

Chart 1

Stages	A Psychosexual Stages and Modes	B Psychosocial Crises	C Radius of Significant Relations	D Basic Strengths	E Core-pathology Basic Antipathies	F Related Principles of Social Order	G Binding Ritualizations	H Ritualism
I Infancy	Oral-Respiratory, Sensory-Kinesthetic (Incorporative Modes)	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust	Maternal Person	Hope	Withdrawal	Cosmic Order	Numinous	Idolism
II Early Childhood	Anal-Urethral, Muscular (Retentive-Eliminative)	Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	Parental Persons	Will	Compulsion	"Law and Order"	Judicious	Legalism
III Play Age	Infantile-Genital, Locomotor (Intrusive, Inclusive)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Basic Family	Purpose	Inhibition	Ideal Prototypes	Dramatic	Moralism
IV School Age	"Latency"	Industry vs. Inferiority	"Neighborhood," School	Competence	Inertia	Technological Order	Formal (Technical)	Formalism
V Adolescence	Puberty	Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Peer Groups and Outgroups; Models of Leadership	Fidelity	reputation	Ideological Worldview	Ideological	Totalism
VI Young Adulthood	Generality	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Partners in friendship, sex, competition, cooperation	Love	Exclusivity	Patterns of Cooperation and Competition	Affiliative	Elitism
VII Adulthood	(Procreativity)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Divided Labor and shared household	Care	Rejectivity	Currents of Education and Tradition	Generational	Authoritism
VIII Old Age	(Generalization of Sensual Modes)	Integrity vs. Despair	"Mankind" "My Kind"	Wisdom	Disdain	Wisdom	Philosophical	Dogmatism

Chart 2

Psychosocial Crises

Old Age	VIII								Integrity vs. Despair, disgust, WISDOM
Adulthood	VII							Generativity vs. Stagnation, CARE	
Young Adulthood	VI							Intimacy vs. Isolation, LOVE	
Adolescence	V							Identity vs. Identity Confusion, FIDELITY	
School Age	IV							Industry vs. Inferiority, COMPETENCE	
Play Age	III				Initiative vs. Guilt, PURPOSE				
Early Childhood	II				Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt, WILL				
Infancy	I	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust, HOPE							

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Gerotranscendence

IN THE PURSUIT of following how aged people face the deterioration of their bodies and faculties, geroticians have begun to use the word "transcendence" to describe a state that some aging persons develop and retain. Let me quote, to begin, the definition of the word "gerotranscendence" presented by Lars Tornstam and fellow workers at Uppsala Universitet, Sweden:

With points of departure from our own studies as well as from theories and observations from others . . . we suggest that human aging, the very process of living into old age, encompasses a general potential towards gerotranscendence. Simply put, gerotranscendence is a shift in meta perspective, from a materialistic and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction. Depending on the definition of "religion," the theory of gerotranscendence may or may not be regarded as a theory of religious development. In a study of terminal patients Nyström and Andersson-Segesten (1990) found a condition, peace of mind, in some of the patients. This condition is in many ways close to our concept of gerotranscendence. They did not, however, find any correlation between this state of mind and the existence of a religious belief or religious practice in the patients. Regardless of this, the patients had or had not reached the state of peace of mind. . . . As in Jung's theory of the individuation process, gerotranscendence is regarded as the final stage in a natural process towards maturation and wisdom. It defines a reality somewhat different from

the normal mid-life reality which gerontologists tend to project on old age. According to the theory, the gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of the self. This individual might also experience a decrease in interest in material things and a greater need for solitary "meditation."¹⁸

These theorists continue this discussion with comments of various gerontologists, the contributions of Zen Buddhist theory, and other contributors from a variety of disciplines.

The statement in the quoted report describes what the gerotranscendent individual experiences—namely:

1. "There is new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe," regarding which I refer the reader to Lewis Thomas's *The Lives of a Cell*.
2. Time is circumscribed to now, or maybe next week, for probably anyone over ninety; beyond that the vista is misty.
3. Space has slowly decreasing dimensions within the radius of our physical capabilities.
4. Death becomes syntonic, the way of all living things.
5. One's sense of self expands to include a wider range of interrelated others.

"Transcendence" is a word one is reluctant to use freely, for it has the tone, the imprint of the special, the holy. According to the dictionary, "to transcend" simply means "to rise above or go beyond a limit, exceed, excel"; also "to go beyond the universe and time." "Transcendence" has placed itself in the domain of religion, where it is on holy ground and protected from casual usage. That the word is used in all religions is unsurprising since it covers an area passing human knowledge, while expressing the hopes and expectations of all true believers.

¹⁸L. Tornstam, "Gerotranscendence: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration," in L. E. Thomas and S. A. Eisenhandler, eds. *Ageing and the Religious Dimension* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993).

Historians of earlier epochs present evidence of how in the Orient the aged were held in high esteem for long lives of service and good judgment. Wise elders were applauded for leaving the bustle of community life, retreating into the mountains and remote places to live out their lives. Though the retreat may have been lonely, it did not cost them self-respect, and many were fed and cared for adequately enough to allow for years of retirement. I am told that even spiritual leaders in many areas of the world have responded with physical withdrawal from the overbusy schedules of monasteries and convents.

Perhaps the really old find a safe place to consider their states of being only in privacy and solitude. After all, how else can one find peace and acceptance of the changes that time imposes on mind and body? The race and competition are over and done with; to release oneself from hurry and tension is mandatory in old age. Some learn this early, and some too late.

This type of "withdrawal," in which one deliberately retreats from the usual engagements of daily activity, is consciously chosen withdrawal. Such a stance does not necessarily imply a lack of vital involvement; there may be continued involvement despite disengagement—as Erik says, a "deeply involved, disinvolvedment." This paradoxical state does seem to exhibit a transcendent quality, a "shift . . . from a materialistic and rational vision." However, when withdrawal and retreat are motivated by a disdain for life and others, it is unlikely that such peace of mind and transcendence will be experienced.

Fortunate are those who have the luxury to choose to withdraw. Many elders are faced with enforced withdrawals. Physical deterioration of eyes, ears, teeth, bones, all the body's systems often inflicts an inevitable reduction in contact with others and the outside world. Emotional and psychological responses to decline may also inhibit one's range of contact. Of course this is all compounded by society, which often places elders where they are rarely seen or heard. The differences between chosen and imposed withdrawal in the orbit of a nursing facility are clear. If

loss of physical aptitude occurs, the patient may naturally shift in attitude; a major improvement in physical abilities could also reverse an imposed withdrawal. Transcendence in the face of imposed withdrawal is perhaps less likely, though certainly not impossible.

In efforts to construct a socially effective sense of self in old age, we are tested on our *time identity*. We look toward a good future moment in order to escape the burden of the present. The normal societal model for old age has been to encourage letting go, but *not* to seek a new life and role—a new self. This promotion of false old age, or denial, stifles normal development. What should normal psychic development from maturity to death be? Is there seldom enough courage to confront aging selves without delusion? Just to seem younger and look younger is playacting. The wisdom of humility, which can be endless and strangely strong, is seldom encouraged. Intent on perfection and measuring up to expectations, we shy away as amateurs from "lovenaking" in creative activity and imagination.

In truth we are called to become more and more human; we must discover the freedom to go beyond limits imposed on us by our world and seek fulfillment. In the beginning we are what we are given. By midlife, when we have finally learned to stand on our own two feet, we learn that to complete our lives, we are called to give to others so that when we leave this world, we can be what we have given. Death, from this perspective, can be made our final gift. We believe it daily, but is it not possible, that by *living* our lives, we create something fit to add to the store from which we came? As Florida Maxwell has reminded us, our whole duty may be to clarify and increase what we are, to make our consciousness a finer quality. The effort of one's entire life would be needed to return laden to our source.

All too often when gerontologists use the term "gerotranscendence," they do not specify as clearly as possible all that they

might describe. They do not take full account of those compensations that old age leaves behind. Nor do they sufficiently explore new and positive spiritual gifts. Perhaps they are just too young. I am still eager in my old age to activate words that sound a bit ethereal in order to make them lively components of behavior. With great satisfaction I have found that "transcendence" becomes very much alive if it is activated into "transcendence," which speaks to soul and body and challenges it to rise above the dystonic, clinging aspects of our worldly existence that burden and distract us from true growth and aspiration.

To reach for gerotranscendence is to rise above, exceed, outdo, go beyond, independent of the universe and time. It involves surpassing all human knowledge and experience. How, for heaven's sake, is this to be accomplished? I am persuaded that only by doing and making do we become. Transcendence need not be limited solely to experiences of withdrawal. In touching, we make contact with one another and with our planet. Transcendence may be a regaining of lost skills, including play, activity, joy, and song, and, above all, a major leap above and beyond the fear of death. It provides an opening forward into the unknown with a trusting leap. Oddly enough, this all demands of us an honest and steadfast humility.

These are wonderful words, words that wind us up into involvement. Transcendence—that's it, of course! And it moves. It's one of the arts, it's alive, sings, and makes music, and I hug myself because of the truth it whispers to my soul. No wonder writing has been so difficult. Transcendence calls forth the languages of the arts; nothing else speaks so deeply and meaningfully to our hearts and souls. The great dance of life can transport us into all realms of making and doing with every item of body, mind, and spirit involved. I am profoundly moved, for I am growing old and feel shabby, and suddenly great riches present themselves and enlighten every part of my body and reach out to beauty everywhere. Somewhere Keats must be musing and smiling:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
You know on earth, and all you need to know.

To grow old is a great privilege. It allows feedback on a long life that can be relived in retrospect. With the years, retrospect becomes more inclusive; scene and action become more real and present. Sometimes the distant scenes and experiences are close to bewildering, and to relive them in memory is almost overwhelming. With mind and heart set on retrospect, it is natural in the ninth stage to find oneself on the upward course of a steep hill. The path up this steep hill, to the vantage point where we can greet the rising and setting sun, is narrow and littered with rocks and rubbish, but every step rewards and draws us up higher. With every step too the view stretches out its releasing display, and the sky and the clouds perform their slow and graceful maneuvers.

But with all this fine talk you still may have your obligations to the body that makes possible this climbing of the mountain, whatever its demands may be. So the pack on your back must also be considered, and, before that, the consistent care necessary to keep the body machinery functioning appropriately in spite of the age and deterioration of the original model. I do believe that in the ninth stage it is mandatory to lighten our load of possessions, especially those that call for supervision and care. If you hope to climb the mountain, whether or not meditation beckons you, travel must be light and unburdened. A lifetime of training is required for success. It's so easy to blame the terrain, the light, the wind for failures and backsliding. Moments of rest are mandatory, but there is no time for self-pity and weakening of purpose. Light too is necessary, for the way and the days are all too short. Song is joyous in the half-light. The dark offers release and dreams of those near and dear and much beloved.

And so you set your course with your face to the rising sun, your eyes alert for the slippery loose stones, your breath reluctant to maintain the pace. You are forced to slow down and reconfirm

your decision to proceed. Always the syntonic and dystonic impulses, to proceed or to give in, wrestle for control and the will to make good. You are challenged and tested. This tension, when it is focused and controlled, is the very root of success. Every step is a test of syntonic sovereignty and will power.