

UNITED WISDOM

Adult development without a single ladder

Human Nature and Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *live and learn*

Robert Browning, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, a short fragment from the selected opening of the poem; the Russian rendering is our own translation. Browning's Shorter Poems, editor Franklin T. Baker, fourth edition, Macmillan1917, Gutenberg16376, displayed line3121, printed page136. A poetic religious voice does not establish a scientific sequence of adulthood.

What this article is about

An adult began learning a new language. In the first class, he had to introduce himself slowly, ask for a question to be repeated and search for a simple word. In his established profession, he was used to explaining complicated things confidently. At home, he still knew who needed help and which agreements he had to honour. Yet after the lesson, an uncomfortable comparison arose: it was as though he had returned to the beginning of life. In this illustrative scene, one new domain became a measure of the whole person. Separating the tasks changes the picture: a beginner in speaking another language remains experienced in other matters, while his responsibilities have not disappeared.

Here, development will mean changes in capabilities, ways of acting and relationships with tasks that we can discuss. This is the article's working frame, not a measurement of a person's overall worth. Selected parts of Baltes's theoretical paper, an author research preprint by Specht and colleagues, and a poem by Browning allow different questions about time, change and the future. They do not combine into a single scientific ladder. We will consider how to name the domain and criterion of movement, recognise limitations and preserve responsibility, without turning a biography into a competition over the correct age, profession or order of life.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

I. Beginning a new task does not erase a previous life

During the lesson, words may genuinely be missing. This is a particular difficulty that needs no embellishment with a story about hidden wisdom. But it does not yet follow that the person has become less adult in general. Knowing a language, conducting a professional conversation and honouring a household agreement concern different things. If we choose the first, it is useful to describe exactly what is not yet possible: answering without preparation, distinguishing a question by ear or asking for clarification. Each description will acquire an appropriate scale. A general verdict on oneself says neither which word to find nor what help is currently available.

Previous experience does not automatically have to work in a new domain either. A good professional may expect familiar confidence to transfer immediately to an unfamiliar conversation. When this does not happen, there is a temptation either to devalue oneself or to declare the lesson pointless. Between these conclusions is the ordinary possibility of examining the task. Which aspects of previous experience were actually useful: preparation, attention to the question or willingness to clarify? What requires separate learning? This examination guarantees no success, but preserves the distinction between a limitation in a particular skill and a rejection of one's entire previous life.

Nor should every awkward moment be called useful in advance. The person may have chosen an unsuitable format, encountered an unclear instruction or discovered that the current goal is unnecessary for him. Each possibility requires its own information. Difficulty alone explains neither what purpose it serves nor why continuing should be compulsory. He can ask the teacher about versions of the task, check the timetable or clarify his own goal. He can decide to end the trial lesson. A beginner has a right to available information and a decision, not merely a duty to endure for the sake of promised growth.

In our scene, after the lesson the person opens his work correspondence and calmly resolves a familiar issue. This turn proves no universal maturity; it simply returns several domains to one biography. He can now write more precisely: I currently answer slowly in the new language, and today I completed my established work. If an assessment of the language itself is needed, it still lies ahead. If a promise at home must be honoured, it requires a separate action. These coexisting tasks are not a contradiction that must be eliminated with a single mark for oneself, but the ordinary structure of a particular life.

II. Different directions do not automatically add up to height

The word “development” is often accompanied by an image of moving upwards. The image is useful while it is clear what counts as height. In language, we can discuss understanding speech or the accuracy of a written answer. In a work project, we can discuss delivering an agreed result. In relationships, we can discuss a particular promise and how it was honoured. If height means everything at once, however, the criterion becomes unclear. Someone may learn a new activity while taking on fewer tasks elsewhere. To understand the significance of the change, we need to name the domain and consequences, not merely the direction of an arrow on an imagined diagram.

Paul B. Baltes's theoretical paper of1987 considers development throughout life through several propositions, including different directions of change, combinations of gains and losses, plasticity and its limitations, and historical context. The opening, abstract and a selected table of propositions were read here, not the entire text. This is a theoretical framework, not an experiment proving an identical fate for every person. It gives grounds for asking about heterogeneous development. It does not allow every loss to be declared useful, every capacity infinitely changeable or every effort sufficient for a result promised in advance.

For a personal note, we can choose two domains that actually matter now and avoid comparing them through an overall height. For example, conversation in a new language requires time, while caring for someone close requires availability at particular hours. The issue is not to calculate a universal personality level, but to see the conditions of compatibility. Where is there free time? Which responsibilities have already been agreed? What will happen if the lesson is moved? These questions concern a particular timetable. An answer about inner growth does not replace checking who will be left without promised help and when.

Individual changes may have conflicting consequences. More demanding study will take time that the person previously devoted to something else. The decision may remain justified for him, but its cost needs to be named. That cost cannot automatically be recorded as a beneficial sacrifice by everyone involved. Another person may have their own right to an agreement and their own assessment of the change. One person's development contains no tacit consent from another. The question of direction therefore connects with the distribution of time and responsibilities, preserving the distinction between a personal aspiration and a shared decision.

III. A criterion of change follows its subject

Suppose the goal of the first month of lessons is to ask for directions independently and understand the main answer in a familiar neighbourhood. This is a limited criterion. It promises neither fluent communication in every situation nor spiritual or moral maturity. If the person needs a different task, the criterion can be changed explicitly, explaining why. But it is useful to remember that a new formulation changes the question. Success under one condition cannot be treated as success under another without explanation. Otherwise, an account of development becomes a moving assessment that is always confirmed only because its basis has been quietly replaced.

For some domains, a clear criterion is harder to find. A person wants to speak more attentively with people close to him, but “more attentively” does not yet describe situations. He can choose one commitment: hear a particular question through before answering, establish a convenient time for a conversation or complete something already agreed. These examples do not constitute a universal test of good relationships. They simply show that a personal intention can be linked to an observable action and a participant's view. Even a successful conversation proves no final change of character. It leaves a precise instance that can be revisited without an excessive conclusion.

A criterion does not have to be a number. Sometimes it is enough to check whether a needed text is prepared, an instruction is clear or a meeting time agreed. A number may also be useful if we know what it counts. The number of lessons reports attendance, but does not automatically report speech comprehension. The length of an account of personal change reports the length of the account. For a conclusion to make sense, the method of checking must match the subject. In a personal note, this may be a simple distinction: what I did, what I was able to complete and what I only intend to try.

There are tasks in which assessment belongs to more than one person. Someone may consider himself more reliable, while the recipient of a promise points to an unfulfilled part. That person's account need not become a universal verdict on his personality, but it cannot be excluded just because it disrupts an attractive story of growth. It is worth returning to the agreement itself and the facts of its fulfilment. If the parties understand a condition differently, a conversation about it will be needed. Self-assessment, checking a result and another's experience remain different information, rather than merging into one convenient mark for development.

IV. Age provides no ready-made list of compulsory achievements

We can change the learner's age in our scene without changing the main question. Which words does he need, and what learning conditions are available? A date of birth may be an important part of a biography or the conditions of a particular programme. But it does not itself imply that the person must already know this language, hold a particular position or have an established family arrangement. When an expectation is presented as a law of development, it is useful to ask where it came from. Is it an institution's requirement, a personal preference, a custom among acquaintances or a research claim? Each basis needs its own check and scope of application.

Adult biographies may include work, relocation, care, learning, living alone, partnership and many other circumstances. The list does not mean everyone needs to pass through every item in one sequence. The occurrence of an event establishes neither how a person understands it nor exactly what changed in their actions. The absence of an event reports no absence of responsibility or ability to learn. To avoid turning a biography into a questionnaire of worth, we can describe particular tasks and agreements. A personal question then remains connected to the person's life, rather than a competition to conform to someone else's order.

Comparison with a contemporary can be useful for limited information. We can learn which course they chose and how the lessons are organised. But their biography does not thereby become a control group for our own. We do not know all the starting conditions, goals and costs of their decision. Even a reliable account of the result concerns them and their chosen task. If we need a similar result, we should check suitable conditions for ourselves. Envy, admiration or hope may be present in the conversation, but none of these feelings makes the comparison methodologically sufficient or compulsory.

Rejecting a single timetable does not cancel particular deadlines. If a translation is promised by Friday, the date matters regardless of one's philosophical attitude to age. If a programme has an admission rule, that specific rule should be checked. Its fairness can be discussed, but first it is useful to distinguish it from an assessment of human worth. Two things retain their places: the established condition of a particular undertaking and the person's right not to consider their entire life a failure for diverging from a general template. Freedom from a universal ladder does not mean release from commitments already accepted.

V. A research trajectory differs from a personal calendar

The author preprint by Specht, Egloff and Schmukle of2011 investigates changes in Big Five traits using data from a German panel sample. The abstract and selected methods and limitations were read. The work distinguishes change in mean level from stability in people's relative ordering. These are different research questions. The available copy is marked as a version preceding final publication; it is not replaced here with the journal text. We derive no numerical personal forecast, universal deadline for adulthood or effect of our exercise from it. Research on traits is not a measurement of a person's moral worth.

The authors identify limitations concerning the time interval, understanding mechanisms and transferring findings between substantially different populations. A particular life event in our note therefore receives no proven causal role merely because it coincides with a change. We can name the sequence of events and our own explanation. A strong causal conclusion requires appropriate grounds. This distinction matters especially when someone is offered a ready-made account: after relocation, marriage or a change of work, they must necessarily become a particular kind of person. In this article, such expectations remain expectations, rather than a research finding about that particular life.

A personal calendar works differently from a set of research measurements. It can record the beginning of a course, a missed lesson, a successful conversation and a changed timetable. These notes have everyday value for the chosen question. But a few notes do not become a replication of a scientific procedure. They create neither a comparable sample nor controlled conditions nor a reliable trait profile. We can use them more modestly: to see which assignment was completed and what we still do not know. This purpose leaves research with its method and the person with the ability to solve a practical problem without pretended laboratory precision.

In the chosen scene, the learner does not need to establish his place among all adults to prepare for the next conversation. He may need a list of familiar questions or clarification from the teacher. This decision is far narrower than the scientific problem of personality change. It is not less reasonable because of its limited scope. On the contrary, an appropriate scale allows a result to be checked in a way that is actually available. If a separate question about traits or health later arises, it will need a suitable procedure and competent help, rather than expanding this note into an answer to everything.

VI. The possibility of change has conditions and limits

Speaking of development without an overall ladder does not promise that everything is possible at any time. A person has particular resources, time, knowledge and conditions. Some conditions can be changed; others currently remain beyond their capabilities. To choose an action, it is useful to name the particular obstacle. An unclear assignment can be clarified. A timetable can be discussed. A course's cost needs to be checked against the current offer. If an obstacle cannot yet be removed, that is important information about the plan. It should not disappear under an appeal to want it more strongly or become more mature in order to continue.

In a new domain, one can retain a right to seek help. Turning to a teacher, an instruction or familiar material does not cancel adult responsibility. It may be part of completing a task if the source is suitable and access conditions clear. At the same time, help guarantees no result and does not have to be available from every person. A request remains a request; its recipient has their own time and right to answer. A practical plan therefore includes not only the learner's need but an actual arrangement. Imagined availability of help should not turn into a commitment that no one accepted.

An unsuccessful trial option can also be described without a whole history of defeat. For example, evening lessons coincided with a care commitment already made to someone close. This is a discovered timetable incompatibility. Another format may work; perhaps no suitable option is currently available. Neither outcome itself reports whether the person has stopped developing altogether. The task is an honest decision about a particular plan. If learning is postponed, it is worth naming what happens to payment, materials and commitments. Closing an organisational question is more useful than a promise necessarily to transform one's whole personality later.

There are also limitations for which an everyday note is insufficient. For mental health concerns, NIMH recommends discussing the question with a health care provider; reasoning about directions of development establishes no cause of a condition and does not replace that consultation. No treatment scheme or health check is offered here. The point is simply to preserve the scale: a language question remains a language question, while a question about one's condition needs its own consideration. A person need not describe every difficulty as a moral failure, but should not receive a promise that a new interpretation will itself remove the actual problem.

VII. A poetic future does not have to become a forecast

In the opening of “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, Browning creates a literary voice addressing an entire life and its religious meaning. A selected opening passage was read, not the whole poem. This is poetry, rather than a report of a completed study or a record of a historical rabbi's actual speech. We may hear in it an invitation not to exhaust life in youth. Yet its understanding of a whole and a divine design retains its own genre. It does not prove that every later age necessarily brings a better life, health or wisdom known in advance.

A literary image can support a personal question about the future if another person is not required to adopt its worldview. One reader connects learning with religious meaning, another with a practical need, and a third is merely trying a lesson. Discussing a timetable does not require an identical answer about destiny. Different grounds can be respected while the shared conditions of an undertaking are checked. If the conversation concerns faith, it is useful to name that subject directly. Poetry then remains a companion in reflection, rather than hidden scientific proof used to end an argument about cost, choice or available opportunities.

Particular care is needed with the image of difficulty. We can recognise that an experience was significant for someone according to their own account. But we cannot demand pain from another in advance for the sake of future development. Not every harm acquires a meaning that makes it necessary or acceptable. In relationships and shared undertakings, participants' rights and the option to refuse remain. A personal account of what helped me creates no permission to cause the same difficulty for you. An experience's significance and an action's justification are separate questions, even if they stand together in an attractive narrative.

A literary line can thus remain a small, open invitation. What else would I like to understand? In which domain am I willing to be a beginner? Which condition should I check first? Answering does not require turning one's entire life course into proof of a poetic idea. A person can leave a question unresolved and still take one appropriate action. The future is then present as a space of possible tasks, rather than a promised outcome that forces today's limitations to be treated as temporary and therefore insignificant. Their reality remains part of an honest plan.

VIII. Changing a choice does not cancel responsibility

Let us return to the learner who wants more frequent lessons. He has an existing agreement to help at home on a particular evening. The possible development of a language skill does not cancel that agreement automatically. If a different timetable is needed, he must discuss it with the participant and check whether a substitute is possible. A personal motive can be named without shame and without inflation. It matters to the decision, but does not report another person's consent. If no agreement is reached, an actual choice with consequences remains. Naming it is more useful than concealing the inconvenience behind a general phrase about needing to follow one's development.

The other person need not assess the new goal with a single measure of adulthood either. They may support learning while pointing out that the promised help is needed at a particular hour. These positions are compatible. A timetable dispute does not necessarily mean a struggle between growth and backwardness. The parties may simply be naming different tasks and limited resources. Checkable conditions are useful for the conversation: time, scope of work, availability of a substitute and a decision deadline. Such information helps preserve the subject of discussion. It guarantees no agreement, but does not require demeaning a participant to present one's own goal as right.

A personal account of change should leave room for fulfilment. I chose a new course is a fact of decision, if the note is accurate. I paid for lessons is another fact. I learned to understand a particular conversation is a skill claim needing its own grounds. I became better for those close to me is an even broader conclusion that includes their experience. The sequence of sentences does not make them equally confirmed. The distinction is useful not for suspicion towards oneself, but for a proportionate conversation. It allows appreciation of what was done without demanding that one action provide evidence for every subsequent promise.

The goal itself can also be changed while preserving its history. For example, the initial plan proved too broad, and the person decided for now to learn to read messages he needs. The note retains the previous intention and the reason for the change, if known. Refining a goal need not count as deception or regression. But if others relied on the original result, they should be told about the change and the associated commitments discussed. One's own account of development does not replace that communication. An honest history makes it possible to see what actually changed: the task, conditions, available way of acting or an already checked result.

IX. A sufficient ending can be local

By the end of the reflection, the learner need not announce a new stage of life. Choosing a suitable course and retaining the previous evening of help may be enough. Perhaps it became clear that lessons do not currently fit the timetable. Perhaps he is still awaiting an answer about another format. These options have different statuses. A prepared question is not a received answer, and a convenient plan is not a completed action. If the status is recorded precisely, the note can end without a general conclusion about human maturity. For the chosen task, as much as is confirmed will have been done, with an intelligible unknown remaining.

This ending does not prohibit sustained work. It simply does not require endless examination of one's whole personality before every new step. A few expressions can be prepared for the next lesson. Conditions can be clarified for a new timetable. For a promised task, one can complete one's part or discuss a change in good time. Each action retains its own subject and appropriate method of checking. If results differ, they need not urgently be reduced to a single height. The question actually requiring a decision can continue, while other domains remain without an artificial final assessment.

Development without a single ladder in this article means the right to see a heterogeneous life with sufficient precision. There are gains, limitations, personal meanings and shared commitments. No element has to explain all the others. A theoretical framework, a research version and poetry help ask questions in different ways, retaining their own grounds. A personal note becomes neither a scientific forecast nor evidence of higher status. Its task is more modest: to show what is changing in a chosen domain, what can be checked now and which part of the unknown should honestly remain open.

What this means in practice

If this approach suits you, choose one current task of adult life in which you consider yourself a beginner. Record it concretely, without assessing the whole person. Name what you want to be able to do or complete, and which near-term evidence will concern that particular goal. You might choose a conversation, a text, an agreed deadline or a check of an available format. This is a voluntary editorial exercise, not a psychometric test, treatment or validated development programme. It promises neither trait change nor better health nor an identical result for different people.

Separately, note one previous domain of experience and one current agreement. These are not needed for a compensatory list of merits, but to preserve scale. What actually transfers to the new task? What time or help is available? What should be clarified before shared conditions are changed? If another person's answer is needed, a prepared request remains a request until an actual answer. Do not record imagined consent as a fact. Do not collect another's personal

information for your own map of development; a question about an agreement can remain limited to the undertaking itself.

End the note when the goal, a known condition and a near-term check are distinguished for the chosen decision. You can leave an unknown unresolved. You can stop if the format does not suit you and return to an ordinary task. Later, check the actual result rather than merely rereading an attractive account of intention. If the question concerns mental health, seeking professional help is considered separately, with reference to the NIMH guidance listed. One step need not become proof of an entire biography. It is enough that it preserve its subject, actual conditions and the rights of those affected.

Key quotation

> *many forms*

Paul B. Baltes, a short fragment from the proposition on plasticity in the selected table; the Russian rendering is our own translation. Original PDF1987, Developmental Psychology23(5),611–626, Table1, displayed line173, printed page613. The context includes the conditions and limitations of plasticity; the fragment promises no unlimited result.

Connections between traditions

Browning's poem addresses an entire life through a religious literary voice. Baltes offers theoretical propositions on development throughout life. Specht and colleagues investigate particular trait changes in panel data in the available author version. These ways of speaking about time differ in genre and grounds. Their comparison here is editorial: it helps distinguish a personal meaning of the future, the frame of a research question and a particular measurement procedure. No shared ladder, historical influence between the authors or universal agreement among traditions is asserted. The practice belongs to the article and does not become a tested method of the sources.

Sources

1. Robert Browning, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, in Browning's Shorter Poems, Gutenberg16376. Franklin T. Baker, fourth edition, Macmillan1917. Header and selected opening3067–3121 read; not the whole poem/collection. Editorial commentary is separated from author poetry. International rights UNKNOWN; no full import.

2. Paul B. Baltes, Theoretical Propositions of Life-Span Developmental Psychology: On the Dynamics Between Growth and Decline, Developmental Psychology1987,23(5),611–626. Complete original abstract, opening and selected Table1 read; not the whole text/calculations

of works discussed. Theoretical propositions, not a universal experiment. APA copyright; official hosting is not a licence, rights UNKNOWN.

3. Jule Specht, Boris Egloff, Stefan C. Schmukle, Stability and Change of Personality Across the Life Course: The Impact of Age and Major Life Events on Mean-Level and Rank-Order Stability of the Big Five, SOEPpapers377, BerlinMay2011, IN PRESS author version. Complete abstract and selected opening/methods/limitations read; not the whole70-page text/all tables or final publication. Self-reports, German panel, two measurements, limited interval and unknown mechanisms; transfer requires caution. APA copyright, rights UNKNOWN, no full import.

4. NIMH, Caring for Your Mental Health, last reviewed April 2026. The heading and selected professional-help and rights sections were read; medical guidance only for the boundary of seeking help, not a test of our note. No full import, images, or direct quotations.

Tags

adult development, life course, learning, new task, beginner, experience, age, biography, criterion, change, capabilities, limitations, plasticity, Baltes, Browning, Specht, Big Five, traits, panel research, self-report, preprint, poetry, future, responsibility, agreement, consent, time, conditions, personal note, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.