

"The Third Age: How Tech Writers Plan and Enjoy Their Golden Years"

What is "The Third Age?"

1. We tend to break life into three basic parts: Childhood; adulthood; old age. The third of these, old age, is not a very nuanced idea of the last part of life. More nuanced is "The Third Age"
2. Defined in the most basic way¹:
 - a. The Third Age is the later phase of life when the responsibilities of work, child-raising, and care of older parents tend to diminish
 - b. On the minus side, health problems and fatigue may be more common in the Third Age, but often, so is free time, leisure time, a sense that more of our time is our own
 - c. Starts at ~60–65 years of age
 - d. It does not automatically imply "late 20th-century style retirement"—no work at all, live on pension/SSRI, investments

Third Age: Two Views

1. In the English-speaking world, the concept of "The Third Age" is relatively new
 - a. It came into the English vernacular through a book called *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of The Third Age* by British Historian Peter Laslett (1989)²
 - i. Laslett's *The Third Age* was a response to increases in healthy life expectancy during the twentieth century—"a period of freedom from work-related responsibility combined with great health and the ability to lead an active life"³ for years or decades
 - b. The focus is on enjoyment as related to our level of activity
 - c. Emphasis on freedom as the great gift of the age—freedom to do what one chooses, but also freedom to give back to one's community
 - d. Implication that, to make this Third Age a reality, we have to plan, shore up finances, stick with good health habits, etc
 - e. I will call this view of the Third Age the **Performance View**—we can now have strong performance and interesting achievements, and be active for years
2. In Latin American and Spanish culture, however, "La Tercera Edad" is a very common expression for anyone who is aged 60 to 65 or older
 - a. My friend Paula, for instance, lives in Bolivia and she uses the term "La Tercera Edad" simply as a synonym for an older or elderly person—her use of the term is what got me going on this set of ideas
 - b. In these cultures, we don't call "old people" old—we say "personas mayores" which creates a mood of "more mature" or even "better"
 - c. The term is used "anthropologically" not aspirationally, to refer to the last decades of life, approaching the maximum age a person can live—"a step in the [natural] cycle of life"⁴

- i. Recognition, openness, and self-forgiveness about physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes—some potentially limiting—that occur as one ages
 - ii. Openness about the need for care—we need the care of others and to care for ourselves more physically, mentally, and spiritually
 - iii. Acceptance of observation of our own limits: example from Spanish literature: “this is the age of evasion” where there will be days we can’t look at the present and must reminisce⁵ A strong emphasis on stoicism—letting go, acceptance, divesting/redefining of situations and relationships that no longer work
 - iv. A focus on wisdom as the great gift of age
- d. I will call this view of the Third Age, the **Acceptance View**

Journaling/Sketching

1. Let’s take some time to gather our thoughts in prose, poetry, or visual arts about the Third Age
 - a. Suggested—not necessary—prompts you may use:
 - i. Which one feels better to you: Performance View or Acceptance View?
 - ii. What are your hopes for the Third Age? Your fears?
 - iii. Could either View of the Third Age help you navigate with any financial, health, social, emotional concerns you have about the future?

TIME FOR SHARING

¹ Significados Web. Accessed April 21, 2025. <https://significadosweb.com/concepto-de-tercera-edad-que-es-definicion/>

² Peter Laslett. *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (London, UK: George Weidenfeld Nicholson, 1996).

³ What’s Nextology. Accessed April 21, 2025. <https://www.whatnextology.com/life-after-work-understanding-the-third-age/>

⁴ Tercera edad; EcuRed. Accessed April 21, 2025. https://www.ecured.cu/Tercera_edad

⁵ Aurelio Arteta, *A pesar de los pesares* (In spite of regrets) (Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Planeta, 2015).