Childhood and Society Study Guide

Childhood and Society by Erik Erikson

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Childhood and Society is a landmark study and theory of childhood development that attempts to combine the methodology of Freudian psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology in order to generate a psychology of child development. Erik Erikson (1902 - 1994), a Danish-German-American psychologist and one of the most important psychologists of the twentieth century, wrote Childhood and Society in 1950 after extensive contact with Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, receiving training in psychoanalysis, observing Native American tribes from a psychological perspective and operating both a public and private practice.

Erikson's focus on child development led him to develop eight psychosexual stages of child development, extending on Freud's original five stages. Erikson argues that each child must navigate these eight stages in order to fully develop. He also defends Freud's controversial notion of the genital stage in adolescence, where children become not only acquainted with their genitals, but do so under a psychological-symbolic aspect, one that represents control over their world.

Erikson is well known for developing a detailed theory of ego psychology and argues that the ego serves to balance the Freudian Id and Superego rather than often being dominated by the Id. Erikson argued that the environment a child is reared in is critical in generating proper growth, adjustment, self-awareness and identity.

Among Erikson's most important theories, as mentioned, is his theory of psychosocial development. Each of the eight stages consists in a contrast between two psychological states which correspond to successful and unsuccessful development in the stage. For example, in infancy (0 to 1 year), trust and mistrust are the relevant contrast, whereas in preschool (4 - 6), initiative and guilt form the relevant contrast. In infancy, the child's major question is whether its world is supportive and predictable; whereas in preschool, the main question is whether the child is good or bad.

Childhood and Society contains over 400 pages of text and is divided into four broad parts, Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life, Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes, The Growth of the Ego, and Youth and the Evolution of Identity. The first part examines early childhood stages of development and develops a theory of how childhood development is related to social development.

Part II contains Erikson's observations of two Native American tribes along with his psychoanalysis of some individuals in the tribes. Part III focuses on Erikson's notion of the ego (built on Freud's) and its development, and Part IV discusses the evolution of personal identity, covering Erikson's theory of national development as seen in the United States, Germany and Russia. Each part contains several chapters, with two chapters in both parts one and two, three chapters in part three and four in part four.

Part I, Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life, Chapter 1, Relevance and Relativity in the Case History

Part I, Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life, Chapter 1, Relevance and Relativity in the Case History Summary and Analysis

Erikson opens by lamenting the fact that child psychology has struggled for so long to be scientific yet so consistently failed. This proves embarrassing to any science that must work hard to develop a systematic method. However, progress has been made, although progress brings challenges of its own. For instance, understanding neuroses as diseases is particularly difficult and leads to a new definition of disease. Thus, Erikson begins with a specimen of pathology, the sudden onset of a "violent somatic disturbance" in a child.

Sam, the study case, is three years old and lives in northern California. One night he wakes his mother by making strange noises. Initially the doctors thought his condition was epilepsy, and once he was treated, he seemed fine. But one month later, Sam encountered a mole in his yard and became incredibly agitated by it. Again epilepsy was the diagnosis. Two months later a third crisis arose from a crushed butterfly. This led doctors to wonder whether he had a psychosis.

The psychosis was clearly related to death in the second two cases, and in the first it turns out the Sam had scared his grandmother, which gave her a heart attack. After several months, she died. Thus, Sam's psychosis seemed to have begun with his guilt, but the mother had not told her son that she died; however, he appears to have deduced it.

Sam apparently had always been irritable and aggressive and was difficult to restrain. Erikson calls this Sam's constitutional intolerance. Sam had had to stay home for hitting a boy at school and he could not hit his grandmother, who lived at home. Apparently he had found a new outlet.

Sam would have two more attacks when his first and second therapists left. Erikson himself later witnessed several episodes, one in which Sam hit him in the face. Afterwards, Erikson confronted the boy with his fear of death. The boy's low tolerance for aggression came from a connotation of violence in the family. Sam was Jewish and had endured discrimination, along with worshiping a mighty, vindictive God. Sam was caught in his ancestors' conflict at the worst time.

Ultimately Sam would learn to express his rage to his mother against whom his rage may have been aimed. Major attacks stopped. His mother apparently had felt guilt for slapping Sam hard once, and she worried that she had caused his problem. Erikson encouraged them to avoid blame.

Erikson argues that the case study suggests beginning by studying processes "inherent in the organism." Organisms will be understood as processes rather than things in order to bring out the idea of homeostasis. A brain lesion may have forced Sam out of homeostasis and his body's natural attempt to return to it led to discharges of energy. Sam's personality would develop around the lesion. Such a personality is produced by the organization of experience in the ego. This process guards the coherence and individuality of experience, ensuring individuation and identity, being one's self, being alright, etc. Finally, humans take roles in society and in small groups. Thus, humans are social and a member of a larger organism.

Erikson argues that there is no anxiety without somatic tension, and this is obvious. Individuals often feel isolated from the social group which can lead to this. Erikson then classifies three processes: the somatic process, the ego process and the societal progress. Biology, psychology and the social sciences study each element. Erikson's philosophy is to become therapeutically involved in all three processes. The processes alter and modify each other which produces a relativity in human existence.

After finishing elaborating on his theory, Erikson turns to a combat crisis in a Marine. The man was a medical soldier who had passed out during an attack, not remembering his full experience. When he was brought to a hospital, he recalled intense headaches that remained with him after leaving. When he did not have headaches he became apprehensive when he heard metallic noises. The soldier had developed a war neurosis.

When interviewing the soldier, Erikson found that various noises upset him and his mother did too. He hadn't seen his mother since he was fourteen and she pointed a gun at him while drunk. He left for good. Probably there are many neuroses of this sort. Erikson theorized that the soldier had experienced temporary trauma, but that various factors combined to lengthen the crisis. Group moral had fallen, imperceptible group panic had grown, the soldier were immobilized in the face of the enemy.

All the soldiers had lost their sense of personal identity. Their lives did not hang together, which Erikson would call ego identity. Identity allows one to understand internal continuity. But anxiety caused identity to break apart during the war. Three processes came together: (1) anxiety in the group, (2) struggling against acute infection, and (3) the breaking of the patient's ego. The man would probably have not broken down without war and combat. But the crisis was caused by an aggregate of changes in the organism. When convergence occurs, the crisis is severe.

These two cases illustrate Erikson's overall clinical viewpoint. These mechanisms are discussed throughout the book. Principles can be expressed within each psychopathological case. It requires developing a case history in three stages. You can

start with any one process (organism, ego, social) but you must turn to the other two. It will be difficult if not pointless to trace the problem to one process instead of looking at the case holistically. The three parts of the book will handle each of the processes, Part I the biological basis, Part II the societal dimension and Part II, the ego. Part IV will review aspects of the end of childhood.

Part I, Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life, Chapter 2, The Theory of Infantile Sexuality

Part I, Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life, Chapter 2, The Theory of Infantile Sexuality Summary and Analysis

First, Erikson will review Freud's theory of childhood sexuality, which sees the infantile organism as containing powerful sexual and aggressive energy. Erikson demonstrates the theory through two children deadlocked in a fight with their bowels.

Ann, four years old, has a pale and sullen face with blank eyes; she sucks her thumb. Her problem is that she is becoming too babyish in one way and too serious in another. She also holds onto her bowel movements and then releases them in her bed at night or just before early morning so her mother cannot catch her. Berating her only caused her to withdraw more. When left alone with her, she implicitly communicates to Erikson that he will not getting anything out of her.

Erikson does not talk; he simply starts to play with blocks, mimicking family life. She then disposes of the mother doll and starts to give the father toy cars. She then breaks down and asks for her mother, rushing out of the room.

Ann wants to come back the next day and she does. She had soiled herself. With the symptoms laid out, Erikson proceeds to analyze them without explaining how the case was resolved. Ann did not come freely; quiet play in Erikson's office allowed her to forget that her mother was outside. She apparently hated her mother and loved her father. But she had then stolen pencils from Erikson for her mother and then tried to force her to give them back to him. She is desperate to gain Erikson's forgiveness.

Soiling is a conflict between anal and urethral problems. This has a zonal aspect, as it concerns a body zone. Ann was unable to give without taking and so she allowed automatic alternations of retentive and eliminative bowel acts to accumulate. The alternation is the "mode" of the matter and the anal-urethral sphincters represent retentive and eliminative modes. Thus, zones are related to modes. Retention and elimination can lead to regression and isolation, whereas being aggressive leads toward guilt. This produces a crisis.

Pathways of regression and progression characterize the chapter. With this, Erikson goes through the second case. Peter is a little boy retaining his bowel movements, lately up to a week. His emotions allowed him to exert considerable force on his anus.

When Erikson visited the home, Peter clearly was struggling with intestinal bulk; he had also had a dream of animals stealing things from him and from his stomach.

Through their next interactions, Erikson deduced that the boy considered himself pregnant; he retain feces to aid his fantasy that he was filed with something precious; if he kept it, it would burst him but if he released it, it could be hurt or dead. As treatment, Erikson drew elephants with him and then showed him how elephants reproduced, illustrating their parts. He showed Peter that a woman's bowel movements and babies came from different places, and when Peter realized this he had a "superhuman" bowel movement.

Peter had apparently had a nurse who had left some months ago and Peter lost an important person in his life. His parents were often gone so he had developed an emotional attachment to the nurse. When Peter expressed unusually masculine sentiment, his mother blamed the nurse and took over rearing him herself. Thus, disapproved masculinity led to separation. The nurse had been around when he was a baby, so he became more babyish. This was connected to his bowel movements. In this case, retention is the mode and the eliminative tract is the modal zone. The new interpretation of Peter's fear allowed him to dramatically improve.

After relating the episodes, Erikson explains Freud's theory that uncharted regions of the body's orifices are zones of vital importance for emotional health and illness. This then correlates to certain personality traits as adults. From this, Freud developed the first consist theory that connected the "tragedies and comedies" and their relation to body apertures.

Childhood zones have successive stages which provide a special pleasure-seeking energy known as libido on this view. Libidinal energy was only allowed to be seen as sexual when it became genial. Erikson then explains how Freud's models apply to various mental disorders. They often result from sublimated sexual energy by diverting sexual energy from non-sexual goals. Pregential trends are then repressed.

The theory is as of yet undeveloped, but Erikson sees the theory as having made progress. Sexuality is made be an epiphenomenon of genetic development as well. Erikson explains that there is a conception of a proper rate and normal sequence of development that, when disturbed, creates neuroses. The two test cases can therefore be understood as being stuck in an anal stage, regressing to babyish themes and releasing energy in relation to parents.

Therapists may be able to determine the forces operative in a clinical situation, but sometimes it is better to focus on the goal the therapist is asked to accomplish. Doing otherwise can cause problems. Erikson begins to chart zones, modes and modalities, first covering mouth and senses, their potential pathologies and manifestations. The next discussion concerns eliminative organs and musculature and the third of locomotion and the genitals. In the fourth discussion, Erikson covers pregenitality and genitality. The story Erikson tells is complex and merits individual study by the reader.

After finishing the charting of the basic Freudian theory of childhood development, Erikson turns to discuss genital modes and spatial modalities. He analyzes the zones and modes that model his two child patients and then discusses observations made on a large number of patients in a developmental study. In the latter study, the children must build various scenes after watching a play put on by Harvard and Radcliffe students. Erikson then discusses various outlier cases and differences between male and female children's structures (Erikson argues that they reflected genital symbolism). Due to social conditioning, male and female children express their sexuality through symbolism in their lives.

One of Erikson's goals in the chapter is to connect the two forms of psychoanalytic areas of study, the psychosexual and psychosocial. Next he will attempt to demonstrate the social and cultural element and how it relates to the ego.

Part Two, Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes, Chapter 3, Hunters across the Prairie

Part Two, Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes, Chapter 3, Hunters across the Prairie Summary and Analysis

Part Two turns from children to American Indians in order to study primitive child-training systems; such studies show that primitive societies are not stuck in infantile stages. In Chapter 3, Erikson begins with some historical background, focusing in South Dakota and the Oglala subtribe of the Sioux.

Erikson begins his discussion with the case of Jim, a sincere young Sioux who had partly assimilated. Jim had a wife and several children and Erikson and his staff interviewed them about stages of child life. The women in the room spoke more, sidelining Jim and showing he lacked authority. Jim's father had spent much of his time in foreign countries, leaving Jim feeling abandoned. In the next section, Erikson discusses a dialogue between American Indians and whites concerning their different methods of child rearing, which revealed their differing value systems.

Erikson next reviews Sioux child training taught to them by the Dakota women. They began with birth, moving to getting and taking as the child grows, passing to holding and letting go and then making and taboos. The text also discusses Dakota beliefs about the supernatural, including the sun dance and the vision quest. In summary, Erikson argues that due to their traumatic conditions, the Sioux lost their historical reality and the base of their collective identity. They had to submit to their conquerors and their methods of upbringing undermine the establishment of white conscience. Erikson ends by describing a subsequent study.

Part II, Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes, Chapter 4, Fishermen along a Salmon River

Part II, Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes, Chapter 4, Fishermen along a Salmon River Summary and Analysis

The second American Indian tribe Erikson studies was a tribe of fishermen and acorn gatherers on the Pacific, the Yurok, whose mode of existence is diametrically opposed to the Sioux. They confined themselves to a small area and became very localized. They emphasize cleanliness rather than strength and fish for salmon. They have a ceremony of the fish dance as a supernatural practice. Erikson reports on their Yurok villages and conveys some intra-Yurok conflicts. The Yurok display an unsubdued, cynical attitude towards whites.

Yurok child psychiatry is carried on by old women. Erikson and his team encounter Fanny, an exemplar of Yurok psychiatry. Fanny argues that Yurok child neuroses are caused by seeing "wise people" after dark that are like infants, small, oral and magic. Erikson then analogizes this idea to psychoanalysis.

Yurok child training begins with the baby's birth and associated safeguards with oral prohibitions. The baby is then denied milk for ten days. The Yurok have an anal face but seem to avoid feces and focus on urine. The child is also encouraged to subordinate his instinctive drives to economic matters.

The Yurok have little hierarchy and are mutually vigilant; they have little taste for war and simply practice avoidance. They see the Klamath River on which they live as a nutritional canal. They also seek to be avid by being clean. Yurok display a retentiveness characteristic of an anal stage and they exhibit anal release at their dances. The study of the two American Indian tribes gives Erikson hope that successful inquiry into the character of personalities is possible.

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 5, Early Ego Failure, Jean

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 5, Early Ego Failure, Jean Summary and Analysis

Before the chapter begins, Erikson argues that personality develops from a state of relative equilibrium between different behaviors. But sometimes various factors threaten the formation of a stable ego and wee do not feel like ourselves. Psychoanalysts see the shift between excessive wishes (the "id") and the oppressive force of conscience (the "superego") as leading toward an in-between stage at the ego. It balances and wards off the excesses of the id and superego and uses defense mechanisms as a result. The ego evolved to protect in order on which outer order depends.

Chapter 5 discusses Erikson's encounter with a schizophrenic child named Jean. Her human relations moved away from others and noticed no one. Her disorientation was extreme and seemed to follow tuberculosis. During this period, Jean's original nurse left her. Jean was distraught and this seems to have created a frantic affection for pillows; this also generated maternal estrangement. And Jane often suffered oral trauma with her mother, such as not being able to breastfeed.

Ultimately Jean had to be cared for by a professional woman and was separated from her parents. When returned, she started to become fascinated with parts of people, such as the genitals of her brothers and father. Jean's focus reflects on her detachment from her mother's breast. But her mother found it difficult to live with her. Erikson then relates the other obsessions she developed, such as with the xylophone which was tied to her hands.

As Jean grew, the distance between her age and behavior became so great that she could not associate with children her age; she also had to attend a special school. It's not clear how much of Jean's behavior was caused by 'maternal rejection'.

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 6, Toys and Reasons

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 6, Toys and Reasons Summary and Analysis

The infantile ego aims at synthesis; now Erikson will turn to illustrate cases where child egos find self-cure in play. He begins with an illustration from Tom Sawyer. After the discussion, Erikson argues that play is a function of the ego attempting to synchronize the bodily and social processes within the self. It is a swing between fantasy and reality. Erikson then illustrates the extension of play into various areas of society. He then argues that those who do not work do not play. The child is nobody yet, and his play is nonsense as a result. Erikson discusses the case of a patient of Freud's as illustration.

When traumatized, children choose to play with material that is manageable at their age. They also try to handle their anxiety during play. The play of children often focuses on his or her own body; this is autocosmic play. Then a microsphere is created, a small world of manageable toys. Next comes the macrosphere, which is a shared sphere with others that brings a sense of reality and mastery. Infantile play, in Erikson's opinion, is not really play at all but a method of moving to new stages of mastery.

The next section discusses play and cure. Erikson points out that modern play therapy is based on observations that play allows children to express themselves after having dealt with trauma. Play makes good use of transference as a mode of communication. Erikson discusses the case of three-year-old Mary to make his point. Along the way, he introduces the concepts of play disruption and play satiation. In conclusion of the Mary discussion, Erikson argues that her case illustrates that spontaneous play has curative effects.

In the final section, Erikson attempts to more clearly describe what is meant by identity. Emerging identities bridge childhood with the bodily self and parents, acquiring cultural dimensions. The transition to adulthood is facilitated, where more social roles become available and coercion is used to force people into them. Erikson illustrates with the son of a bombardier and black identity.

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 7, Eight Ages of Man

Part III, The Growth of the Ego, Chapter 7, Eight Ages of Man Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 begins with the observation that babies' social trust makes feeding easier, along with sleep and bowel relaxation. Discomfort becomes a problem for the bowels and the infant must learn how to separate from parents. As the child develops, children constantly test the relationship between their inside and outside, between the reality they face and their internal needs. The absence of truth results from a disconnect and can be observed in childhood schizophrenia.

Psychoanalysis assumes that the early process of differentiation between inside and outside can be disrupted and that this is a cause of many neuroses. As differentiation occurs (or not), enduring patterns of behavior are established. Organized religion helps to give parents faith which supports the trust emerging in the child. Trust born of care is the source of religion anyway. Societies and ages must find institutionalized reverence which derives life energy from its worldview.

As the human grows, it moves from trust and mistrust to autonomy vs. shame and doubt. Outer control must be reassuring but failure can reduce trust and autonomy as a result. Shame does so as well, and presupposes that one can be judged by others. Doubt is tied to shame. Socially, this need creates religious institutions which embody the human's lasting need to have his will affirmed.

In the next age of man, the child faces the opposition of initiative and guilt. He becomes more himself and begins to initiate his own personal growth and action; this brings a certain sort of pleasure. The suppression of autonomy often leads to guilt and neurosis as well, dividing the child within himself. The problem is one of mutual regulation, inside emotion and outside activity. Children also must choose between industry and inferiority. In school, children can succeed or feel inferior to other children. This produces a new set of opportunities for inner and outer hindrance.

Identity and role confusion bring the next contrast. When children establish relationships with the world of skills and tools, childhood comes to an end and youth begins. The physiological revolution of development brings the recognition of adult tasks ahead. Integration of self with one's skills and tasks helps to develop ego identity. But this stage brings the possibility of role-confusion, such as a doubt of one's sexual identity. Adolescent love often aims to define one's identity, which is why it so often involves talking.

Intimacy and isolation follow identity and role confusion. Strength acquired at various stages is tested by events that force one to move beyond it. Young adults emerge from

the search for identity with a desire to fuse their identities with others; they are ready for intimacy and commit one's self to others. But isolation follows frustrated intimacy. Sexuality begins to develop here. The seventh stage brings the contrast between generativity and stagnation. Generativity is acquired when adult youth can guide their own lives, being productive and creative; stagnation is the opposite of generativity.

The final contrast lies between ego integrity and despair. Ego integrity is produced by the (at least partly) successful passage through the previous seven stages of development. A stable ego is produced, but without a stable personality, despair threatens. Despair often manifests in a fear of death. The chapter ends with an "epigenetic" chart of the eight stages.

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 8, Reflections on American Identity

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 8, Reflections on American Identity Summary and Analysis

Prior to the beginning of Chapter 8, Erikson introduces part four of the book. He notes that the book may seem to have gone beyond childhood. But, Erikson counters, understanding childhood involves understanding how it ends and how it leads to social integration. In the process, Erikson extols Freud's work in continuing the process of bringing the individual to a self-conscious state, which produces an increasingly advanced society. The introduction concludes with more discussion of the origin and significance of Freudian psychology. Erikson plans to focus the fourth and last part of the book on the problems of identity in America, Germany and Russia to illustrate Freudian theory.

Chapter 8 claims that the United States is a dynamic country that forces extreme contrasts and abrupt changes on individuals. This produces many contradictory social currents. American identity formation supports individual ego identity, but he must preserve a tentativeness about his identity to maintain the need to make new autonomous choices. The final ego identity of the American is rooted in dynamic polarities. American life, choices and egos must be left open.

Psychiatrists in the United States often blame "Mom" for neuroses. Case histories show that patients have cold, dominant, or rejecting mothers, or hyper-possessive and overprotected ones. Erikson is interested in who this "Mom" is, worrying that she is merely a prototype.

"Moms" are authorities in the matters of morals and practices in the home; she never blames herself for mishaps and maintains discontinuity between childhood and adult status and she also is hostile toward free expression, teaching instead self-restraint and self-control. She stands for tradition. Erikson then suggests how such an identity might develop, pointing towards factors such as Puritanism, although even Puritanism has been unfairly maligned since it was once a rational developmental strategy.

Erikson is concerned that he cannot characterize the level of emotional disturbance in the United States but he thinks it has a certain quality where, below the proud sense of American autonomy, lies a troubled American who blames his mother for letting him down. American folklore highlights this personality type, with John Henry as a stereotypical case and similar illustration in American Indian culture and cowboy songs.

Adolescence involves the final establishment of a dominant positive ego identity, but this poses a problem for Americans who must be ready to change themselves. They often concern themselves with who others think they are and this stage risks role diffusion. Young American boys often exemplify this problem, and Erikson illustrates with an archetypal description, analyzing the relationship between the boy, his "Mom" and his more distant father. Erikson also discusses how suitable this boy is for politics when he ages. Since the boy composes American politics, America faces a "rocking sea of checks and balances ...." In the family, contrasts often produce disintegration. His identity is also threatened by excessive "bossism" or the rule of bosses and machines in society.

Americans must ask how sons can preserve their freedom and share it with those whom, through technology and an increasingly universal identity, they must consider equals.

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 9, The Legend of Hitler's Childhood

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 9, The Legend of Hitler's Childhood Summary and Analysis

Adolf Hitler and his associates were the greatest exploiters of a nation's fight for safe identity in history. Unfortunately Germany was absorbed by martial spirit, and according to Erikson, will hopefully return to the pursuit of "Kultur", but Nazism was the German version of universal contemporary potential. Nations are defined not only by their highest point of civilization achievement but by the weakest point in the collective identity. Consequently, Erikson proposes to analyze German identity through the prism of the legend of Hitler's childhood.

Hitler was born in the Austrian town of Braunau, near the German border. His mother was twenty-three years younger than his father and was a good woman for her day; his father was a drunk and a tyrant. The young mother shows the German conception of the betrayal of a longing son for an elder tyrant. This produced an Oedipus complex in Hitler which is reflected in German identity.

Hitler spends the first part of Mein Kampf asserting that his father could not make an official out of him and the office had no appeal to him. Hitler rebelled against his father, but not all Germans had fathers like Hitler's. But his position was not unlike that of many Victorian era middle class Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Erikson then presents an "impressionistic" picture of one pattern of German fatherhood. The description includes a parallel dialogue about the development of German culture.

Erikson discusses the significance of the fact that Hitler left out a detailed discussion of his mother, to whom he was certainly pathologically attached to. In adulthood, Hitler comes to see himself as the child of fate and it frustrates him in various periods in his life. Erikson next comments that Hitler was a sort of adolescent trying to escape the shadow of "Great Father."

Germany's adolescent rebellion was of a similar sort. Germans threw off all previous sources of authority in order to liberate themselves from a sense of being dominated by what came before. Nazism established a new German pride and aided in the preservation of a fragile German political identity. And in fact, German history is shaped by its subjection to near constant fear of invasion. It often has a fear of disunity, which

illuminates its struggle for unity. Erikson discusses how the orientation of German intellectuals aided in this struggle.

The Jewish obsession seems to be a projection of the German that reflects of his own hostility to having his masculinity removed, and thus engendering Freudian castration fear. Jews displayed an admirable adaptive flexibility of conservatism and progressivisim. They were both dogmatically orthodoxy and opportunistically adaptable. Erikson then discusses the role of Jewish people in more detail.

The crushing of National Socialism brings new dangers because Germany has again become divided by itself and thus the development of its identity has been delayed.

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 10, The Legend of Maxim Gorky's Youth

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 10, The Legend of Maxim Gorky's Youth Summary and Analysis

According to Erikson, at that time (1963), it was difficult to learn much about Russia. Much of what Erikson knows comes from a vital Russian movie about the Bolshevik legend of Maxim Gorky's childhood. As with Hitler's childhood, Erikson gives a similar analysis of Maxim Gorky. Similar to Hitler, Maxim Gorky has a childhood torched by a father who is a merciless tyrant and a senile failure. Gorky becomes a writer, not a politician, but he remains an idol of the Soviet state. He also belongs to the epoch of Russian realism that made literate Russia miserably self-conscious.

The vast horizons of central Russia reveal the Russian dark emptiness; the balalaika tunes reassure Russians that someone is there for them. Erikson then describes the film in more detail, with images of characters and ethnicities like Gypsies. Erikson argues that the Russian personality contains a desire to regress to traditional morality and ancient folkways, remaining bound by the superego and serfdom. In response, Russians must develop their own individualism without intellectual figures or pioneers to teach them this.

The second section discusses the role of maternal figures and their generosity; they are characterized by this practice. Grandmothers often assume the role of mother, and the actual mother is not a necessity. Thus, motherhood is diffused in peasant Russia. The third section addresses fathers and grandfathers who are seen as destroyers of boyish gaiety. He is dependent on money and his wife's strength. He also has sado-masochistic mood swings.

Ancient Russia was composed of Slavs, but a millennia ago they asked a Viking to rule them to protect them against southern invaders. They wished to keep to their primitive hunting practices, but the Vikings introduced Christianity of the Byzantine sort, and this generated another hierarchy into Russia that warred with other Russian hierarchies. Hierarchy would lead to centralization and national organization, and this led to self-perpetuating paradoxes of Russian history.

Centralization led to more middlemen who governed and policed for the Tsar. As the Russians came closer to the west, they increasingly became serfs. But they nonetheless gave the Tsars permission to act in incredibly irrational ways. The Russians

thereby project their inner badness and inexorable conscience. Russian literature puts patricide and fratricide into the ordinary Russian.

Erikson reminds the reader that at the time of the Russian revolution, four-fifths of Russians were peasants. The revolution led to a profound transformation from nomadic to agricultural life and then to industrialism.

The fourth section of the chapter discusses exploitation in the form of the suffering saint and beggar. Gypsies, Erikson argues, come to represent the simple saint of a primitive Christian era: cheerfully good and charitable to the end. The stranger also becomes an archetypal figure, who teaches that one must learn not to wait for what is given but must take what one wants. The stranger is a revolutionary.

Other archetypes include the fatherless gang and the legless child. The homeless, fatherless gang represents the proletarian class and their lack of control over their lives, as does the boy with the paralyzed legs. The swaddled baby is analogous to the swaddled soul of the Russians who have a common cultural heritage. Erikson then analyzes the Russian understanding of childhood. The "swaddling hypothesis" shows the transformation of infant experience to juvenile and adult passion.

Section five addresses the symbol of the Protestant. It represents the rebelliousness of the Russian soul against the nation-state which suffocates its natural desire to live a nomadic live. The Protestant American farmer's boy ties Russia to the Founding Fathers of America who were themselves rebels. They had the Reformation, the Renaissance, Nationalism and Revolutionary Individualism along with a new continent.

There is an analogy between Western rebelliousness and the Russian desire to be free. But there are important differences because this rebelliousness is proletarian, industrial, Russian and Orthodox. The Community Party absorbs a Protestant mindset and becomes sectarian. It them acquires a need for absolute power and absolute unity.

Erikson argues that Americans can forge bonds with Russians by recognizing their common Protestantism and hostility to servility.

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 11, Conclusion, Beyond Anxiety

Part IV, Youth and the Evolution of Identity, Chapter 11, Conclusion, Beyond Anxiety Summary and Analysis

Erikson argues that Childhood and Society is an attempt to reconcile historical and psychology methodologies by dealing with them jointly and as having joint laws. We can find this unity in the child. The smallness of the child forms a background in the mind of each person and shapes his or her challenges in life.

Conscience arises during this time and an immature conscience endangers man's maturity and work. Childhood fear follows men throughout their lives as does learning to see some aspect of bodily function as evil, shameful or unsafe.

Erikson then summarizes some of the basic spheres, but also emphasizing the need to separate anxiety and fear. Fear is apprehension about specific dangers, but anxiety is a diffuse state of tension that is produced by tension between the internal and external self. In childhood, fear and anxiety are closely tied.

The first fear of childhood is the loss of support, and another is a fear of manipulation, along with a fear of being interrupted in an important act. A fourth fear concerns impoverishment in an organ mode and the fifth a fear of losing autonomy. The sixth fear is that of the danger of being closed up, or having no outlet for one's desires. A seventh fear is that of being exposed and the eighth a fear of being exposed. Other fears include the fear of being immobilized, being left empty, and being raped.

The human psyche aims at gradually accruing a sense of identity based on social health and rooted in cultural identity. Erikson illustrates this with a discussion of the problems that face youth today, such as industrial revolution and world-wide communication. The job of adults is to perfect methods that reduce prejudice, apprehension and judgment lapses that flow from infant rage and defense mechanisms against childhood anxiety.

Clinical experience allows psychologists to find important connections between infant anxiety and social upheaval. This new knowledge offers us a new power to produce desired personalities which we may learn at some point in the future. By charting this unknown area of human existence, psychologists risk making a part of life the whole. Each field only knows part of the story and cannot generalize too far.

This is why Erikson recommends being interdisciplinary. Concentration and cooperation may allow the reduction of prejudice and produce social harmony. If men are to avoid exploitation, they must appeal to new forms of group discussion and recognize their

competencies. Erikson then encourages the reader to consider his own competencies, and then he relates some of his. He then discusses some important new social innovations, such as natural birth, which connect humanity to its past.

Erikson ends by admitting that his perspective is limited by his clinical experience and then discusses the nature of the job of the psychoanalyst. He must focus on the balance between developing cures and research and between objectivity and participation, along with balancing knowledge and imagination and tolerance and indignation. This will allow the psychoanalyst to contribute to new psychological knowledge and perhaps acquire the freedom to change history.

Characters

Erik Erikson

Erik Erikson (1902 - 1994) is the author of Childhood and Society. Since Childhood and Society is a non-fiction book that gives a psychological theory of childhood development, Erikson is its most important person. Erikson was born in Germany to Danish parents, his lifelong interest in identity psychology began here. When Erikson grew up, he was a teacher of dancing and the arts, teaching at a Viennese private school. At this time, he came to know Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, went through psychoanalysis and then became a psychoanalyst himself.

After graduating from college in 1933, Erikson and his wife moved to Denmark and then the United States, where Erikson became a child psychoanalyst. Over the next seventeen years, Erikson compiled the research that became Childhood and Society. The book is a significant achievement in clinical psychology for numerous reasons, including its attempt to synthesize psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology, its extension of the five stages of child development hypothesized by Freud into eight stages and its detailed theory of the ego and ego development.

Erikson became one of the most prominent Neo-Freudians and was known as an "ego psychologist" who studied the development of children, often through their whole life spans. He was also widely renowned for the application of his methods to analyze the psychologies of important historical figures such as Gandhi and Martin Luther, along with analyzing national psychologies, such as the psychologies of the United States, Germany and Russia.

Sigmund Freud

As mentioned, Erik Erikson was a Neo-Freudian and friend of Anna Freud, Freud's daughter. Thus, Freud features constantly in Childhood and Society and is its second most important person.

Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939), was the Austrian neurologist who founded psychoanalysis, perhaps the first school of clinical psychology. He developed the theory of the unconscious mind, the idea of the defense mechanism and repression, and his radical new understanding of sexual desire as the primary motivating energy of life.

Freud developed the idea of transference, the interpretation of dreams, and while his ideas have become unpopular, he has inspired numerous schools of Neo-Freudians, of which Erikson was a member.

Freud famously divided human psychological motivations into three types: the Id, or the animal force of desire, the Superego, or the conscience and the Ego, or the force that balances the two. He also developed a theory of psychosexual development, where

infants and children pass from the oral stage to the anal stage, the phallic stage and the latency stage, ending in the genital stage.

Erikson takes on both Freud's division of human motivation and his theory of psychosexual development, but he builds on and modifies both. First, Erikson develops a conception of the ego that is more active, building and developing over time rather than simply balancing the Id and Superego. Second, Erikson expands the theory of psychosexual development from Freud's five stages to eight.

The Infant

Erikson begins the book with a study of infantile sexuality and focuses on the infant's primitive social concepts, like trust.

Ann and Peter

Two of Erikson's child case studies, both of whom had anal fixations.

The Sioux

One of the Native American tribes that Erikson studied and analyzes in the book.

The Yurok

The second Native American tribe that Erikson studied and analyzes in the book.

Jean

A case study patient who has trouble with ego development.

Mom

An archetypal character within American society that represents a cold, overbearing mother figure that produces neuroses in American men.

Hitler

Erikson analyzes the psychology of German society by means of the legend of Hitler's childhood.

Maxim Gorky

A Russian dramatist, and a motion picture character, Maxim Gorky was thought to provide a good psychological model for Russia, at least on Erikson's view.

Objects/Places

Freudianism

The psychological theory of Sigmund Freud, which deeply influenced Erikson.

The Eight Stages of Man

Erikson's eight stage theory of psychosocial development.

The Ego

Erikson understands the Ego as that group of psychological motivations that generate identity and balance the Id and Superego.

The Id

The set of psychological motivations that are most primitive, animal and that need to be restrained.

The Superego

The set of psychological motivations that restrain the passions of the Id and influence the choices of the Ego.

Zones, Modes and Modalities

Erikson's concepts that relate emotions and sexual drives to regions of the body and social relationships.

Case Studies

Erikson often defends his theory by means of case studies.

National Identity

Erikson also believes that his theory can be extended to national psychologies.

Somatic, Ego and Social Processes

These three processes, physical, mental and social, all have a complex interplay that help to create human identity.

Play Therapy

Erikson developed play therapy as a method of helping children to express themselves through play when they could not do so with words, due to age or trauma or both.

Anxiety

Related to fear but distinct, anxiety occurs during a raise state of apprehension that has no object. Anxiety leads to neurosis, on Erikson's view.

Themes

The Eight Stages of Man

Erik Erikson is perhaps most well-known for his "eight stages of man", his theory of psychosocial development. The theory is Freudian in nature but expands Freud's five stage theory into an eight-stage theory. It focuses primarily on a dichotomy between possible psychological states that must be chosen between before proceeding to the next stage.

The first stage occurs in infancy, from 0 to 1 years of age, with an emotional dichotomy between trust and mistrust; the infant wonders whether her world is predictable and supportive. The next stage is the toddler stage from 2 to 3 years of age; its dichotomy is autonomy on the one hand and shame and doubt on the other. In this stage, the child wonders whether she can take care of herself or must always rely on others.

In the third preschool stage (4 to 6 years), the child faces a contrast between initiative and guilt, wherein the child asks whether she is good or bad and takes on various social roles to experiment. The fourth stage is childhood (7 to 12 years), wherein the child must choose between industry and inferiority; she must ask whether she is successful or worthless. The fifth stage is the adolescent period (13 to 19 years) and involves identity and role confusion. Adolescents ask who they are and what their life goals are. In young adulthood (20 to 34 years), the adult must ask whether she is loved or wanted and whether she will share her life with others. She chooses between intimacy and isolation.

Middle adulthood follows and covers the longer stretch of life, from 25 to 65 years. This period involves a choice between generativity and stagnation; the adult must ask whether she will produce anything of value with her life. In the senior period, the senior chooses between integrity or despair, depending on whether she regards herself as having lived a full life or not. This period extends from 65 years of age to death.

Ego Development

Erikson's theory of ego development is contained in his eight stages of man. However, understanding his theory of ego development as a whole helps to illuminate his theory of development. For Freud, the ego is that aspect of the psyche that balances the repressive nature of the superego and the animal passion of the id. But Erikson's conception of the ego is much more active and expansive. First, the ego takes an active role in the construction of identity and extends its reach as the child grows and interacts with the environment.

In fact, Erikson understands the human being as an organism within a biological/social system that goes through particular stages of identity development that ties together experience into a narrative. The ego is that aspect of the psyche that unites experience,

tells a coherent life story, and creates a stable personality and self-conscious identity. Thus, the ego is not only a kind of balancing act but an active, biological and social process of identity construction.

Ego development can also be stunted whenever an individual chooses the "bad" option at a stage of development. Thus, infants that have no security or adolescents who acquire role confusion will develop neuroses until the disorder is resolved. Further, bad decisions "upstream" in development inevitably reverberate to later stages. Thus, neuroses compound and can ruin lives unless they are addressed. Ego development thus requires an expanding reach of activity, always reaching out to broader forms of life or dying back.

Psychoanalysis and Cultural Anthropology

One of Erikson's stated goals in Childhood and Society is to unite Freudian psychoanalysis with cultural anthropology. Psychoanalysis involves an analysis of the individual and perhaps her relations to her parents or siblings. Cultural anthropology involves the study of cultures as a whole, their norms, customs, religious beliefs, and so on. Erikson tells a biological story that attempts to unite the two.

Every individual identity is a product of three organic processes: somatic, ego and social. The somatic process is the process of physical development; the infant becomes a child, the child goes through puberty, puberty leads to adulthood and so on. The ego process moves along with it (in normal development), passing through each of the eight stages of man. The social process describes how the individual relates to her society at large, whether she is accepted or not, which role she fits into, whether she is satisfied with her role or not.

Erikson argues that each of these three processes determine one another and that trying to treat one of the three processes as the most fundamental will lead to confusion. Instead, the entire process is holistic. This is Erikson's attempt to combine psychoanalysis with cultural anthropology, since psychoanalysis focuses on the nexus between ego and body, and cultural anthropology focuses on the social. Erikson illustrates his theory not only in his case studies, but in his observations of the Sioux and the Yurok and his analysis of national psychologies.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of Childhood and Society is that of its author, Erik Erikson. Erikson was born in 1902 and grew up to be a dance instructor. While a dance instructor, Erikson befriended Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, and then subjected himself to psychoanalysis. Having been so intrigued by psychoanalysis, Erikson then decided to become a psychoanalyst himself.

Thus, from an early period in Erikson's adult life, he was deeply influenced by Freudian thought and Freudian methods. This is clear throughout the book and this influence is universally acknowledged, even by Erikson. He is widely considered among the foremost Neo-Freudians of the mid-twentieth century.

While Freud deeply influenced Erikson, Erikson both disagreed with some of Freud's positions and extended and refined others. For instance, Erikson accepted Freud's division of the human psyche into Ego, Id and Superego. However, while Erikson thought that Freud understood the Ego as a mere balancing mechanism between the repressive Superego and the irascible Id, Erikson thought the Ego was a much more active and self-driven process.

For instance, he argues famously that the Ego goes through its own stages of development and is the nexus of perception through which personal experience is organized into a narrative that can then be used to tie together a coherent personality and identity.

Freud has a five-stage theory of psychosocial development, and here Erikson accepts a relatively higher proportion of Freudian thought but extends Freud's model from a five stage period to an eight-stage period. Thus, the perspective of the book is of a clinical psychologist concerned to defend and extend Freudian ideas and apply them to an analysis of child development embedded in society at large.

Tone

The tone of Childhood and Society contains several subtleties. It clearly sets out to be a scientific text. It aims primarily to synthesize psychoanalysis with cultural anthropology and then it proceeds to elaborate an understanding of various social, mental and physical processes that interact to produce human identity. The model is extended and refined throughout the book and then applied to a variety of case studies. Throughout most of this discussion, Erikson's tone is that of an impartial observer. He elaborates his theory and simply applies it.

However, Childhood and Society often has the tone of a narrative. For instance, Erikson illustrates his theory through a variety of narratives. In his descriptions of his case

studies, he organizes the narrative in an exciting way and will sometimes apologize to the reader for not explaining how a particular psychological conflict was resolved. In still other cases, Erikson employs an analysis of a legendary figure, like Hitler or Maxim Gorky, in order to analyze the psychology of a nation, thus making his analysis mostly narrative in structure.

Towards the beginning and the end of the book, however, Erikson begins to sound more like a philosopher. He discusses his choice of methodology and defends it, arguing that there are great benefits to interdisciplinary approaches to human psychology. He also argues that understanding human psychology will have great benefits in helping humanity to shape the personalities of its children, thereby producing a better society.

Structure

Childhood and society runs around four hundred pages. The four hundred pages are divided into an introduction and four parts. Each of the parts contains several chapters. Part I, "Childhood and the Modalities of Social Life" explains Erikson's theory of childhood development, sexual energy and the association of emotions and areas of the body. In Chapter 1, "Relevance and Relativity in the Case History," Erikson conveys cases studies that he analyzes in Chapter 2, "The Theory of Infantile Sexuality."

Part Two, "Childhood in Two American Indian Tribes," aims to apply Erikson's theory to his observations of the Sioux and Yurok Native American tribes. Chapter 3, "Hunters Across the Prairie," covers the Sioux, and Chapter 4, "Fishermen Along a Salmon River," covers the Yurok. Part Three, "The Growth of the Ego" elaborates and defends Erikson's complex theory of ego development. Chapter 5, "Early Ego Failure: Jean," explains a test case of ego failure, and Chapter 6, "Toys and Reasons," explains how toys and play can be used by children to heal trauma and express emotions. Chapter 7, "The Eight Ages of Man" is perhaps the central chapter of the book and outlines Erikson's famous theory of psychosocial development.

Part Four, "Youth and the Evolution of Identity," contains Erikson's theory of identity development and is illustrated in Erikson's analysis of the psychologies of three nations, the United States, Germany and Russia. Chapter 8, "Reflections on American Identity, Chapter 9, "The Legend of Hitler's Childhood," and Chapter 10, "The Legend of Maxim Gorky's Youth," cover the three nations respectively. In Chapter 11, "Conclusion: Beyond Anxiety," Erikson concludes with a discussion of the roles that fear and anxiety play in psychological development and expresses hope for the future of the study of child development through the method he has developed.

Quotes

"As we try to think of neuroses as diseases, we gradually come to reconsider the whole problem of disease." Part I, Chap. 1, p. 24

"The combined circumstances which we recognize are an aggregate of simultaneous changes in the organism (exhaustion and fever), in the ego (breakdown of ego identity), and in the milieu (group panic." Part I, Chap. I, p. 44

"The anal-urethral sphincters, then, are the anatomic models for the retentive and eliminative modes, which, in turn, can characterize a great variety of behaviors, all of which, according to a now widespread clinical habit (and I mean bad habit) would be referred to as 'anal.'" Part I, Chap. 2, p. 52

"We may accept, then, the evidence of organ-modes in these constructions as a reminder of the fact that experience is anchored in the ground plan of the body." Part I, Chap. 2, p. 108

"Child training systems change to advantage only where the universal trend toward larger cultural entities is sustained." Part II, Chap. 3, p. 165

"If we know the official behavior required for successful participation in the traditional spectacle of a certain culture, we stand only at the beginning of the inquiry into the 'character' of individuals." Part II, Chap. 4, p. 184

"The ego, then, is an 'inner institution' evolved to safeguard that order within individuals on which all outer order depends." Part III, Introduction, p. 194

"Play, then, is a function of the ego, an attempt to synchronize the bodily and the social processes with the self." Part III, Chap. 6, p. 211

"Trust born of care is, in fact, the touchstone of the actuality of a given religion." Part III, Chap. 7, p. 250

"Thus the functioning American, as the heir of a history of extreme contrasts and abrupt changes, bases his final ego identity on some tentative combination of dynamic polarities ...." Part IV, Chap. 8, p. 286

"Whoever hopes and works for a change in Europe which will provide the Germans with a destiny of peace must first understand the historical dilemma of her youth and of the youth of other large areas in the world, where abortive national identities must find new alignments in an over-all industrial and fraternal identity." Part IV, Chap. 9, p. 357

"We must succeed in convincing the Alyoshas that—from a very long-range point of view—their Protestantism is ours and ours, theirs." Part IV, Chap. 10, p. 402

"The 'psychoanalytic situation' is a Western and modern contribution to man's age-old attempts at systematic introspection. It began as a psychotherapeutic method and has led to an encompassing psychological theory. I have emphasized in conclusion the possible implications of both theory and practice for a more judicious orientation in the unlimited prospects and dangers of our technological future." Part IV, Chap. 11, p. 424

Topics for Discussion

Explain Erikson's theory of childhood sexuality, the meaning of Erikson's ideas of zones, modes, modalities, libido and aggression, and how they are illustrated in Erikson's two test cases.

Which Indian tribes did Erikson observe? What are the relevant differences between them? How does providing psychoanalysis of both tribes add to Erikson's theory?

Erikson builds on Freud's theory of the ego. Explain Erikson's theory of the ego and Freud's theory of the ego. Then explain how Erikson's theory extends and deepens Freud's.

What is Ego Failure? How is it displayed in Jean?

What are the eight stages of man? List the relevant contrast psychological states and the virtue of each period. Explain each stage in detail.

Do you find Erikson's generalizations about national identity helpful? For instance, to what extent is analyzing Hitler's childhood a reliable method of understanding the psychology of the German nation?

Do you find Erikson's Freudianism shocking or unusual? What parts of it might offend? Why? Would such a reaction be justified? Why or why not?