Commentary

G.E.

George E.

Vailiant

Brigham and Women's Hospital. Boston, Mass., USA

George E. Vailiant, Division of Psychiatry, Brigham and Women's Hospital, 75 Francis Street, Boston, MA 02115 (USA)

Levenson and Crumpler ask us to consider adult development in fresh ways. They point out that the sociogenic model is fatally flawed by suggesting that *all* adult development is environmentally determined. What they call the 'biological stage' model of Erikson and myself they regard as parochial. Advocates of biological theories of development often appear to be politically conservative, while advocates of purely environmental models tend to be unusually liberal. Levenson and Crumpler also claim that biological stage theory is too biased by a child development perspective and that Erikson's view of intimacy is flawed by the fact that the 'desirability of sharing emotions is of rather recent origin in Anglo-Saxon cultures'. Thus, they suggest, what is needed is an adult-developmental model that is apolitical, nonreductionist, and free of Western materialism. The keys to adult development, as seen by Levenson and Crumpler in their 'liberative' model are postformal operations, integration, the capacity for double entendre irony, a Janus-like view of the world, and the capacity for self-evaluation. In short, they see the key to adult development as an increased capacity for self-knowledge and a Zen-like detachment. In the 20th century, they suggest, the chief exponents of the liberative model have been Jung, Maslow, Loevinger, and Langer.

The difficulty with the liberative model described by Levenson and Crumpler is that by dismissing Eriksonian generativity as materialistic, they suggest that adult maturity consists of not being too concerned with creating children's clinics, providing clean water, or undertaking the fund-raising necessary to finance Tibetan monasteries or Schweitzer's African clinic. The strength of the article by Levenson and Crumpler derives from the same source as its weaknesses. We have much to learn from Taoist views of maturity and from writers who, like Maslow and all armchair psychologists, are liberated from obsessional matters of consequence (such as children's clinics and clean water). Levenson and Crumpler suggest that the capacity of human beings for realization outside biological necessity creates cultural forms that support further development. They observe that neither sociogenesis nor biological necessity can account for the advent of Buddhism. One of the powers of their model is the idealistic notion that part of development is that one becomes how one behaves: 'One is not merely "old and set in one's ways" ... one is old because one is set in one's ways.' In other words, the real task of maturation is not so much to get off the 'wheel' of Western materialism; rather, it is to

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escape Ogden Nash's dire prediction of 'the trouble with the kitten is that eventually it grows up to become a cat'. Really exciting septuagenarians have not forgotten how to play. Thus, Levenson and Crumpler suggest that overcoming determinism become the defining criterion for adult psychological development. As a result they run the risk of becoming mired in a defense of free will. However, they avoid becoming too lost in theory by virtue of multiple examples drawn

from the developmental literature, such as Loevinger's idea that development does involve personal liberation and that neither biological nor social determination is adequate to explain such phenomena.

Levenson and Crumpler suggest that rather than trying to generalize about development from what is common and average, we should try to understand adult development by focusing on the more exceptional cases. In short, the study of Gandhi has more to teach us than a study of practical English politicians. Churchill is reputed to have complained that it cost a million pounds a year to keep Gandhi poor. Should we regard such political realism as evidence of Churchill's maturity or of his immature materialism? My criticism is that the choice Levenson and Crumpler pose does not need to be made. For example, we might study the development of musical skills both by paying attention to prodigies such as Mozart and by studying cohorts of randomly-selected children studied prospectively from age 5 to age 65.

The idealism of Levenson and Crumpler also runs the risk of regarding as developmental givens 'final' developmental stages, such as Loevinger's 'integrative' stage and Maslow's stage of 'self-actualization'. In fact such 'final' developmental stages reflect the ego ideals of their authors rather than well-validated endpoints in human lives.

Levenson and Crumpler point out that the power of the sociogenic model is that sociological analysis is often more effective than psychological and biological analysis in explaining behavior in mid-life. In contrast, the power of biological stage analysis is most useful at the beginning and the end of the life cycle. For example, whether or not a 13-year-old or a 55-year-old female has a child may depend on whether she is postpubertal and premenopausal. However, whether a 30-year-old woman has two or more children will depend on whether she lives in China or the USA and whether she lived there in the 1950s or in the 1990s.

The intellectual traditions of those who have studied adult development are extremely diverse. They are reflected by models as diverse as biological determinism, Piagetian structuralism, ego psychology, psychobiography, sociological determinism, and the philosophy of free will and humanism. We continue to need fresh approaches to the study of adult development, just as we need fresh approaches to poetry. Levenson and Crumpler suggest that the task of students of adult development is not to fight over whether Cyril Burt or Franz Boas was right about the development of adult intelligence, or even to try to understand the relative contributions of biology and of sociogenesis to adult development. Rather, they suggest, the task of adult development is to free the maturing individual from the influence of both the environment and biology. Like much idealistic thinking, this is bad science, but it is a valuable and useful sermon. And those readers who are so materialistic as to fear religion and sermons may read Levenson's and Crumpler's article as they would a wise opinion piece or editorial.