

**THE BEST OFFENSE**

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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

JUNE 9, 1980

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You may have guessed that the complete title is "The Best Offense is a Good Defense." This essay will attempt to show that this less familiar sequence of the same words is true and that the other way around describes dangerous desperation.

We are all biographers. If we do not publish books, we prepare essays for this club analyzing great men caught up in great events. Or, if we write instead about petroleum or planets, each of us still creates at least one life, his own. Retrospective study of a fascinating life can teach us much, as can our own puzzling progress through the decades, intently examined, although by prejudiced and myopic observers, ourselves. But if we want to understand life, or lives, we should employ a more scientific method: select a promising group of young people, collect data on their progress as they grow older, analyze what they do and say, using multiple disciplines, criteria and analysts, and when they have reached middle age, report the findings. This idea for compared, prospective biographies is not new, but such studies are limited by expense. A snapshot, or even an oil portrait, is cheap compared to a movie, and when the movie must be made over decades using the same actors, only a research fund could pay the bill. We are fortunate that the Grant Foundation in 1939 funded the Grant Study and that Dr. George Vaillant has reported its finding in his 1977 volume, "Adaptation to Life."

Gertrude Stein on her deathbed answered her own whispered question, "What is the answer?", with another query, "What is the question?" The Grant Study began with questions, not hypotheses. Why do men succeed? What do men who seem well at nineteen do with their lives, and what do they and others say en route? The question, "Why do men fail?", followed like a shadow but was not the initial intent of the study.

The subjects selected by the Grant Study staff were college sophomores in the years 1939 through 1944. Only students who were doing well academically and who

were identified by a college dean as being sound of mind and body were chosen. Elliott Richardson and John F. Kennedy were included. Women were not, a regrettable, intentional omission reflecting ignorance of the coming onslaught of career-minded coeds on male citadels of power. No apology was made for the highly unrepresentative nature of the group studied. If success was to be the focus, it was thought best to pick those who would achieve it.

The Grant Study staff has been exhaustive in building dossiers on its men. Subjects, parents, siblings, friends, and teachers were interviewed in psychological detail, not once but repeatedly, by more than one specialist, for over thirty years. The methods are important, but we cannot go into Thematic Apperception Tests and double blind appraisals here. The point is that during the period of the study psychological understanding in general advanced and solidified. By the time of Dr. Vaillant's report, it was possible to oversimplify this understanding to emphasize three points. The continuing challenge for each of us is our internal mastery of passion and anger. The roles of significant persons in our early lives cannot be overstated. And, our choices to direct our elemental energies into productive channels, or to dam them up, are made unconsciously and are carried out through a variety of mechanisms devised to defend our egos. The men of the Grant Study have proved themselves intelligent, creative people with a large unconscious capacity for emotional equilibrium. The prices they paid for defense mechanisms, however, varied inversely with the satisfactions of their lives.

Freud made familiar the concept of unconscious defense mechanisms. His daughter, Anna, catalogued and differentiated them and saw that aggressive instincts against which they were erected could be usefully channeled. How many defenses are there? Arthur Valenstein, a splitter, says forty-four; George Vaillant a lumper, eighteen. The lives capsulized in this essay illustrate eight of the most important on Vaillant's list.

When William Mitty left for college one thousand miles away, his mother shook hands with him. When he entered the Grant Study, she wrote about him: "I don't

think Willy cares a great deal for people. He works pretty much alone with his telescopes and fossils." Unathletic, he studied astronomy. Unable to enjoy girls, he learned to fly. His only college friend appeared to be the Grant Study to whose staff he turned, after graduation, to find him a ride home and a roommate at graduate school. In his twenties he found happiness in involvement with the Oxford movement ("it was a childhood dream come true"), and through correspondence with a young woman also in the movement, but whom he had not met, he convinced himself he was in love. Both enthusiasms faded. Asked to talk about his closest friend, he named a man he had not seen for eleven years, and for the decade before his father's death, he did not visit him. He earned a full college scholarship, went on to a Ph. D. in astrophysics and became a designer of radiotelescopes. A late marriage produced three sons and proved him a reliable father and husband. At age fifty he did not appreciate that he rubbed others the wrong way. He lived within his mind. He wrote to the Grant Study: "My day dreams enable me to need other people less - presumably. I avoid closeness and familiarity with other people - but I really don't know why. I have sometimes thought that the depth of my feelings might become destructive. Sometimes I feel I will devour those I need the most."

Mitty's daydreams were lifelong extensions of the normal fantasies of adolescence (sometimes defined as that self-limited mental disease). Fantasy brings comfort to the lonely and needy, when what they need are friends. It excludes others, and others feel excluded and critical. It does not preclude subjective happiness or career success, but in the Grant Study it was more highly associated with dependency than any other defense mechanism except projection and masochism, and it was highly correlated with bleak childhoods. Dr. Vaillant considers this defense immature, potentially akin to psychotic denial of external reality, but capable of evolving into adaptive intellectualization. Why choose this defense? Mitty was not alone in his underlying terror that getting close to people could be destructive, to them.

Francis Oswald at nineteen was a charming youth who had apparently survived a

childhood strict enough to see him totally toilet trained at one, cured of thumb sucking by having his fingers painted with Tabasco, and encouraged to combat constipation with Ex-lax and enemas. He prided himself on endurance under adverse conditions, whether rowing in rainstorms or, later, leading a platoon of Marines on dangerous missions. But his basic manner was gentle. He emerged from the South Pacific after World War II a virgin who had never been drunk. He struggled to repress sexual impulses up to his late marriage, denied he wanted money but talked a lot about it and had nightmares about the killing he had done while earning his way medals. When he was thirty, his parents died and he turned to the training of his young children with the statement: "A young child does not know enough to be upset . . . the sooner you start establishing good habits, the better off the child will be." He coveted his boss's job but criticized him for pressuring him into work he did not want to do. He moved from job to job, had an extramarital affair and complained that his mistress was a neighbor who was trying to break up his marriage. At forty he felt that his children were persecuting him, ungrateful for his having saved them from a permissive upbringing. He was hospitalized for frank delusions of persecution and thereafter was unemployed. Quixotically, he enlisted in the fight to save the Florida Everglades from a corrupt society. At fifty he hoped the Grant Study could set his life in order, and at fifty-two he died when his car hit a bridge abutment. The police found no evidence that he was drunk or that he had used his brakes.

Oswald's youthful celibacy, self-discipline and horror at the killing he had done can be called reaction formation against unpermitted impulses. But as an adult his dominant defense was projection, a useful way to refuse responsibility for his own feelings and to assign responsibility to someone else. Dr. Vaillant calls projection a common "social" defense, unavailable to a castaway on an uninhabited island but tempting, and wholly immature, in any group. Users of projection include the prejudiced critic of society, the collector of injustices, the pathologically jealous spouse and the professional rebel. "Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that the bastards aren't out to get me" is an example

of projection. In the Grant Study men who relied on projection were terrified of intimacy and oddly dependent on being the object of hostile feelings assigned to some enemy. Someone cares! Self doubt and passivity characterized users of projection, and their careers were the most unsuccessful in the study.

Immaturity should not loom large in a group of men studied for their successful adaptation to life. Statistically, it did not. The same cannot be said for defenses classified by Dr. Vaillant as neurotic, but this term is less pejorative than we might think. Neurotic defenses are acceptable, serviceable in youth and age, not so self-destructive as immature defenses nor as whole as mature adaptations, but used by most men and capable of being understood and changed. The unconscious aim of neurotic defenses is to separate feelings from their ideas and objects. Some Grant Study men used these defenses very well; others less well.

Dean Henry Clay Penny was never late for a Grant Study appointment. He saw both sides of every question and was considered exceptionally frank and empathetic for a college sophomore. His management of his life became precise. He was orderly and persevering, and on a small academic salary he regularly saved money. When his father died, he said it was regrettable because his father had been on the verge of an important raise in salary. He wrote to the Grant Study two pages of detailed events surrounding his mother's death, without mentioning his own sadness.

Penny's mastery of unemotional detail made it difficult for him to make decisions and easy for him to doubt the decisions he made. But, as a college dean conciliating students and faculty in the 1960s, his calm ability to appreciate all arguments made him a valued mediator. To solve personal problems he turned to ritual - an amulet to ward off asthma, evenings prayers to end each day of his married life, and knocking on wood while describing his excellent health. "The more I think about it," he explained, "the more I believe in accidents and fate." He worked hard as a loyal lieutenant, shunned the limelight and the passions of his time, and became an academic expert on human relations. His marriage and career prospered.

Penny displayed intellectualization at its most serviceable. This defense includes the psychoanalytic concepts of isolation, undoing and rationalization and is often associated with the obsessive-compulsive personality. Whereas the histrionic personality represses the idea and retains the provocative affect of, for example, sexuality, an obsessed intellectualizer can say at twenty-seven, "I'm still trying to determine why I have not yet engaged in sexual relations, for I have no objection to it." Dr. Vaillant's subjects who used intellectualization extensively were orderly, obstinate, thrifty, scrupulous and emotionally constricted, more likely than their peers to be without friends and less likely to be without jobs. A classmate of Penny's made no friends in the service but instead engaged in a "sociological study of my fellow soldiers." Another man, asked to describe the most illegal thing he had ever done, replied, "My cumulative impression . . . is that nearly everything that is illegal does not make much sense as a thing to do." How simple to live rationally!

Judge Conrad Spratt grew up in Manchuria, the son of missionaries, worked his way through college and law school and quickly rose to the bench. His Methodist minister father beat him, and his strict mother neglected him for the mission children. When he joined the Grant Study, Spratt told one interviewer that "the less obligation incurred, the greater freedom I will have," and by "obligation" he meant both money owed and love requited. He sent money home to his demanding father and acknowledged only his need to have others depend on him for love, not to love him. Before leaving China, Spratt had known Japanese atrocities, but planned to be a pacifist in World War II. He did later fight in the South Pacific but after the war he returned to Japan as a missionary "to atone for . . . trying to destroy" that country. Law school followed, all work and no play. Spratt's judicial appointment was to a family relations court where he never missed work and never took vacation from assisting neglected children. A Thematic Apperceptive Test at this period was interpreted as "crying for rescue from his bitterly stake out claim to independence."

In his forties Spratt allowed himself his first fight with his father, and

became depressed and hypochondriacal as a consequence. Psychotherapy relieved him, but not quickly, and not until Judge Spratt admitted that he needed help for himself. When Dr. Vaillant interviewed him at fifty he considered him still a man of contrasts, rumbling with volcanic energy but sweet in personality, saintly but with a hint of arrogance, an unselfpitying martyr who could now hope that "I am no longer ashamed to admit pleasure for pleasure's sake."

What was Spratt doing? Dr. Vaillant calls it reaction formation, behaviour that exactly opposes an unacceptable impulse, quelling too free an expression of anger, dependency or sexuality. The impulse, of course, is unacceptable, not so much to the real world, as to the unconscious world of the reaction former. A proper Bostonian, later revealed to be a secret lecher, is a pillar of the Watch and Ward Society. Good, for him; but not for Spratt who martyred himself through his denial of self-gratification and was almost a suicide. The reaction formers in the Grant Study who feared their own assertiveness and their own sexuality tended to impede their careers and abbreviate their marriages. Spratt's defensive lapse which first released his anger against his father so horrified him that he became angry with himself and therefore depressed. His lifelong neurotic defense was difficult to let go, but a skillful psychiatrist enabled him at least to modify its strictness.

The other neurotic defenses are repression, dissociation and displacement. Repression is selective forgetfulness of a devastating idea. It allows into consciousness only the emotion previously attached to the idea, not the idea itself. The bell tolls, but knows not why. Dissociation edits both idea and emotion and can be invoked voluntarily by use of alcohol, drugs, hypnosis and meditation. Its users change their own personal identities and verge toward fantasy. Displacement removes troublesome emotion or affect from one disturbing idea and reattaches it to another idea of far lesser import. Examples are phobias, as of snakes or crowds; the not unwelcome physical symptoms of conversion hysteria; caricature; parody; and games. The puzzle here is working back through a man's choice of displacement targets to find out what idea was so



disturbing to him that he had to reinvest all that emotion in a somewhat ridiculous substitute. But we lack time to do more than list these common neurotic adaptations.

The Grant Study men were successful - war heroes, academics, lawyers and judges - but you may not admire the examples offered so far. Consider, however, Steven Kowalski, given his pseudonym by Dr. Vaillant because of his earthy resemblance to the hero of Tennessee Williams' classic "A Streetcar <sup>N</sup>amed Desire," a man in whom "animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes . . . the power and cry of a richly feathered male bird among hens."

Steven Kowalski had a modest, brilliant, academic father who achieved national recognition denied his son. His mother tolerated Steven's early aggression with good-humored admiration. At fifteen Steven toured surrounding towns for new girlfriends with whom to impress his cronies, and at eighteen he controlled his high school's politics. In college he played varsity lacrosse and wrote for the humor magazine. He had to cheat on his eye examination to enter World War II, and by midlife he had become a happy competitor in the jungles of Wall Street. He loved arguing with his hot-tempered wife, arguments which sometimes ended in tears (his), apologies and reaffirmation of a marriage in which divorce had never been considered. When his own prosperous business faced failure, he anticipated the difficulties beyond his control and switched to an even more successful financial career. At forty-seven he described his dominant mood as "buoyant enthusiasm." He believed that his disinterest in self-analysis "might account for some of my happiness" and boasted that he took no medicines shortly after filling out a questionnaire in which he mentioned medication for stomach spasms. He dealt with colds by ignoring them and with stress at work by doing things more slowly and exploring alternative options. He loved skiing with his family and friends, gave up smoking in 1963 and opposed the Vietnamese war in 1967.

Did Kowalski have, or need, any ego defense? Perhaps not, but he exemplified a mature adaptation, common among accomplished Stoics, suppression. Unlike neurotic repression, suppression postpones paying attention to a conscious conflict

or impulse. "I will think about it tomorrow" is suppression, and the thought does recur the next day, but the uncomfortable affect is deliberately minimized. For physical and mental health, this semiconscious faith in homeostasis is often sound.

W.C. Fields' secretary once asked him how to get rid of an intrusive visitor. Mr. Fields replied, "Oh, give him an evasive answer. Tell him to go (bleep) himself!" Why is this anecdote important to understanding mental health? Because it reveals to our admiration a secure man unafraid to express his anger directly, yet able to soften the expression with humor. Freud defined mental health as the capacity to work and to love. Dr. Vaillant tells us that this means employing coping mechanisms which harness lust and aggression in the service of loving and working.

Frederick Lion, an angry man, prospered because the adaptation he employed made full and constructive use of his fury. As an adolescent he fought physically with both parents, but they respected his independence and spunk. In college he earned disciplinary probation. During World War II his superiors deplored his military deportment but had to admit that he got things done. Later, in his civilian career, he liked to think of himself as a barracuda; his underlings preferred the word bastard. Dr. Vaillant interviewed him at length at age forty-seven and found him warm, enthusiastic, emotionally honest and dignified. He put himself out to arrange the interview on twenty-four hours notice and shared breakfast and a tour of his offices with the interviewer. He spoke freely about his successful family and many close friendships.

Twenty-five years earlier a college psychiatrist had found Lion a person who knew how to deal with people, was deeply affected by any emotional event and possessed "rather an excess of energy." None of this was ever lost. As a young man he was headlong and accident prone but never sick. Stress did not bother him; it was others who found him stressful. He won his wife from another man, had four children of whom he boasted and retained close ties with parents and siblings. But his choice of work best revealed his psychological style. He

had grown up in the East, a privileged WASP whose family despised Roosevelt and defended the status quo. However, he allowed his social views to broaden, once drove five hundred miles to vote, and by age thirty-one, when asked what he would do to further our foreign policy, growled "Remove Joseph McCarthy's vocal cords." The work he chose was editing a liberal magazine, and he loved his social crusades. "Anything that absorbs me and at the same time generally furthers the well-being of mankind, that will I do." His spare time was taken up in volunteer work in the inner city.

Frederick Lion's life, no less than many of ours, was sometimes plagued by periods of depression, frustration and the urge to escape. In maturity he dealt with his problems through perhaps the most useful defense mechanism available, sublimation. His daily work channeled his anger into the constructive task of identifying and remedying social injustice. When his closest friend was killed in a hunting accident, he spent the night writing a poem which later won a prize. His income was large, but he earned it fighting for the poor. Sublimation can be defined as the indirect expression of instincts without adverse consequences or loss of pleasure. At its richest, sublimation overlaps another mature adaptation, altruism, where instinctual gratification is found vicariously in service to others, in enabling them to enjoy more fully than the altruist can. Lion could be accused of some altruism and, like W. C. Fields, of humor.

If defense mechanisms are unconscious and cannot be consciously chosen, what determines which ones an individual will use? The Grant Study is a forty year search for the answer to this question. Certain observations have become well documented as the study has proceeded. Family trees tainted with mental illness do not lead to more frequent choice of immature defenses. Nor does genetic inheritance perpetuate superior or inferior defenses within a family, although certain mental illness, especially manic-depressive psychosis, is thought to involve heredity. The larger social system plays some facilitating role - Lion the crusading editor would have been jailed under any totalitarian regime - but economic class, I.Q. and early educational differences do not determine the

maturity of an individual's adaptation. Surprisingly, abrupt childhood disasters, such as death of one parent, moving to another part of the country or major surgery do not of themselves impair an individual's ability to adapt to life maturely. The self-esteem palpably present in the maturely defended Grant Study men is not the result of conscious learning; it is absorbed from the responses of other people, not just from events. Dr. Vaillant emphasizes loving acceptance of us over time by crucial persons in our early lives so that we may in turn incorporate into ourselves these role models. These key individuals need not be parents, but a father's example is the one most powerful.

Do adaptive styles mature with advancing years? The lives capsulized in this essay often indicated an early choice of defense which persisted thereafter. However, this was not true for the Grant Study men as a group or for the best outcomes within the group. If defense mechanisms are graphed against age, the immature defenses as a group decline with the years. Fantasy, projection, hypochondriasis and masochism are all most common under twenty. Suppression, repression, dissociation, sublimation and altruism increase in middle life. Reaction formation loses more than half its following by age thirty-five, but intellectualization remains as popular as it was in college years. Humor, that mature adaptation, is largely absent under twenty and not widely utilized even in the fifth decade.

Dr. Vaillant underscores this general point by comparing the adaptation of seven "perpetual boys," whose lives displayed little psychosocial maturation, with the defensive styles of the thirty best outcomes. By age forty the unhappy seven had increased their use of immature defenses and decreased their already unacceptably small employment of mature defenses. The thirty best outcomes had given up immature defenses at forty and had doubled the frequency with which they displayed mature defenses. The so-called neurotic defenses were used seventy percent of the time by the perpetual boys and fifty-five percent of the time by the best outcomes.

Dr. Vaillant asks why this progression occurs in some men, or occurs at all.

His guess is that biological maturation of the brain is one critical factor and that an individual's ability to internalize the observed experience of trusted mentors is another. He also credits psychotherapy. In a fascinating aside he links maturation of ego defenses to assumption of moral responsibility. Freud had taught that the externally derived superego was the agent of morality. Modern psychoanalytic theory disagrees, noting that moral development progresses independently of social class, nationality, religious persuasion and formal efforts to teach it, and concludes that it proceeds in step with adaptational maturity and the emergence of an appropriately defended ego.

This message of growth is a hopeful one. When a social order is as complex as ours, man must grow for decades in order to fit into it and manage it. We need to know that our life cycle is more than physical. Erik Erikson summed up the subject of adulthood in a few words: "The ethical rule of adulthood is to do to others what will help them, even as it helps you to grow." A psychoanalyst's golden rule!

To put the particular Grant Study lives in a broader perspective, Dr. Vaillant turns to definitions of mental disease and mental health. First, mental disease.

In "The Way of All Flesh" Samuel Butler wrote: "All our lives long we are engaged in the process of accommodating ourselves to our surroundings; living is nothing else than this process of accommodation. When we fail a little, we are stupid. When we flagrantly fail, we are mad. A life will be successful or not, according as the power of accommodation is equal to or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting internal and external chances." Adolf Meyer pressed this insight farther, asserting that there are no mental diseases, only characteristic reaction patterns to stress, and Dr. Vaillant calls him more right than wrong. Symptoms and categories of mental disease, particularly neurotic anxiety states and depressions, can be thought of as reflecting inward struggles to adapt to life. Hans Selye's classic account of stress is wrong. Daily stress, unavoidable and omnipresent, does not make us mad; our ineffective defenses create the illness. If we look from this viewpoint at persons suffering emotional

illness, we are more likely to seek and understand the defense mechanisms behind the disease. We can even see that much of the stress in unhappy lives is the result of maladaptation, not its cause. The Grant Study staff liked all the men they studied because they understood them. Even the sons of bitches were not born that way. They were trying to adapt unconsciously to a world perceived as unreasonable. Their psychopathology was part of a potentially healing process. Claude Bernard insisted in 1856 on the importance of explaining pathology by explaining normal, vital phenomena, and this idea applies to mental disease. A surgeon cannot entirely control normal <sup>^</sup>would healing, but if he understands the process, he can avoid standing in its way. Similarly a psychiatrist can work with a patient's vital but ineffective defenses and help him to understand that other adaptive techniques normally available to him may help him more.

The definition of mental health has been hotly disputed. Isn't mental health relative? Doesn't any definition reflect large value judgments? Peter Sedgwick poses the problem of a potato attacked by a potato bug. If we value potatoes, we say the potato is sick and the bug is the agent of disease. If we aim to raise potato bugs, then all we have is a healthy bug eating its proper food. Dr. Vaillant rejects this argument. He believes that mental health tangibly exists. He first cites other longitudinal studies of individual development carried out by other scholars including Erik Erikson, and second he notes the numerous objective <sup>1</sup>correlations between the use of certain ego defenses by Grant Study men and their activities in society.

Erikson in "Childhood and Society" outlined stages in our adult life cycle which show adulthood, like childhood, to be a changing, dynamic experience. No precise timetable exists for these stages, but rough estimates have been proposed. If adolescence is a time of striving for Identity, meaning differentiation from parents, then the twenties find us seeking Intimacy, reestablishing emotional links with other persons from the outside world, choosing important friends, marrying. The late twenties and much of the thirties are taken up with Career Consolidation, a hard-working, self-centered, colorless period of apprenticeship,

ladder-climbing and disinterest in idealism and dreams. After forty, however, a much more interesting stage appears, which Erikson calls Generativity. Compulsive busywork wanes and no longer obscures a reawakening interest in the world within. Life experience to date is scrutinized, and critical relationships, as with parents in the past or spouses in the present, are reinterpreted. This period can be upsetting, a sort of second adolescence, but it releases new energy and interests and cannot be considered an unhealthy crisis or a manifestation of increased awareness of death. The most important feature of Generativity, however, is the move away from self-centeredness toward reaching out to others. Not my life, but my children's; not my position at work but the welfare and development of those for whom I am responsible; not my insistent hangups but acceptance of truths now seen as universal in a world no longer so malleable to individual effort.

Erikson's concept of this life cycle emphasized one critical point. To experience any stage satisfactorily the previous stage had to be satisfactorily completed. What he was doing was defining mental health in terms of successful psychosocial adjustment throughout the cycle; he was not probing individual adaptive techniques. Dr. Vaillant applies Erikson's continuum to the Grant Study men and finds excellent concurrence between psychosocial progress through Erikson's stages and his own insights into the study subjects. Those who did not achieve Generativity were those whose unconscious choices of defense could be expected to hold them back. Erikson's macropsychiatric analysis tended to confirm Vaillant's more microscopic dissection, and vice versa.

In a similar fashion the Grant Study men were evaluated according to several objective measures of success in this world, and these measurements were compared to their use of adaptive defenses. Choice of career, quantity and quality of friendships, supervisory responsibility at work, stability of marriage, income, children's educational success, and charitable giving were some of the categories probed. To no one's surprise the well defended men scored best when these factors were made statistics. The men most productive at work tended to have the best

marriages. The men who took the most imaginative vacations tended to be president of their companies. The most generous givers to charity tended to have the most successful children. Dr. Vaillant uses these data to define mental health in good part as a flurry of activities generally admired and thought useful by the society in which we live. Because these activities are not possible without the underlying adaptation to life, they are markers of mental health.

There are always exceptions. Ghandi? Thoreau? Each would have scored poorly in this objective definition of mental health. Moreover, to go back to the selection of Grant Study men, who were these happy few? A little tribe of especially privileged, cerebral, over-achieving youths gathered at the same college at one point in time. Can their life experiences have any general significance? Perhaps not, but one value of this study of different ego defenses is the homogeneity of the group in other respects. Had each member been from a different land and culture, the meaning of comparisons between adaptations would have been lost. We have also learned from Zuni Indians, Samoans and other compact societies studied by anthropologists that particular manners and mores may illuminate the way we all are.

The Grant Study was begun with the hope that its findings would be predictive for subsequent lives. This could not be. Life is too full of surprises, and the psychological variables are too many. Dr. Vaillant compares his study of lifetimes to the study of celestial navigation. A sextant and a celestial map will not tell us where we should go or may be driven, but both help to tell us where we are.

In T. S. Eliot's play "The Confidential Clerk" Sir Claude says: "If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms on life, you must accept the terms it offers you." This is a poor observation and worse advice. If we have not the adaptations to accept the terms life offers us, we may try to force our own terms upon it. The Grant Study biographies vividly document the probable outcomes of either response to life. The best offense is a good defense.