PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

The Human Relationship with Time

The Assumption of Completion and the Foreclosure of Reflective Development

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the human relationship with time through the **assumption of completion**: the belief that the ways of thinking and living already acquired are sufficient for later life, and that essential learning is over. This assumption makes further reflective development appear unnecessary and weakens the sense of responsibility for pursuing it. When the routes from practice back to learning are kept closed, reflective development is actively foreclosed. Mental development is the broader term; reflective development concerns the reassessment of one's assumptions and relationships, including the willingness to act on that reassessment. Individuation is understood as taking responsibility for building one's life within a world shared with other people, animals and nature. Age and professional achievement can undermine this process when they become claims to exemption from further learning. Adolescence matters as a transition in which guidance from family and school changes and responsibility for one's own formation becomes more explicit. Closure can operate at two points: a person may exclude their judgements from reconsideration, or acknowledge a wrong while exempting their conduct from the changes that acknowledgement requires. These attitudes differ, but both can block responsibility within relationships. They must also be distinguished from recognising a wrong and struggling to change. Over time, repetition may be mistaken for maturity, and skill in defending an established position may grow. Through education, work and authority, personal closure can limit others' development and reinforce structural problems that erode the material and social conditions of shared life. Drawing on philosophies of time and education, autonomy and environmental ethics, and a limited psychological literature, the essay argues that development requires keeping open both the passage from experience to reassessment and the passage from reassessment to responsible action.

Keywords: Time; assumption of completion; mental development; reflective development; adolescence; adulthood; individuation; responsibility; learning; experience; habit; tradition; ideology; reflective autonomy; resistance to time; generational conflict; social competence; expertise; competence that undermines individuation; social habitat; awareness of coexistence.

From the beginning of life in the womb, a human being is caught up in a process they did not initiate. Time takes hold of them; bodily formation proceeds, while the meanings of the world they will inhabit are prepared before their arrival. After birth, they enter this world through family, language, culture and education. In learning how to live, they also learn what is considered worth living for. The image of time taking hold of a person expresses this unchosen beginning and a temporal existence that cannot be halted by an act of will. As people begin to recognise the relationships that shape them, they encounter the possibility of evaluating their direction and participating in their own formation.

Ageing and taking responsibility for development follow different paths. The calendar records elapsed time; it cannot tell us what a person has learnt from living. Time does not seek consent for bodily ageing, but it does not guarantee reflective maturity either. The image of time handing development over to the individual expresses this asymmetry. A person must participate in the work they may have expected the passing years to do for them. That responsibility is exercised within available possibilities, not through mastery over every condition that shapes the mind.

Mental development here includes learning, remembering, interpreting, imagining and processing emotions. Reflective development concerns how people examine and revise the ways of thinking and living acquired through these processes. It includes asking new questions, understanding another's experience and imagining different possibilities for living. The essay calls particular habits, assumptions and methods ‘tools’; their wider organisation into a way of interpreting and directing life is a ‘framework’. Development requires that this framework remain open to examination and that examination be able to change conduct. ‘Foreclosure’ names the keeping closed of either passage. It does not mean that all mental activity ceases: a person may continue to acquire information and skills while protecting the framework that governs their relationships from revision.

The essay proceeds through conceptual analysis and philosophical comparison. Its examples of parenting, education and management are hypothetical illustrations of closure within relationships. Psychological research helps delimit the argument; it does not directly establish the proposed links with generational conflict or habitat destruction. Adolescence is treated as a social transition, not a biological deadline: active participation can begin in childhood, and unplanned transformations remain possible in adulthood.

For the purposes of this argument, the defining feature of formation through childhood and into adolescence is the reach of environmental influences. People acquire, within the same environment, the tools with which to compare the meanings offered to them. What deserves trust, which conduct earns approval, what counts as shameful or right, and what makes a life successful may enter a person's world before independent evaluation becomes possible. A child is not a passive vessel for these relationships. Nevertheless, children are not on equal terms with adults in determining their boundaries and resources.

Tradition, custom and ideology offer tools for interpreting situations and building a shared life. The problem arises when their acquired character is forgotten and they are assumed to remain valid for every subsequent situation. The sense of having ‘learnt everything naturally’ is an interpretation that renders the origins of learning invisible. What was taught under particular conditions may be carried as a truth disclosed directly by life itself. Life's continuation then appears to offer fresh occasions for using one's existing resources, rather than reasons to transform them.

Adolescence and the transition to adulthood matter because intensive guidance from family and school begins to give way to greater responsibility for directing one's life. A person faces questions that those who raised them cannot answer on their behalf. ‘Becoming an individual’ names the process of assuming social responsibility for one's formation; human worth and rights do not depend on achieving it. Guidance may persist, diminish or change its form at different times. The decisive question is whether inherited ways of living are still expected to suffice automatically for encounters yet to come.

During this transition, a person may encounter contradictions in the adults who raised them and recognise that their judgements are not the only possible ones. Beauvoir's treatment of adolescence in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* approaches this problem through the disclosure of the received world's human-made character and the confrontation with one's own choices. Beauvoir also leaves open the possibility of reassessing later choices (Beauvoir 2006, pt. 2). The present essay emphasises the possibility of mistaking the end of a stage in one's upbringing for the completion of one's development. Adolescence matters as a transition in which this problem can become pronounced; the assumption of completion can also emerge or strengthen later in life.

The threshold concerns one's relationship to knowledge: how it was acquired, why it commands assent, and whether it remains adequate to the life it directs.

Here the assumption of completion becomes decisive. It is the belief that the tools of thought and living acquired throughout life, especially during childhood and adolescence, are sufficient for subsequent life, and that essential learning has been completed. This need not involve claiming to know every detail of one's life. A person may remain receptive to new information while treating the basic resources through which they evaluate it as a finished whole requiring no further change.

On this assumption, continued reflective development ceases to appear as one's responsibility. Existing tools are to be used; transforming, replacing or relinquishing them is no longer understood as an ongoing task. The assumption of completion thus supplies grounds for failing to take responsibility for further development.

Arrest becomes active when the judgement that learning is finished and application should take its place closes the routes through which experience might transform the person. No explicit declaration is necessary: responses to questions, objections and errors can sustain that judgement in practice. The assumption of completion supplies the justification; failure to take responsibility sustains it; foreclosure keeps the transformative routes of learning closed.

Faced with failure, a person may apply familiar tools more insistently instead of examining their adequacy. Faced with another way of life, they may dismiss its participants rather than question their own criteria. Closure consists in repeatedly neutralising what these encounters might change. Missing one opportunity to learn is insufficient to establish it; the pattern concerns someone who no longer regards their governing framework as needing revision.

Kant's account of immaturity matters because it distinguishes chronological adulthood from the use of one's own understanding. Yet the assumption of completion examined here is not confined to someone who openly admits needing another's guidance. A person may consider themselves entirely independent while continuing to use inherited tools without examination. The essay's engagement with Kant extends responsibility for using one's own understanding to the formation of the resources on which that use depends (Kant n.d.).

Practice remains part of development when its consequences can lead back to learning. A person may discover the limits of a method through using it and revise it accordingly. When results serve only to confirm an earlier judgement, this return route closes: application becomes a means of insulating the framework from experience.

Dewey's reflections on growth and habit help clarify this distinction. *Democracy and Education* values the capacity to reorganise habits in response to new conditions and criticises the foreclosure of growth through mechanical repetition unaccompanied by thought. This approach makes visible the difference between repeatedly exercising a skill and evaluating its limits (Dewey 1916, chap. 4).

Consider a parent who treats their child as they themselves were treated, regarding this as the natural order of life. The child's objection may invite reconsideration of that order, or become a reason to apply the inherited method more strictly. In the latter case, experience makes the parent more determined without making the relationship more open to revision.

Imagine someone who has lived for fifty-five years but still uses, without reassessment, the tools of thought and living they considered sufficient at twenty-five. ‘Remaining at twenty-five’ does not mean retaining the vitality of that age. It means remaining bound, in one's relationship to those tools, to the judgement of completion made then. Twenty-five is a threshold specific to this example, not a universal age of closure. New knowledge, relationships and responsibilities may have accumulated during the intervening thirty years. Yet if the basic tools for meeting them remain closed to evaluation, the expansion of a life story cannot be equated with a corresponding growth in reflective development.

Those years are not empty in relation to closure either. Repeated use may produce greater skill in applying the same tools and greater strength in defending them. The length of their use may itself be treated as proof of their validity. Repetition is then presented as experience; experience supports a claim to competence; and that claim supports the judgement that further learning is unnecessary. ‘At my age’ and ‘I have done it this way for years’ can become reasons for dispensing with an evaluation of limits. While the assumption of completion directs repetition, the duration of repetition can reinforce the assumption. What the essay challenges is the belief that age and experience automatically guarantee reflective competence.

Experiences can multiply without changing the judgements through which they are understood. Their developmental significance depends on what they allow a person to reconsider and do differently.

Seneca distinguishes the length of life from how it is lived (Seneca 1889, chap. 7). That distinction acquires a further significance here: elapsed time may become a certificate of authority. When age makes a person's word unquestionable, the years already lived are used against the possibility of learning from those still to come.

Augustine's account of memory, attention and expectation shows how past, present and future coexist in experience (Augustine 1887, bk. 11, chaps. 20, 26-28). For this essay, the question is what that coexistence permits: can present encounters alter the meaning of the past, and can the future hold more than the repetition of an established life? This draws on his account of temporal experience without adopting its entire theological framework.

A person who considers learning complete does not cease to face the future. They make plans, work, pursue success and may adapt to new circumstances. Yet the meaning of that future can be restricted to a period in which unquestioned resources will be applied. Its possibility of making them someone different

from who they are today contracts. The human relationship with time shifts from transformation through new encounters towards the continuation of an existing form across the passing years.

Bergson's conception of duration sharpens the distinction between change and development. In *Creative Evolution*, the past remains active in the present and personality continually changes (Bergson 1911, chap. 1). Closure changes too: it may become more rigid, more subtle or easier to defend. The person in the fifty-five/twenty-five example may acquire knowledge and argumentative skill precisely to protect a framework regarded as complete. The issue is therefore the direction of change. Becoming better at defending closure does not amount to reopening one's formation.

As the body ages, the gap may widen between the life a person has lived and the framework through which they understand it. This is the temporal asymmetry at stake. New relationships, responsibilities and losses enlarge the demands of life while the judgements used to meet them remain protected from revision. The established framework falls behind the life it must address.

The body continues to age while the person resists allowing lived experience to revise their established judgements. Such resistance forces new situations to fit familiar tools rather than testing those tools against the situations. It differs from considering a new demand and rejecting it for reasons: reasoned refusal can itself express responsibility for one's development.

The assumption of completion can produce a struggle between a changing life and the image of self a person seeks to preserve. Needs and relationships expose the limits of once-sufficient tools. Instead of reconsidering those tools, the person may treat whoever reveals their limits as the problem. Self-protection becomes an effort to make others conform to old judgements. This struggle need not be consciously recognised or follow a fixed sequence from inner conflict to social conflict. An environment that shares the same assumptions may support closure without making it appear conflictual at all.

The direction of individuation is given by **the awareness that one builds one's world within a world in which others also exist**. Those others include people, animals and the natural world of which humanity is part. Evaluating one's conduct, understanding another and changing where necessary belong together because one's life is never exhausted by one's own purposes. What one does enters the conditions of other lives.

Social competence means making this awareness effective within relationships: recognising another's experience and right to speak, examining the consequences of one's conduct and changing shared arrangements when necessary. It may require resisting social expectations rather than fitting in. With other people, reciprocal speech and objection are central; with animals and nature, responsibility includes recognising forms of existence and conditions of life beyond their usefulness to us. These relationships differ, but each calls into question the sufficiency of one's own purposes. Individuation concerns how a person inhabits a shared world, not their entitlement to human worth or rights.

A high level of intelligence, advanced mathematical knowledge, the ability to overturn an established paradigm in physics, or legal knowledge capable of saving a person's life does not automatically bring about individuation in this sense. Someone may be open to learning at work while treating their assumptions in family and other social relationships as unquestionable. Professional progress does not compensate for closure in social individuation. Working life also involves social relationships. The distinction is between becoming proficient at a particular activity and taking responsibility for one's social existence, including that proficiency.

Expertise can undermine individuation when it becomes a certificate of adequacy for one's entire existence. Knowledge, qualifications or achievement may be used to justify the belief that social relationships require no reassessment. The assumption of completion then draws support from professional success as well as elapsed years. What makes competence destructive of individuation is its conversion into a claim to exemption that prevents a person from encountering their own limits.

The situation described here as ‘pathological’ is not simply success in one area alongside inadequacy in another. It becomes apparent when a person refuses to examine their social shortcomings and turns success, competence or position into grounds for exerting pressure on others. The word is not used as a clinical diagnosis. It refers to damage to the possibilities of coexistence and responsibility within relationships. While using competence to place their own conduct beyond evaluation, a person may also invalidate others' objections. The same abilities can benefit both the person and shared life when their own social formation remains open to examination.

Fromm's discussion of the ‘pathology of normalcy’ helps explain why social approval cannot certify development. A socially shared defect can appear normal, acquire cultural value and be reinforced by a sense of success without being identical to individual neurosis (Fromm 1944). The question pursued here is how that reinforcement works over time: age and competence can validate a judgement of completion, while authority allows a person to carry the limits of their own formation into the lives of others.

The form this damage takes varies with a person's relationships and available power. It may appear in childhood relationships as a refusal to listen, in employees as the use of professional knowledge to silence colleagues, or in employers as the conversion of success into grounds for dismissing workers' objections. In scientists it may appear as a claim to unquestionable authority beyond their expertise; in voters as a refusal to evaluate the consequences of their preferences; in politicians as the treatment of criticism as an attack on authority. These are possible manifestations of closure, not necessary features of those roles. Damage ‘corresponding to one's level’ concerns the reach of influence, decision-making authority and power over other lives, not one's worth as a human being. Nor can a child's developing relationships and the responsibility of an adult with extensive authority be assessed by the same measure.

Moving beyond the environment that formed oneself means encountering explanations and possibilities it did not supply. Language, knowledge and relationships remain the conditions of thought. What changes is the authority granted to inherited interpretations: they become open to comparison and judgement instead of settling the matter in advance.

Moving from one tradition to another ideology is therefore insufficient evidence of development. The same unquestioning allegiance may persist with new content. Equally, retaining an inherited idea is not automatically closure. A person may examine it, recognise its limits and adopt it for reasons they can defend. Development should be assessed through the openness of this relationship to evaluation and transformation, rather than through constant changes of opinion or the rejection of everything that shaped one's upbringing.

Mark Wrathall's account of Heidegger's authenticity provides a limited comparison here: taking responsibility for one's possibilities does not require an unconditioned beginning. A person already inhabits a world and inherits possibilities within it (Wrathall 2025, secs. 2.4, 2.4.2). The question here concerns how those possibilities can be reconsidered and lived differently. Heidegger's ontological analysis supplies a comparison, not an age-based measure of maturity.

The normative basis of this essay is the value of participating in the judgements that direct one's social life and recognising the same participation in others. Inherited assumptions must therefore remain

answerable to those whose lives they shape. Responsibility for development asks people, within the possibilities available to them, to examine whether the framework directing their lives remains adequate.

This responsibility extends through the roles of parent, teacher, manager, neighbour and citizen. Each gives a person's established judgements some reach into another's life, and therefore makes listening to objection part of examining oneself.

Whether someone genuinely questions themselves becomes apparent in how they respond to another person's objection and whether they change their conduct when there is reason to do so. There is no requirement to accept every objection; but age, success or expertise cannot be the sole grounds for retaining a view. In the parenting example, listening to the child differs from converting the child's objection into an instrument for vindicating one's method. Allowing the child's experience to reveal a problem with that method, and assuming responsibility accordingly, gives questioning a real place in the relationship.

Struggling to change must be distinguished from keeping change at bay. A parent who recognises a wrong but repeats the behaviour may still be trying to alter it. Taking responsibility, making a sustained effort or seeking help indicates that a route towards change remains open. Acknowledgement alone, however, neither establishes development nor removes the harm. When someone knowingly preserves a wrong for comfort, advantage or superiority, recognition has been prevented from governing conduct.

A parent who declares ‘I do not make mistakes’ closes a different route: the possibility of reconsidering their judgement. Recognition offers the struggling parent a starting point that this attitude excludes. The closure belongs to the attitude being sustained, not to an unchangeable essence of the person. Change becomes possible when error can both be recognised and make a difference to conduct.

A manager who silences an employee with ‘I already know’ may believe their judgement infallible, or know it is wrong and seek to protect their position. The denial of the employee's participation can be identified and criticised without first deciding which motive is present. Explaining how the denial is sustained, however, requires preserving the difference: one manager excludes reconsideration, while the other refuses to act on what they already recognise.

Closure can thus operate at two points. In the first, a person exempts their judgements from reassessment; in the second, they exempt their conduct from the changes their own assessment requires. Both can interrupt responsibility within a relationship, without being psychologically identical. The assumption of completion provides a specific justification for the first and can extend into the second when an established position or way of life is treated as beyond revision even after a wrong is acknowledged. Knowing wrongdoing alone does not prove that someone considers learning complete. It does show that knowledge cannot substitute for responsibility. Reflective development requires keeping both routes open: from experience to reconsideration, and from reconsideration to responsible action.

The proposed explanation of generational conflict concerns the transformation of an area closed within one's own formation into a limit on the formation of the next generation. Tools acquired by an earlier generation under particular conditions are treated as unquestionable standards for the different encounters of the next. The new generation's demand to participate in its own formation thus meets personal closure transformed into a claim to determine how another may develop.

‘I was your age once’ can begin an exchange of experience between generations. When it becomes ‘Therefore I already know what you are experiencing’, it can become a claim to authority that dispenses with listening to differences in the next generation's experience. Competence claimed on the basis of age

and repetition becomes grounds for authority over another's present. The conflict concerns the authority with which one generation's past is entitled to speak in the life of the next. Someone who keeps their own past closed to reassessment may expect another's future to continue that past.

This does not identify a single cause of all generational conflict. Greater age is insufficient evidence of closure, just as youth is insufficient evidence of openness. What matters is whether people open their resources to evaluation and whether they impose them as fixed limits on another's formation.

The possibility of exercising responsibility for development is nevertheless inseparable from social conditions. Participation in one's own formation becomes harder where questioning is punished, access to alternative sources is obstructed, or the means of devoting time to thought are continually reduced. The relationship between what people can do and what they are permitted to do must enter any assessment of the scope of responsibility.

Education shows why this responsibility is not merely personal. When appointments rest on professional qualifications while the relational dimension of individuation remains unexamined, a person may acquire authority in a role for which they are technically competent without assuming its social responsibility. The concern here is the treatment of professional competence as a certificate of adequacy across all relationships. Teaching makes this problem particularly visible because it participates directly in the conditions of another's formation.

A teacher who regards their framework as beyond question may transmit course material while suppressing students' questions, objections or alternative explanations. Students then learn both the subject and the suspension of their own judgement before authority. The damage reaches beyond the present lesson: the tools with which they will interpret later problems are being shaped within that relationship. Teaching can therefore obstruct the very capacity for further learning that education should sustain. This may be difficult to overcome, although it does not determine the student's entire future.

Freire's critique of ‘banking education’ examines how learners are reduced to storing knowledge while their participation as enquiring subjects is suppressed. Awareness of human incompleteness, by contrast, grounds the continuity of education (Freire 1970, chap. 2). The assumption of completion reveals a way this continuity can be broken: a learner may later treat acquired knowledge as grounds for ending further learning, then impose the same judgement as a teacher. Dewey's account of education as continued growth brings the future consequences into view (Dewey 1916, chap. 4). What is at stake in the teacher's openness is also the student's capacity to learn after the lesson has ended.

An account of foreclosure must hold together personal participation and the conditions that enable it. External pressure does not explain everything a person does to sustain closure; an appeal to individual will does not explain the conditions in which closure takes shape. Responsibility for future development does not assign blame for every limitation imposed in the past.

Reflective closure can nourish structural problems and draw strength from them. Unequal rights to speak, punishment of objection and narrow measures of success support the assumption of completion, while those who hold it may reproduce the same conditions. This occurs as personal assumptions become criteria for decisions, rules and practices. When problems caused by a practice become grounds for applying its tools more rigorously rather than reconsidering them, damage is deepened from within. Here the social dimension of the ‘pathological’ relationship emerges: the capacity to identify and correct problems is eroded by the practices that sustain them.

The field exposed to this erosion may be called the **social habitat**. Habitat comprises the material and social conditions through which people sustain life and build a future with others. Water, soil and a liveable environment belong to it, as do trust, mutual learning, the right to speak and the possibility of correcting shared problems. To the extent that reflective closure makes objections inaudible and errors uncorrectable, it can damage the social ground that enables participation in one's own development. Its connection to damage to the material environment must be traced through the decisions into which closure is translated, the practices it sustains and the ways it obstructs evaluation of their consequences.

Extending awareness of coexistence beyond human beings takes us beyond treating habitat merely as an environment for human use. Leopold's land ethic includes soil, water, plants and animals within the community and places humanity among its members (Leopold 1949, “The Community Concept”). For this essay, the comparison matters because it recognises that people build their own worlds within the lives of other beings. The assumption of completion is questioned insofar as it closes human purposes and tools to learning from these relationships. The relationship with nature also becomes a matter for reassessing one's own formation.

Consider a hypothetical production facility that uses large quantities of water. Its managers define success solely by output and refuse to treat worsening access to water among neighbouring residents as grounds for revising that criterion. They improve their technical knowledge while dismissing those who live with the consequences. Greater competence then helps sustain a harmful practice. Closure reaches the material habitat through the decisions it protects and the consequences it excludes from consideration.

The expression ‘a society destroying its own habitat’ does not attribute the same will, interests or responsibility to everyone involved. Those making decisions, sustaining practices, benefiting from them and bearing their consequences may be different people. Participating in a practice out of economic necessity cannot be equated with defending its validity through the assumption of completion. Responsibility must be assessed with regard to a person's voice, decision-making authority and opportunities to understand consequences and intervene. The claim is not that every structural problem originates in personal closure. Combined with such problems, the assumption of completion may become a phenomenon that deepens them from within and narrows the routes towards correction.

This transformation brings the social dimension of the relationship with time into focus. Practices counted as successful today may erode tomorrow's conditions of life as their effects unfold over time. Treating once-sufficient tools as immutable can leave the next generation with more than a reflective limit: it may narrow the conditions in which that generation will live. By placing the adequacy of life-sustaining tools beyond discussion, people may use those same tools to exhaust the foundations of shared life. The contradiction is that the activity of sustaining life destroys the conditions of its own continuation. Responsibility for development thus extends to oneself, others and the conditions of a common future.

The psychological literature helps delimit this philosophical explanation. Baltes's life-span approach treats development as multidirectional, involving both gains and losses. Hartshorne and Germine show that different cognitive abilities do not peak at the same age. Somerville discusses the problems of defining brain maturity through a single measure or timetable. These works support caution against assuming that the entire mind follows one developmental trajectory (Baltes 1987; Hartshorne and Germine 2015; Somerville 2016).

In Weil and colleagues' study, correspondence between performance and confidence judgements in a particular visual task improves across adolescence. This is a limited example of the capacity to evaluate one's mental activity itself developing; it does not measure philosophical self-awareness as a whole. Roberts and colleagues' meta-analysis of longitudinal research identifies personality changes throughout adulthood. Adolescence therefore cannot be treated as a boundary beyond which change is impossible (Roberts et al. 2006; Weil et al. 2013).

Kruglanski and Webster's account of cognitive closure examines how the need to reach a definite answer and retain it can affect the evaluation of information. Deci and Ryan's review of research considers differences between autonomy-supportive and controlling contexts in motivation and learning. These sources illuminate possible mechanisms of closure and participation. They are not presented as studies directly testing the assumption of completion in its entirety (Deci and Ryan 1987; Kruglanski and Webster 1996).

The contribution proposed here lies in the relationship between elapsed time, the assumption of completion and the reproduction of closure through social authority. Fromm illuminates socially normalised damage; Freire makes awareness of incompleteness central to education (Freire 1970, chap. 2; Fromm 1944). This essay follows a particular connection: people may treat their formation as complete, convert years and achievements into grounds for that judgement, and impose the resulting limits on others' development. Time then becomes both the medium in which closure is reinforced and part of the authority claimed for it.

Taking responsibility for development cannot be reduced to an obligation to become ever faster, more productive or more adaptable. Rosa, Dörre and Lessenich's account of dynamic stabilisation examines how maintaining an existing order may itself require growth and acceleration (Rosa et al. 2017). People can also participate in their formation by questioning these demands or changing the pace of their lives. Wider participation is supported by relationships that permit mutual learning and by the protection of the material conditions of shared life.

Closure persists through conduct and relationships; neither adulthood nor a settled history makes it irreversible. An objection, failure or unfamiliar encounter may expose the limits of established judgements, though none guarantees change. A person cannot erase the past, but can reconsider the authority it exercises in the present.

A person does not choose their beginning; they can take responsibility for how the life inherited from it continues. The passing years cannot perform that work on their behalf. **As time advances, the mind may settle into repetition, and a person may count the duration of that repetition as proof of maturity.** Adulthood therefore requires more than having learnt enough to act: it requires remaining open to what the consequences of action can teach.

That openness finds its direction in a world shared with other people, animals and nature. **Knowing does not replace allowing what is known to change one's life and relationships.** When personal closure becomes a limit on another's formation, once-sufficient tools can also narrow the common future. Taking responsibility for development means recognising others' possibility of participation and caring for the conditions of shared life left to those who follow.

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