

## Philosophy of Aging

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**Abstract:** The article offers a multi-perspective analysis of old age as the longest and most content-rich period of human life and the possibilities of education at the old age. The cultural, social, philosophical and even linguistic aspects are brought together to understand the interrelation of aging and time, and identify the possible interpretations of aging within various concepts of time. The author also offers some prognosis on the possibilities of changing perceptions of aging and the actual age brackets for the old age in different models of civilizations of the future. A working definition of aging is provided as well as a comprehensive catalogue of models of aging in the modern society and typologies of aging in terms of gender and relatedness to the actual chronological old age. The abstract concepts and typologies are then applied to the experience gained through the Silver University – an institution catering to the educational needs of the elderly in Moscow. The experience contributes to the understanding of the role of education in a meaningful and self-fulfilled aging.

**Key words:** longevity; immortality; aging-related and non-aging related old age; ontology of aging; the Silver University; aging pedagogics

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### 1. Longevity or Immortality?

At present, we are facing a cardinal dilemma, a choice that will determine our entire future existence as a species and a civilization.

The first option is longevity promised to us by gerontologists and ranging from a moderate life expectancy of 200-300 years to a much more radical 900-1000 years. The commitment to achieve longevity can be observed across sciences, social institutions and personal life choices.

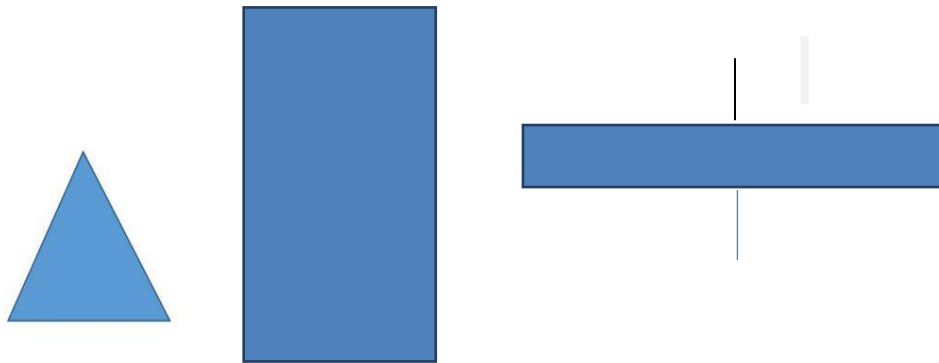
The second option — best represented in the accomplishments of genetic engineering — is human immortality. Actually, nature has already created several models and mechanisms of immortality, so the question for now is which of them is the most suitable for humans.

Both choices will have a dramatic impact on the demographic situation. Below are three fundamentally different age and sex structures of the population (Figure 1).

The present-day pyramid-shaped age and sex composition is typical of developed countries; the height of the pyramid is 90-100 year-olds.

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**Figure 1** Age and Sex Structures of Population

The cylindrical figure in the middle represents the long-liver civilization with a life-span of 200-1000 years. The lowest one third (hypothetically 70-330 years) can be referred to as the young (about a quarter of the population), the middle third (from 70-330 to 140-660 years) stands for the adult population (about half of the population), and the upper third (the rest of life in 70-330 years) is the elderly (about a third of the population, which is symmetrical with the young).

As an aside, currently, it is difficult for us to imagine what one can do at the old age of more than 300 years, but I think it will be mostly health care.

The third figure represents the age and sex population structure of the immortal civilization. The entire population will be concentrated in the age range of 30-50 years, in the niche of omnipotence. Children will be the rarest exotica, allowed for some incredible service to society and humanity. Symmetrically, old people will also become rare, for example, as punishment for the most atrocious crime. Death by choice will be welcomed as a feat, but not as an example to follow. This model has already been given a test-drive in V. Lefebvre's *Cosmic Subject* (1996): every member of such a society will sink into the deepest loneliness and will go out to communicate with their own kind only for super-important causes and reasons, for example, for the reorganization of the Cosmos. This situation is directly opposite to the tower of Babel, but the results and outcomes may turn out similar.

In the context of this paper, all problems of the old age will become irrelevant in the civilization of immortals, alongside old people, while the very same problems will be most visceral and all-consuming for the long-liver civilization.

## 2. Old Age and Time

There is the very credible and intellectually attractive theory developed by J. Piaget (2003), according to which, an individual's development mirrors the whole history of mankind. However, there is also an opposite, albeit highly subjectified, theory: "the history of mankind is the history of life of one person". Madame Pompadour expressed this concept in her credo *Après nous, le deluge* — "After us, the flood".

Another curious aspect of this issue is the reversibility of time: there is a second youth (and some people are able to enjoy a third one), you can regress to childhood, but a second old age, alas – and fortunately, is unheard of and unlikely. Old age, no matter how long it stretches, is always a unique period of life. By the way, the evidence to it is the fact that in dreams we see ourselves at our current age or younger, but never older, even when we dream of our own death.

### 3. Time Schemes

Jan Baars (Cole, 2014) furiously opposes the concept of the so-called “chronometric time”, but neither he nor his numerous supporters actually offer any ontological alternative to this. Their actual thesis is that throughout life, including the old age, the individual differences between people matter much more than their age.

This prevalence of individual differences over age differences, however, fails to erase the problem of aging and time. First of all, the “chronometric” time itself is twofold:

- on one hand, it is biographical and reflects an individual's life journey;
- on the other hand, it is historical — and we all find ourselves amidst the flow of historical time;

Besides, there is gender-specific time:

- cyclical male time (best summed up by Ecclesiastes “there is no new thing under the sun”);
- vectoral female time (as in Heraclitus: “No man ever steps in the same river twice”);
- spiral childhood time, encompassing both male and female time.

The idea of distinguishing between male and female time is illustrated by the wedding rite common to most European nations:

The groom goes to get his bride and returns to his house, his household, having made a full circle. The bride does not know her way for it is closed with her veil; her way is truly one-way.

In general, the space of time can be represented as follows (Figure 2).

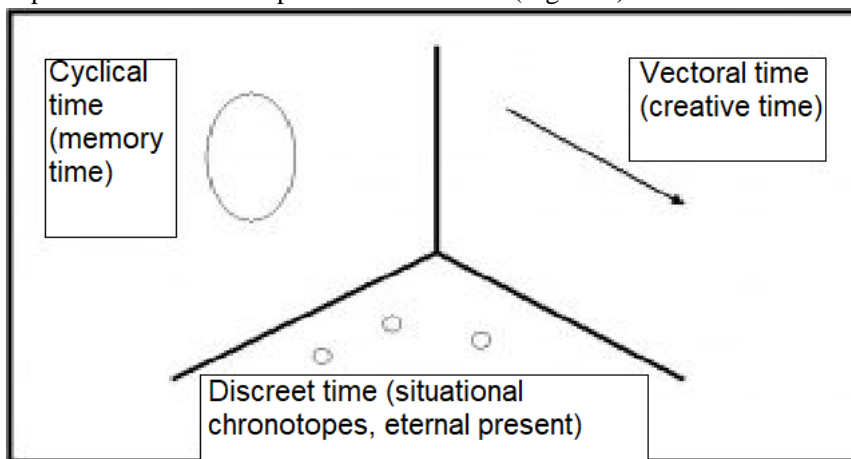


Figure 2 The Space of Time

### 4. Spaces of Time

We experience the same event, the same process three times: as cyclical and repetitive (“nothing new under the sun”), as vectoral (“no man can step into the same river twice”) and as discrete (“chronotope”).

For example, the process of development is experienced as an act or stage of development in discrete time, while in vectoral time the course of development is reflected only a posteriori, historically, by virtue of actual changes and shifts, and in cyclic time it is an absolute likeness of the view of the surface from the side, that is, the line by which we judge the direction and intensity of changes.

Every “incarnation” of time is different in its intensity, sometimes described as speed or fullness. This, by the way, is a very common effect: the fuller time is of events, passions, emotions, thoughts, and ideas — the faster it

seems to run. And when we come back from this intensity, this journey through time, this adventure, we feel that the world we left for this length of time has become a little older and somewhat worn-out — because we have got ahead of it!

My very strong belief is that the main punishment in Hell is experiencing every moment of suffering and torment as infinity, and the main reward of Paradise is the perception of every abyss of time as one moment.

Our contemplation and experience of discrete time can be described as a collision, as a “once”, as a flash, as a spark, as a drop, as a moment, as a point (spot = “пятно”, the dot of an Internet address, the point in mathematics, the period as a punctuation mark, the point of control in geodetics).

The cyclical time breaks down into phases, the vectoral time — into periods and epochs.

We are present and can feel our own presence in the fullness of time: in its turning, in its flowing and its eternal moment. Moreover, we are able to understand how and why our circular time rotates, we understand that only in the proactive position, as managers and designers of our life we move backwards along the vector of time — from past to future, and in ordinary life normal people move into the past, following their teachers, parents, and ancestors.

We can measure the “chronotope” of time in the flashes of light with a frequency of 50 hertz per second, and in the moving picture frequency of 24 frames per second, and in parsecs of the dialogue of the soul with God.

Old age is the mastering of all times and being in their fullness: when else can one revel in, anticipate and remember all these times?

## 5. The Working Definition of Old Age

The gentleman’s code of conduct requires that the first step in any new endeavor should be to agree on the meanings we attach to words and ideas we refer to. I find it extremely helpful to rely on the scheme suggested below (Figure 3).

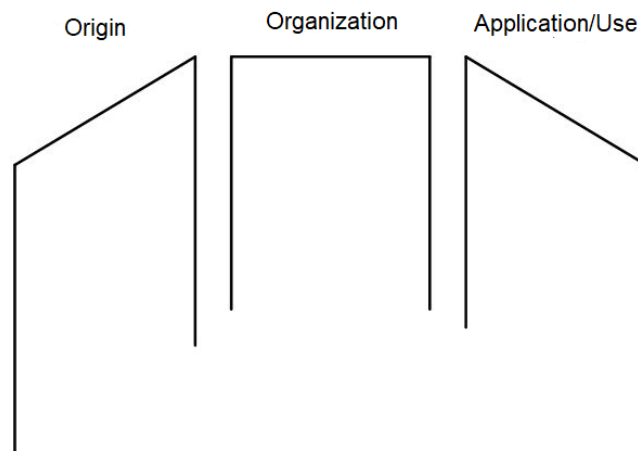


Figure 3 Developing a Framework of Concepts

### 5.1 Origins

The original meanings of “old” in Russian include “fat”, “solid”, “strong”, “manly”, “unwandering” (about a person’s eyes) — which is quite a broad range. However, the overall picture of an old person, an old man is still recognizable.

An etymological dictionary of English offers a similar, if somewhat more detailed, description of the word “old”.

Some Indo-European languages differentiate “old” as “not young” and “old” as “not new”, and some languages have separate words for old people as opposed to old things. The Latin *senex* was used for old beings, mostly people, while *vetus* (literally “many years”) was used for inanimate objects. The Greek *nearós* was used mostly for people, whereas *palaios* was reserved for things, and was used only as a derogatory term to speak about people. The ancient Greek also had *arkhaios* (literally, “belonging to the beginning”), which is an almost complete analogue for the French word applied mostly to refer to things “from past times”.

The key English meanings are “elder”, “mature”, “nurturing”, “grown-up”.

The opposition between “old” on the one hand and “new” and “young” on the other is quite interesting too: these are two very different “olds”.

In many European languages there is a fundamental difference between old people and old things (Table 1).

**Table 1 “Old” For Humans and Things in European Languages**

	Humans	Things
Latin	Senex	Vetus
Greek	nearós	Palaios arkhaios
French	Vieil	Ancien
English	Old	Ancient

It is quite curious that in the Russian language the word equivalent to “decrepit” would be used, both about a person and a non-living thing, while the English language would opt for “old” in regard to the same things (e.g., Old Testament) and humans. “Old” and “decrepit” in English can be used in the same phrase, one designating the age and the other — rather the state than the synonym of “old”. This offers quite important insights in the Russian language and in the Russian mentality, where “decrepit” becomes a synonym to “old”. This reveals the attitude towards a person as a thing, and, most importantly, makes “old” equal to “unnecessary”, “useless”. Thus, deterioration and uselessness are by default presented and perceived the most important characteristics of old age.

## 5.2 Organization

I am an old man, I am already 76. And the longer I experience aging, the more often I remember that I am old, and therefore more and more weak. Everything is running out, be it something as trivial as appetite, or as essential as strength and memory. The only thing that, perhaps, is not running low is creative potency. For several years I have been writing 30 texts a month, 350 texts a year. Poems are as easy to write as ever — with no effort or pains. And I do not need notes or cheat sheets to read lectures. And yet — plans, projects, programs stretch far beyond my lifetime, and this is not a nuisance, but rather a pleasure and joy — a joy without excuses and indulgences, a much bigger joy than the past, full of remorse and qualms of consciousness.

Every illness and operation contributes to aging, even a simple cold takes a considerable toll. But even bigger is the toll taken by losses, especially loss of people close to us. The effect of experiencing loss is that we do not want to part with the deceased and, sometimes subconsciously, wish to see them again — in the great beyond, in the afterlife, in the other realm that exists for all of us, including atheists. This other realm is perhaps one of the fundamental differences between us and the animal kingdom.

Aging is not comfortable or convenient, but what is? Nothing is perfect, there is disorder and ugliness everywhere, but this is the basis of the great and noble plan of the Almighty: in the fight against the imperfection of the world — inside and outside ourselves — we are forced to become better and purer. To tell the truth, this is what aging is first and foremost about. We are immersed in ourselves and our loneliness, and we drown in it like the Titanic.

The semantic field for “old age” and “aging” is not hard to construe: there would be “maturity”, “adulthood”, “youth”, and “death”. Addressing each other as “old man” as in slang employed by the young would signify the closeness and the longevity of acquaintance, as well as irony towards one’s own age and the (hidden and/or unconscious) desire to hurry up one’s adulthood and old age. The synonymic row for ‘old man’ is noticeably richer: “grandfather”, “Granddad”, “old chap”, “old devil”, “old geezer”, “old grunt”, “old trout”, “wreck”, “ruin” etc.

When does old age start?

In an ordinary Russian peasant family there were three sons (the girls did not count): the eldest son was given a plot of land after he got married, the middle son would get a craft (a mill, a forge, a bee farm etc.), and the youngest remained in the father's house, where he obeyed his father, until there was a change in power and he became the master in the house, and his old man went to live ‘behind the stove’ (in Russian houses it was the warmest place to sleep in). This ritual meant the transition to old age. The obstinate old man could not forget that once he was the boss here, and would get naughty at night, trying to restore his own rule. Until the adoption of Christianity, the old man would be buried under the threshold of the house, as the country was huge, but the houses were small and crowded. The spirits of the dead became guards and protectors of the house, but the family would try to keep them out, so as not to let them have their way inside the house, as brownies, and therefore, nothing was supposed to be done over the threshold – nothing given or received.

This “behind the stove”, “under the threshold” life, or rather, the remainder of it, was the old age: humble, quiet by day and restless and naughty by sleepless night.

Traditionally, there are three stages of aging identified: the active aging (by estimation from 60 to 70 years), the “semi-active” aging (from 70 to 80 years) and “non-active”, “dependent” aging (after 80). In the civilized society, these thresholds are gradually but steadily shifting, and this is an indicator of national well-being, clean environment, a healthy lifestyle and the development of medicine.

In fact, pension contributions (30% of the salary fund) in Russia have turned into an irrevocable tax in favor of the state: 80% of men and 70% of women do not survive to the retirement age at all, and less than 10% of the sums that were cut off from their salary fund are returned to survivors (the pension calculates the life expectancy of 20 years for the retired!). If people set up their retirement accounts themselves, for example, 10% of their salary or another source of income, then even with a modest 2% of annual income for their contribution, during their 35-40 active years, the amounts accumulated would 5-10 times exceed their current pensions, and this money could be inherited, while pensions cannot be queathed.

### **5.3 Application/Use**

What should old age be used for, if you live to see it?

There are several fairly popular, worthy and well-tested models:

#### **5.3.1 The Struggle for Longevity**

People begin to follow a healthy lifestyle, get medical care and acquire prosthetics for various body parts and

organs as far as it is possible, keep to a rational and healthy diet, do yoga and so on. They are supported in these endeavors by doctors, pharmacists, insurers, health resorts, spas and other crooks. All this is very touching.

### 5.3.2 Business, Entrepreneurship and Self-Expression

Tired of working for hire, many retirees start their own businesses: more than half of all small businesses in America belong to retirees. They have saved money and developed ideas for their businesses. As a rule, they open restaurants, cafes, and shops. Strictly speaking, this involves a lot of struggles and troubles, but they enjoy it. In addition, the elderly are entrepreneurial and creative, which, combined with the wisdom of experience, produces excellent results. Their business is less of a source of profit, but more of a tool for self-expression and self-empowerment, for independence and self-fulfillment, so attractive for the older generation. So, they are proud to have found themselves at least at the old age.

### 5.3.3 Education

Surveys conducted during the “Silver University” study have revealed that about 10% of retirees want to study; they did not have much of a chance for quality education during their youth and adulthood, and education makes them feel younger and gives them that chance of experiencing student years. However, 3.2 million retirees live in Moscow, and 5.3 million people in the Moscow region (metropolis). Today, the Silver University, an institution within Moscow City Pedagogical University, catering to the educational needs of the elderly, is able to provide educational services to only 20 000 students. And it is important to remember that the Latin *scola* originally meant “rest” — the rest from the work later in the day and later in life.

### 5.3.4 Travel, Entertainment and Excitement

No one, not even children, travels as much as the elderly. They develop a passion for life, because this is their last chance to do something that matters in this life. And besides, they are eager for entertainment, because the end of life is close, but there is still money. They are a noticeable segment of sports fans, all kinds of Hyde parks, unauthorized rallies, etc.

### 5.3.5 Family, Home, Garden

When a person feels the approach of death (which is not confined only to the old age), they are most worried about their family and its well-being after their death. Old age in the family is also a chance to make up for all the mistakes we made as parents: grandfathers and grandmothers are usually more patient and tolerant than parents, they quickly reach an understanding with their grandchildren and generally love them more than their children and more wisely. And finally, old people find joy in their garden, vegetable garden, vineyard, flower garden etc. They are the main inhabitants of cottages and village houses bought late in life.

### 5.3.6 Continuation of Habitual Work

A lot of people choose to ignore the approach of old age, pretending that nothing is different, and continue their work, only a little adapting it, for example, switching from teaching to research or from research to teaching, becoming mentors, gurus, coaches etc. People with a poor inner world (and it is poor in those who do not look into their inner world or do not do it very often) are afraid of loneliness, loss of social connections, and their social status. This is understandable and some sympathy is due here.

### 5.3.7 Spiritual and Material Legacy

“You do not need money six feet under” is a simple and obvious truth, which, however, is not easy to grasp for quite a lot of people. But those who do grasp it, do their best to either help the young within their remaining lifetime, and thereby earn appreciation, gratitude and good memory, or draw up a will: material (real estate, money, jewelry, etc.) or, no less valuable, spiritual. The idea of an *essay-as-a-will* is laid down in the foundation of the

Silver University project. On the one hand, people pass away, trying to do it as quickly and quietly as possible, so as not to burden anyone and leave with their head held high, being able to tell themselves “I’ve done everything that I could and what I’ve done is important for me and for those who remain”. On the other hand, humanity makes a monstrously ridiculous mistake, letting go of people without asking them: “what is the point of your coming here? what is the meaning of your life?” In the hustle and bustle of a young or an adult life, we have no time to think about it, but old age is the best time to find the meaning of our existence. The generation of the meaning of life is the lot of the elite, which is why old age is an elite age. Legacy may not be accepted or not immediately accepted. But this is not to be feared: let the legacy be heritage or treasure for the time being.

#### 5.3.8 Communion with God and Solitude

In the Cosmic Subject V. Lefebvre explains why we are not interesting for other civilizations of the Cosmos: if they are evolutionarily younger than us and are several steps below us, they will be afraid of us, and we ourselves do not really need them, if they are much more advanced than us, what can we offer them? According to V. Lefebvre, mature Cosmic Subjects go deep into themselves, retire, and become closed and inaccessible introverts who believe that old age is a time of communication with God, first and foremost, with God within oneself.

That is what old people often do, going to the monastery and caves, into spiritual eldership. Their prayer and monologue are not addressed to us, and therefore are inaudible and incomprehensible to us like the inarticulate old man Zosima in the Brothers Karamazov by Dostoevsky.

## 6. A Typology of Aging

There are several typologies of aging, but they are all quite simple.

### 6.1 Male and Female Aging

Demographically, the yin-yang, female and male, at the old age fall short of the Taoist harmony of the Cosmos: there are considerably, sometimes dramatically, fewer old men than old women, especially in such “male” regions as the Urals, Kuzbass, the North and territories equated to them, and the main reason for that is not the climate, but the kind of work they do. Men here do heavy, sometimes life-endangering work, whereas women are employed either in the social sphere (education, medicine, trade), or are generally confined to domestic duties.

But the matter goes beyond this demographic slant and prevalence of widows over widowers.

Male aging is generally negative, gloomy, full of disbelief in himself and contempt for the present, and even more so for the future, skeptical, inactive, overflowing with myths about oneself and one’s past successes, especially sexual, narcissistic and very often alcoholic. The average elderly man ceases to read (if he ever had such a tendency at all) and to educate himself (if he had such a tendency before). He is conceited, selfish, capricious, petty, quarrelsome, penny-pinching — and in general, and all this is quite an act of self-criticism.

The life of the elderly man stops at the fateful “two axes” — at the age of 77 (if he reaches this point at all), afterwards there is either death or, much worse, a vegetative state and complete degradation. I, personally, would not like to reach this period and this condition.

The female aging is positive, active, that is, looking at the present and future, bustling, full of enterprise, socializing and intellectually stimulating, as proved by the fact that 95% of students at the Silver University are female. The female aging is also dedicated not to themselves, but to others. It is caring, categorical and non-reflective, demanding respect for themselves and their rights and privileges.



It is to be expected that the male aging is noticeably shorter than female, and this can be regarded as a blessing.

## 7. Age-Related and Non-age-related Aging

According to the UN, by 2050 the population of the Earth will increase from the current 7.6 billion to 9.8 billion, and by 2100, unless there is a global disaster (which is almost 100% probable), it will reach 11.2 billion people. Leaving aside the 47 least developed countries, the rest now account for 6.6 billion people, while in 2050 it will be 7.9 billion, and in 2100 — 7-7.5 billion.

At the same time, the number of people over 60 will reach 1 billion in 2020 (12.8% of the total population), in 2050 — 2 billion people (20%), in 2100 — 3.1 billion people (28%). Even in the underdeveloped countries mentioned above, the share of people over 60 will almost double over the next 80 years, from 5 to 9%.

But these figures, which are quite impressive in themselves, fail to reveal a very important fact: the real life-expectancy is growing rapidly thanks to the improvement of the quality of life and the accomplishments of medicine, which is aimed at prolonging life, but not at promoting health. Medicine has long become prosthetics-oriented: glasses and artificial crystalline lenses act as prosthesis for eyes, drugs replace the natural composition of blood, blood pressure, cardiac function, digestive tract, there are prosthetic arms and legs, even brain functions — almost for every human body part and organ, which allows humans to live indefinitely longer and longer, thus elongating aging.

But this is age-related aging.

And there is also a non-age-related one.

The probability of life expectancy for those born in 2020 is 120 years. For those born in 2050 it will be 150-200 years, and for those born in 2100 — 300 years. Naturally, this will shift the bottom limit of old age from the current 60 years to 90-100 years in 2050 and 150 to 2100 years. 150 years of old, prosthetics-reliant aging is a frightening prospect for us, today. A global disaster compares favourably with that.

4th-degree cancer patients go through the remainder of their lives completely old, regardless of their age. This holds true psychologically, intellectually and behaviorally for any other fatal illness, regardless of the patient's age.

The meaning and purpose of life is lost for athletes when they leave sport. It can happen to them at 20, 30, or 40; what remains is just a sort of residual life. The situation is exactly the same in ballet, with its retirement age of 35, and very few manage to find themselves in teaching ballet.

It is a very similar experience for war veterans and active service officers retiring at 45, in the prime of life. Veterans of the two World Wars, the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, the Chechen War have nothing in common ethnically or in terms of age, but they all can be described by G. Stein's apt term "the lost generation", a generation of young old men who have lost their purpose in life.

Another example of non-age-related aging is ex-prisoners. They will hardly be able to return to normal life because of administrative suspension of rights and loss of opportunities, and the social experiences acquired in prison will not be compatible with life outside. In order to understand the scale of this phenomenon, one can multiply the number of prisoners in our country (1 million people) by the average duration of the term — 3 years, which reveals that 5% of Russia's population are old people by court verdict.

One more addition to the list is the emigrants. Unlike immigrants, full of hopes, energy, and aspirations to start a new life, emigrants live in the past and only the past, they have no future.

Apparently, this is not an exhaustive list, and some significant social groups are missing, but there is no doubt that it is non-age-related aging, psychologically and behaviorally no different from actual old age.

This, whether you like it or not, raises the question of twofold aging: age-related and non-age-related, which puts inconceivable pressure on people who experience it.

The non-age-related aging is primarily a sense of approaching death.

## 8. Three Types of Age-related Aging

It is believed that the first, or early stage of aging begins currently at 60. It is the so-called active aging. At 70, there is the “semi-active” aging, and after 80, it is the “non-active”, “dependent” aging. In the modern developed societies all this has already shifted noticeably: the active aging starts at the age of 65-70, the “semi-active” aging at 80-85 and the “non-active”, “dependent” aging comes closer to 90. In the very near future, when life expectancy will be counted in centuries, aging will come incredibly late for us, but it will still take up most of our lives. We do not give much thought now to ways of filling such a long time yet, but we will have to fill it, and we are going to need something to live on something, sad as it sounds.

Unfortunately, the longevity strategy will increase the duration of the “non-active”, “dependent” aging and its share in the life structure compared to the “semi-active” aging and even more so for the active aging.

I am, personally, relieved that I am not fortunate to be able to spend two or three centuries at the “non-active” age, but I am prepared to admit that this is what life has in store for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

## 9. The Ontology of Aging

At the old age, a person becomes a cause for themselves. And when one realizes this, one becomes old. Very few achieve this understanding by the old age, the majority remaining either young or adult and constantly looking around in search of a reason for themselves and their existence. And it is a strange and scary situation that the overwhelming majority of people pass away without ever aging, without finding a reason for themselves, and, therefore, without understanding why they lived and their purpose in this realm of life.

Ontologically, aging is a premonition of CLOSE death. It is not about age at all. Mikhail Lermontov wrote the poem “I am going alone onto the road ...”, essentially a requiem describing the end of his life and his grave, with the “the forever green, dark oak leaning and rustling” over it, in 1841, literally on the eve of his death, which happened not because of an illness or a war, but in a duel. Of course, he could not have been able to foresee the duel, but the death was foreseen clearly and precisely. Mozart also wrote his *Requiem*, foreseeing his imminent death.

Another ontological premise is that old age is a reward.

In the Judaism, there is a well-wishing “Live to be 120 years old”. It was once believed that, having lived to the age of 50 (an anniversary, a jubilee, “7 by 7” years old, the so-called “jubba”, from which, in the opinion of I. Amusin (1983) the word “Saturday” derives), a person should let slaves, workers, and cattle go, should stop cultivating the land, and do nothing instead and have the deserved rest, and if these 60 years have been lived in love of God, then God gives the man a second life, also of 60 years. Thus, the righteous experience the old age twice, as a long rest before death. This idea: two lives, but only one death is often interpreted as reincarnation, as

the hope of living two lives, if one behaves the right way.

There is another interpretation of old age as a reward.

In the late 80s, at the advent of computer in Russia, I came up with a computer game “GULAG” for some kind of computer games competition: the player goes through all the circles of this hell, from the arrest and first interrogations to the release, sometimes in solitary confinement, sometimes in common works, sometimes in tree felling or in the prison hospital. If the player manages to get to the finish line, the release from prison, then they will be presented with a list of their betrayals and weaknesses, agreements on cooperation and denunciations, as well as a list of people who were let down and ratted out by them and who died in the Gulag and did not live to the release.

Naturally enough, this game did not win any competition, and I did not even get an acceptance confirmation from the competition board. But for me even then it was an exercise in reflection and an attempt to answer this question: how much evil, sins and mistakes do we commit in order to reach the old age and “natural” death?

And finally, one can ontologically conceptualize old age as a punishment: to experience your own degradation and loss of potency and potential, to suffer from a growing avalanche of ailments, diseases and infirmities, to lose memory and clarity of mind — being fully aware of this — to see your loved ones suffering with you and because of you, to be leaving and still not leave. One cannot deny this is a heavy punishment, all the more so because it is totally well-deserved.

## **10. Aging Pedagogy and the Silver University**

In 2014, I initiated the Silver University study (Levintov, Dobrokhleb, 2014), which was financed by the Moscow School of Management Skolkovo, and in November 2017, the Moscow City University opened the Silver University. I am going to finish this article with a summing-up of the experience gained by and through this university.

### **10.1 Goals and Outcomes**

Unlike schoolchildren and students, whose educational goals are either too formal, or straightforward, or — most often — are completely absent, elderly people have very diverse and realistic goals. Here are but a few most common ones:

- the search for communication and socializing opportunities
- mastering new knowledge, competencies, or professions
- self-fulfillment
- intellectual curiosity and cognitive needs
- fun hunting
- the desire to create an intellectual legacy to their grandchildren and descendants
- reflection on one’s life experience
- self-affirmation and increasing one’s authority among the family, neighbors, friends and relatives
- making up for previous life failures
- leisure
- ...

As a rule, every student at the Silver University carries a whole range of goals, which can sometimes contradict each other.

*The psychological age* (including the psychological old age) is based on self-esteem and can be regarded as the transfer of one's fulcrum from future aspirations to the past experience. This is also the reason that underlies the narrowing of one's range of interests and one's social network.

*The social age* (and the social old age) is the change in one's social status, retirement, and approaching grandparenthood.

As K. Victor (1994) points out, the old age is associated with a bunch of stereotypes that significantly hinder the "silver education" both on the side of suspicious old people and the incredulous society:

- all old people are alike
- the elderly are socially isolated
- most of them are in poor health
- retirement causes more problems for men than for women
- most old people are isolated from their families or avoid them
- at this age they are not interested in sexual life or are simply incapable of it
- an old person cannot study
- cognitive abilities deteriorate with age.

For the most part, these stereotypes are absurd.

Preparing for retirement is very similar to choosing a profession in your youth. Interestingly, while there is a direct proportion between one's position seniority and status and the difficulty of accepting the loss of status, there is also a direct proportion between one's estimation of one's profession and job satisfaction and one's satisfaction with retirement. The psychological well-being is an important integral indicator of the general condition of an elderly person: the deterioration of emotional health leads to a deterioration in physical health. However, the maxim of L. Tolstoy should be remembered: the tragedy of old age consists in rebellion and rejection of physical weakness by the eternally young spirit. But an active adaptation to the conditions of life at the old age can even intensify the resocialization and inclusion in social life. The analysis demonstrates the plight of elderly people with their rather low demands and expectations. Observations also prove that if a person is afraid of retirement as impending social loneliness, this is an indication of a non-intensive or absent inner world

Many elderly people seek protection in the family, which becomes an "insurance factor", a source of financial, material, emotional and social support. Whereas in the West the elderly typically enjoy stable intra-family roles with sufficient support of relations outside the family, in Russia the third age is characterized by the absence of social roles, except, perhaps, for family ones.

The issue of social interaction of older people outside the family is very important. There are two main directions possible here.

- how the elderly are included in the local community, i.e., how they interact with neighbours, how much they are included in social networks etc.,
- how the elderly interact with others within the secondary groups.

An elderly person gets tired quickly, but is much more diligent and assiduous than a young one

As for intellectual abilities, memory is, of course, noticeably weaker (which, however, may be somewhat of a blessing as most knowledge becomes obsolete before it reaches the mass consumer), but creative abilities do not subside, attention and thinking are almost intact, and the ability of understanding is growing (due to the accumulated life experience and deeper immersion in culture).

There is also a curious dependence between the basic intellectual competencies of a person (Kanatov, 2000) (Table 2):

**Table 2 Age-related Differences in Intellectual Competencies**

Age	32-33	34-35	36-37	38-39	40-41	42-43	44-45	46-47	48-49	50-51	52-53	54-55
Attention	105	100	94	97	97.5	96	95.5	93.5	86	92	95.5	93.5
Reasoning	104	96	96	100	95	86	93	89	89	91	91	89
Memory	99	96	92	92	92	89	87	86	83	80	82	78

The pedagogy of aging is based on the recognition of self-education as the main form of education. The basic principles of self-education are formulated as follows:

- reliance on discussions, not monologues
- egalitarian participation
- encouragement of multiple perspectives and opinions
- non-expert-based dialogue
- using the participant-generated database
- creating shared experiences
- creating conditions for unpredictable outcomes

The idea of self-education extends to the whole society and assigns a modest place in the public educational movement to the school and educational institutions in general. The Silver University is part of this mainstream.

Three fundamental principles are important here:

- a learning society is an educated society that is consistent with the ideas of citizenship, liberal democracy and equal opportunities
- a learning society is a learning market that provides competitive conditions in the economy
- a learning society is a learning network of a learning-driven approach to life.

Traveling a lot and constantly participating in educational activities, I came to realize that:

- people’s welfare depends on two factors only: their hard work and education
- only educated people need education.

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