and that of his independence. He says yes to his life and is willing to live the entire thing once more."⁸

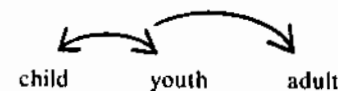
I don't wish to endorse without reservation the language of

this description (I am not certain the language is Dunne's final position since he is commenting on Nietzsche in the passage quoted). What does strike me is that assumptions about growing up to be adult in our society are seriously threatened by old people in the same society. Psychology books often seem to be saying that people should become self-directing individuals who increasingly grow away from dependence on others. Of course, such books never deny that people get old and die. However, that fact is attached as a coda instead of being an interpretive key to the rest of life. The implied movement is a straight line forward until an unfortunate downward move:



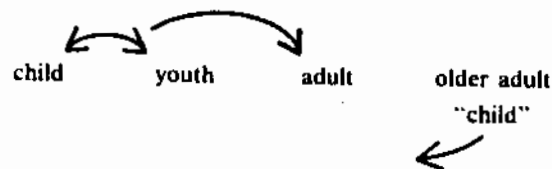
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An alternative image of human development would place childhood and youth in some degree of tension: Adulthood is then conceived as the continuing synthesis of childlike attitudes and the critical faculties of youth.



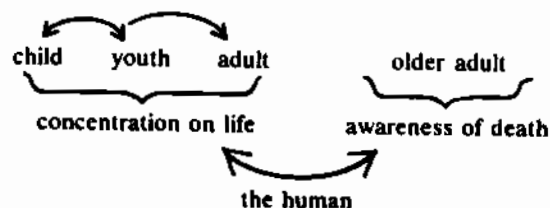
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Although this diagram is an improvement over the first, it is still incomplete. The questions of old age and death do not appear at all. The "fourth stage" which Dunne speaks of does not fit into this scheme. What was called a "second childhood" has to be added, but this addition changes the other three:



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If we go one step further in recognizing the older adult, the diagram looks this way:



[1d]

In this final picture one can see both the legitimacy and the inadequacy of identifying old age and childhood. Old age does have to recover the attitude of childhood, but it must also include the other stages of life. The old person never ceases to be adult even as he or she becomes childlike. Adulthood, I shall claim is inadequately conceived unless it includes the awareness of one's own personal weakness and imminent death. To accept human life is to accept its opposite, death. That is the paradox toward which humans move from the beginning. If adulthood is the ideal, then adulthood has to include this paradox.

I would like now to describe more systematically the four operative meanings of adult in contemporary English. They are:

1. Synonymous with pornographic
2. Chronological or biological point of development

3. Ideal of rational, factual, economically productive individual
4. Ideal of maturity, integrity of life and death

1. Pornographic

Many people might suppose that this first meaning can be dismissed as unimportant and accidental. However, as old age is an interpretive key from one side, pornography is an important phenomenon at the other end. One thing is certain: The use of the word "adult" to mean pornographic has grown rapidly. Of the four meanings this one has been the fastest growing in the 1960s and 1970s. Adult entertainment, adult movie, and adult bookstore need no explanation any more in nearly all parts of the country. The adult entertainment area is most evident in the center of cities, but the "adult industries" serve small-town, rural, and suburban populations.

One definition of pornography is the presentation of sex without some larger human context. The search for "artistic pornography" is almost a contradiction in terms because pornography lacks sufficient human material to be artistic. By the same definition, however, pornography is not a moral horror; it is merely an underdevelopment of artistic and moral sensitivity. Pornography in our culture has become closely allied with drug abuse, violence, and the degrading of women. Pornography under some kinds of control might not be so bad. Or stated differently: Trying to stamp out pornography may make no sense if pornography is deeply rooted in our culture. The absence of pornography in such a society may be worse than its presence. On the basis of my overall analysis of adulthood I will claim that pornography in some form or other is the counterimage to our dominant ideal of adulthood.

2. Chronological/Biological Point

This meaning of adult is the clearest of the four even though

there is some ambiguity in the relation between calendar time and organismic time. Some people seem to grow up quickly, some people seem to age slowly; some people who are 65 look 45 and vice versa. Nonetheless, there are unavoidable realities to the aging process. Girls may develop faster than boys, but eventually the boys catch up. Despite the ability of some people "to keep their youth," everyone eventually ages and dies.

For my purposes here the variations in relating biological and chronological age are not important. What is clear is that society uses adult and child to characterize two stages of life. Children may argue about the age at which they cease to be children, but they don't challenge the existence of the two categories: adult and child. I have said that there have always been some variations as to the age when children become adults. Our era is probably more confused than the past because of the extended span of adolescence and youth. What everyone does seem to agree upon is that if you wait long enough you are bound to become an adult in the chronological/biological sense.

3. *Rational, Objective, Productive Individual*

I have already noted that this third meaning (and the fourth as well) overlaps the chronological/biological meaning. There is nonetheless an important difference between this third meaning which relies on psychosocial criteria and the second meaning which is measured by the calendar. The law may *presume* you are adult after a certain age, but it is quite conceivable that a 30- or 40-year-old has never grown up in a psychological and social sense.

What is the chief mark of having become adult in one's life? Our society looks to reason as a psychological characteristic and ability to work as a social criterion. The two regularly go together. If one is not a reasonable being, one probably cannot hold a job. The child's tutelage is a progress toward the use of the mind in a world that exists objectively outside the mind. The child is thought to be immersed in subjective feelings which obstruct his or her ability to see the world as it is.

A chief mark of the childish is dependence. One is not fully a human being while one is dependent upon adults for all forms of sustenance. The human offspring from before birth is totally dependent upon the mother for nourishment. During infancy the child needs constant physical and psychic help from adults. As for being economically productive, the child remains for many years almost completely helpless. Becoming adult is conceived of as ending this radical dependence. The person acquires the ability to think, to organize, to judge, and to work.

At the center of this description is the word "reason" or "rational." Rationality and adulthood become almost synonymous. Where did such a view come from? Roger Gould writes that "the preferred view that adults are rational is a strongly held prejudice of mankind and has fit well the needs of a Christian theology and a structure of civilization built on the law."⁹ The reference to theology here in addition to law may be surprising, but there is some basis to tracing concern for reason to Christian and Greco-Roman ideas. In an article entitled "Christian Adulthood" William Bouwsma makes a contrast similar to the one I am making between two ideals of adulthood. The one which stresses rational individuals he calls "historic Christianity" which he seems to see as a corruption of a biblical meaning of adulthood.¹⁰

Criticism of Hellenic or Christian emphasis on reason has to take account of a narrowing in the meaning of reason during recent centuries. The past shouldn't be attacked on the basis of the present meaning of terms. In the case of reason, we now have both a narrower and a more powerful meaning of the word. It is that meaning which has to be questioned when offered as the ideal for individuals and societies.

The movement called "Enlightenment" was the attempt to free reason from the shackles of any authority. "Dare to be wise—think for oneself"¹¹ was the central motto of the Enlightenment. In the view of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *illuminati* the world was becoming adult and the countries of the Western Enlightenment were leading the way. Individuals could participate in this forward movement to the extent that they could use their minds to abstract, to objectify, and to master the environment.

The individual was the central concern of this progress, that

is, the individual and his or her reason. Each individual's progress in this forward movement could be measured. Louis Terman, one of the fathers of the IQ test, wrote that "an individual is intelligent in proportion as he is able to carry on abstract thinking."¹² I would not be doing violence to that quotation if I replaced the word "intelligent" with adult. No higher ideal was posited than intelligence—meaning the ability to think abstractly. This ability, it was believed, could be directly correlated with people's acquisition of wealth, virtue, and happiness.

The IQ mentality has been vigorously attacked in recent times and the racial/nationalistic crudities associated with IQ tests have been curtailed. Still, the basis of criticism has not been entirely clear. The IQ maintains a significant hold on United States education because it does fit in with our ideal of intelligence. Much of the criticism has been directed merely toward correcting biases. Educational systems still try to measure intelligence more accurately so as to guide better the movement toward adulthood.

The ideal that is regularly assumed throughout our popular literature is independence of the individual. Bestselling books constantly work the theme of how to get control of your life. There is a struggle for power, it is presumed, and the choices are to manage or to be managed. The adult-minded person is to free himself from all domination including that of his own feelings. The adult is one who takes charge and sees clearly what his options are. With machinelike accuracy he makes the right decisions. He takes responsibility for the choices which determine his life.

As a clear example of this ideal consider the extraordinarily successful book *I'm OK-You're OK*.¹³ Author Thomas Harris popularized a system of psychology called Transactional Analysis. His starting point is a model of the human person composed of three parts: parent, child, and adult. What is immediately striking is not the use of ordinary words and imagery in a scientific system. Freud after all tried to start his system with terms close to ordinary German speech.¹⁴ Rather, it is the particular choice of imagery and language. Parent and adult are separated and both set in relation to child. Adult and child here are

obviously not just chronological categories. Child in relation to both adult and parent has specific meanings tied to a psychosocial ideal.

The position of parent outside adult is the most intriguing part of the scheme. While it is obvious that not all adults are parents, it would seem that nearly all parents are adults. Of course, the actions of a parent may not always be adult (as distinct from the actions of *an* adult). But is it to be presumed that one can never act as parent and at the same time be adult?

The names in the model fairly well determine what can be said of each element. The parent cannot be adult because of his or her involvement with another person and especially because that other person does not act from reason and objectivity. The adult part is able to remain above the fray and coolly calculate the proper way to act. The image which Harris can easily employ is the computer: "The adult is a data-processing computer which grinds out decisions after computing the information from 3 sources: the Parent, the Child, and the data which the Adult has gathered and is gathering."¹⁵

Consistent with the choice to set adult next to parent and child, the ideal of adulthood is identified with rational objectivity. Adulthood starts very early in life, but it is set along a narrow track. The "Adult's ability to find out for himself" is contrasted to the "taught concept of life in his Parent and the felt concept of life in his Child."¹⁶

The significance of *I'm OK-You're OK* is that it captures so well the dominant ideal of adulthood in our society. Like so many self-help manuals in the United States the big question is not where to go but how to get there. The ideal to be sought receives very little examination in this kind of literature. The individual, it is assumed, wants to be strong, healthy, liberated, and successful. To be an individual at all connotes those qualities of independence and self-determination. Everyone supposedly has the chance to be successful in this way. If there are people at the margins of society who do not seem to be successful, they simply have to try harder or receive help until they are ready to go it alone.

Old age, as I have already noted, is the most intractable

challenge to this ideal both because it is "incurable" and because it is where the self-possessed individuals eventually land. The only way to deal with the problem of old age here is to postpone it as long as possible and keep it out of sight. A society that is primarily concerned with rational and technical productivity does not know what to do about old age.

The identification of adulthood with the strong, rational, productive individual hits older men the hardest. White men in United States society do not on the average live much beyond "retirement age." They seem to sense the logic that if to be a man is to be a worker, then to retire is to cease to be a man. Extending the retirement age may help a little, but it is still following a policy of postponement. The underlying problem is the identification of human adulthood with rational and technical forms of productivity. If that ideal kills men after retirement, it may also be unhealthy before retirement. The case of women has been different; one cannot immediately say better or worse, just different. The history of women does not provide the perfect human ideal, but that history is one of the levers for questioning the ideal that has dominated men's lives in the United States.

4. *Integration of Opposites, Maturity, Wholeness*

The fourth meaning of adulthood, like the third, overlaps the chronological meaning of adult. That is, it forms part of the basis for society's designating the point when people become adults. It is an ideal which begins in infancy and can continue to grow throughout life. Whereas rationality is assumed to be firmly secured by people in their 20s or 30s, the ideal of maturity to be described now is both slower in coming and never completely secured in life.

As with the third meaning, one could also ask here: Where did the ideal come from? Befitting its paradoxical character, this ideal comes from contrasting sources: modern science and primitive wisdom, Eastern and Western religions, the experience of the healthiest people and the history of oppressed people. Christian

writers who claim to discover this ideal in the Bible as the "true Christianity" have some basis. But Christian claims today need a dialogical context of Jewish and Eastern religion, ancient cultures and modern society. I would not wish to claim that this ideal is derived from Christian documents, but I think it is possible to claim that this ideal is compatible with much of the original and continuing impulse of the Christian movement.

This meaning of adulthood is marked by the synthesizing of what are often thought to be opposites. Psychologist George Lapassade has said that adulthood is a stage in which pleasure and pain are no longer separable.¹⁷ Throughout much of life there may be a search for pleasure and a hope to avoid pain. The hope is always unrealistic and old age, if nothing before, proves that to be the case. At some age in life, if people are to experience the full range of humanity, they have to give up searching for the perfect pleasure. They need to discover that love for one's equal, care for those in need, and passion for justice involve a pleasure that also hurts. Pleasure and pain here are signposts for the union of opposites that is adulthood. The following three examples of union are especially noteworthy:

A. *Rational/Nonrational*

The third meaning of adult holds out the rational individual as the highest ideal. While not repudiating rationality, this fourth meaning of adult puts reason at the service of life. That means the admission of the nonrational as a positive force. Whereas the word "irrational" connotes violence and the destruction of the rational, the word "nonrational" simply refers to what is not rational and to all that reason abstracts from. Adult behavior would then mean that sometimes a person acts reasonably and sometimes he or she doesn't. Behavior that is nonrational is not necessarily beyond all human control. The individual can let go of the self into a relational control which may include one's own feelings, other people, and the non-human environment. A parent playing a game with a small child does not always act rationally, but the behavior is appropriate—and adult.

Adult activity does not require the individual always to be

conscious and self-reflective. The person moves between poles of conscious self-direction and spontaneous reaction. In the image Martin Buber uses, "consciousness ought to play first violin but not be conductor."¹⁸ Nothing is higher than reason, but something is broader, namely, the life of the organism in its environment. The adult person is able to control environmental factors when such control is appropriate. At other times the person can be quietly receptive to the human and non-human environment.

Toward one's own body the attitude is also one of conscious and reflective control at times. But even for the sake of that control the proper attitude is sometimes one of inattention. As John Dewey said, one's golf swing is not improved by always thinking of one's swing.¹⁹ The same is true of innumerable other human gestures in which the body has been trained "to do its own thinking" and rational consciousness keeps quiet. From the first complex act of sucking a nipple to the last moment of giving up the spirit, the ideal of reason is not an adequate guide.

B. Dependence/Independence

The relation of dependence and independence is another expression of the union of opposites. In our society dependence/independence is of special importance for understanding the ideal of adulthood. Quite regularly, the movement toward adult is described as an increase of independence and a decrease of dependence. However, dependence vs. independence is not an accurate description of human choice. There are several forms of dependence and several forms of independence. While some forms of dependence are to be outgrown (e.g., economic dependence on parents), other relations that can be called dependent may be desirable (e.g., love for one's parents). While independence of some things may be worth striving for, independence as the final ideal of life is illusory and self-destructive.

No single word can capture the paradox of uniting independence and dependence. However, the word "interdependence" has become a helpful word. It has gained some currency especially in reference to international affairs. Even the most powerful country in the world is ineluctably related to the rest of the world in financial and ecological interdependence. The word could also

be helpful in describing individual human beings. People are interdependent, that is, there is a necessary and desirable dependence of humans on one another. That interdependence can also be called "mutuality," a reciprocal giving and receiving in which everyone profits. If I depend on you and you depend on me, then there is a growing I, a growing you, and a growing we. With some change in the kind or degree of mutuality, the same principle is true of the non-human environment. We and the trees, we and the rivers, we and the minerals, constitute an interdependent world.

The paradox here is that one finds a strength in shedding the belief that one can be a masterful power. The discovery of an adult self is an acceptance of oneself as "one among many." The others always remain some threat to one's existence, but they also provide support. One doesn't always have to be struggling and striving. If one lets go, the world neither disappears from sight nor engulfs one's selfhood. Adulthood is that specific form of dependence (or interdependence) in which the illusion of self-sufficiency is recognized and one gratefully responds to the pain/pleasure of life.

C. Life/Death

The unavoidable puncturing of human independence is death. The choice here is between death as a cruel destroyer at the end of life and death as a factor throughout life which makes us receptive, gentle, and filled with care. The third meaning of adult can make little sense of death and relegates it to the end of life. This fourth meaning of adulthood incorporates death into all of life's activities. Small children have a strong sense of death (e.g., as reflected in fairy tales). As people grow up, death recedes to the background, but it should not be totally blocked from our awareness. As one becomes more adult, death begins to shade all our hopes, projects, and concerns.

Death raises the question of whether other humans and non-humans are opponents to be mastered or colleagues to be befriended. If rationality/objectivity is the ideal of adulthood, then the ideal is to master the world. But the ideal is shattered by death which seems to prove that life is a cruel hoax. If care and love is the ideal of adulthood, then one is called to befriend the world.

Death in this context is a severe test of our gestures of love, but death does not prove them useless. Younger people assume that death is the big worry of old age, but those who have lived by befriending life have often by old age befriended death as well.²⁰

This fourth meaning of adulthood is one that is attainable only by exchanges between human groupings and between humans and non-humans. In reference to human groupings I would especially stress exchange across generational lines and sexual lines.

The third meaning of adulthood did not entirely exclude children. Nonetheless, a strong contrast is drawn between the small amount of a child's independence compared to the high degree of adult independence. Rationality and objectivity are conceived to be a progression away from the status of childhood. In the fourth meaning of adulthood, not only are children not excluded, but their presence and qualities are a key test of adulthood. To become adult is to recapture some of the qualities of childhood. The very young and the very old have much in common. Each helps to bring out qualities present but hidden in the other. Adulthood in this meaning can be evaluated only by an intergenerational community. If the generations were entirely segregated, then no one would be adult and no one would know what it means to be adult. We are not in that frightful situation, but modern society erects barriers between generations.

What is true of the intergenerational mix is also true of sexual diversity. The third meaning of adulthood has been described, as it is regularly and appropriately described, with the masculine pronoun. The ideal is the "individual and his reason." The fourth meaning of adulthood cannot be described without advertence to a pluralism that includes sexual elements. The ideal is a union of men, women, children, and others in which unity and differences grow together.

Especially in the nineteenth century, women were not thought to be rational, objective, and productive. To be a man was to have work that was recognized as economically productive. Women were in another realm needing for identity not work but a relation to "man's world." Women were spared the crisis of

retirement in old age, but they had to face the question very early in life. In recent decades great numbers of women have entered the sector defined as work. What remains to be seen is whether women will change work or work will change women. That is, the fourth meaning of adulthood requires that work be placed at the service of a wider ideal of life and death. That ideal has been preserved in part within the sphere assigned to women. The question now is whether that meaning will get lost or whether a fuller meaning of adulthood will become available by reason of men and women learning from each other.

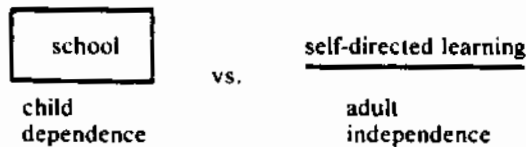
One final point remains in the interrelation of these four meanings. If the fourth is a fuller meaning than the third, where is the missing element of number three existing now? I said above that it may exist in healthy or distorted form in the "woman's sphere." But where does it exist for men? The answer, I suggest, is found in my first meaning of adult, that is, the pornographic. I said that this use of adult is not a bizarre accident. Pornography as an irrational concern with sex (and violence) is the underside of the ideal of adulthood represented by meaning number three.

Since human life is as a matter of fact not entirely rational and objective, then the rest of life has to show up somewhere. If rationality, independence, and objectivity are presented as the ultimate ideal, then the other side to life will come out in distorted and obsessive ways. There will be a disjunction of public and private persons, a separation of sex and care, and an addictive dependence on pleasures that cause guilty feelings. The actual operation of the pornography business supports this theory. The market of the pornographic trade is mostly male, white, middle-aged, married, respectable and wealthy. The same people who are thought to have the ideal of number three are the people who show up in number one.

A further confirmation of this thesis is a frightening one. I said that: *a*) the ideal of number three is constantly contrasted to children; *b*) the other side of number three is the pornographic. It would follow that the ultimate counterpoint to the ideal of adulthood in number three would be child pornography. It is impossible to find anyone in the United States who will defend child

pornography and yet it is a multibillion-dollar industry. This fact can only mean that the practice goes to the core of our society's ideals and institutions. Child pornography suddenly attracted attention in 1977, but it has long been the underside of our society. This form of pornography has less to do with sex than with power though the two are intimately related. In a world where "self-determination" is the great ideal and yet most men feel powerless, the sexual domination of children is one sure release.²¹

Finally, in looking ahead to the next chapter it is already possible to see two educational ideals that correspond to the third and fourth meanings of adulthood. Ideals of adulthood can be correlated to educational systems. Which comes first is a chicken-or-egg question. The ideal is embodied in the pattern of education while that education continually reinforces the ideal. The link between ideal and institution is found in language and imagery.

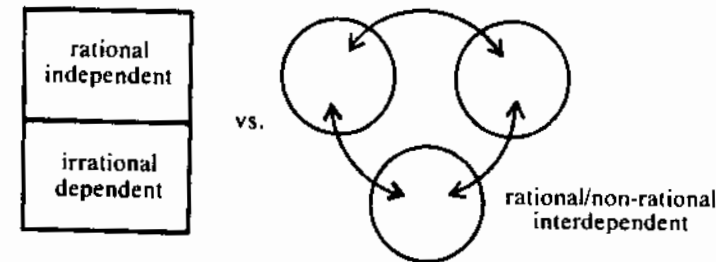


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In this model the governing ideal is the third meaning of adulthood: the rational and independent individual. Institutions are conceived to be restrictions on individual liberty. The adult learner is in charge of his own learning and learns only what interests him. The child, on the other hand, has to learn discipline and disciplines. Liberal reforms of school are imagined to be those which increase permissiveness for the individual within school.

The purpose of education here may be put under the term "self-actualization." A standard and contemporary definition would be that of Robert Blakely in the *Handbook of Adult Education*: "The purpose of American life and American education is,

in this light, seen to be the development of individuals who will fulfill themselves and freely serve the society which values individuals."²² First the individual is perfected and then society is served. A peculiarity of this definition is the fact that the individual is to serve the "society which values individuals." What if society doesn't value individuals? Apparently the stipulation that this is an "American" education takes care of that point since perhaps by definition American society values individuals.



In the fourth meaning of adulthood the choice is not between school and self-directed learning or between child and adult. The choice is between authoritarian forms of organization that segregate by age, sex, or other categories and a community-based education in which people grow in interdependence. The purpose of education includes individual development, but the individual is situated in the realistic context of his or her environment. Kenneth Benne captures most of this meaning: "Educators must concern themselves with the individual's quest for identity, the quest for community, the proper uses of fraternity, the assumptions which underlie problems created by bureaucratic behavior, and the reeducation of persons in human relations."²³

To describe an educational model for this ideal of adulthood it is not enough to describe a model of "adult education." We need a model of education that in being adequate for adults is at the same time inclusive of children. The test of any educational model is whether it helps adults and children move together toward an adulthood that is mature, wise, and integral. The details of that model are what we turn to in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Joseph Goldstein, "On Being Adult and Being an Adult in Secular Law," *Daedalus*, 105(Fall, 1976), p. 69.
2. Winthrop Jordan, "Searching for Adulthood in America," *Daedalus*, 105(Fall, 1976), p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
5. See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Washington, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1974).
6. John Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (New York, Macmillan, 1969).
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
9. Roger Gould, "The Phases of Adult Life: A Study in Developmental Psychology," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, November, 1972, p. 52.
10. William Bouwsma, "Christian Adulthood," *Daedalus*, 105(Spring, 1976), p. 77.
11. See Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).
12. See Benjamin Fine, *The Stranglehold of the IQ* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1975), p. 10.
13. Thomas Harris, *I'm OK-You're OK* (New York, Avon, 1973).
14. See Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1959).
15. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
17. See Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder* (New York, Knopf, 1970), p. 150.
18. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God* (New York, Harper Torchbook, 1952), p. 39.
19. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, Capricorn, 1958), p. 109.
20. See Alan Knox, *Adult Development and Learning* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1977), p. 51.
21. See Gloria Steinem, "Pornography—Not Sex but the Obscene Use of Power," and Helen Dudar, "America Discovers Child Pornography," *Ms.*, August, 1977, pp. 43ff.
22. Quoted in Malcolm Knowles, ed., *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States* (Chicago, Adult Education Association, 1960), p. 6.
23. Kenneth Benne, *Education for Tragedy* (Lexington, University of Kentucky, 1967), p. 198.