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## SOCIAL AGEING

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the phenomenon of human and social aging, in an attempt to answer several questions related to social evolution. What principles should govern the relationship between the individual and society, and how far do our obligations to others extend? To what extent should the state intervene in market regulation? How does social change happen and how can the law ensure that everyone has a voice? The distinction between traditional rural communities and modern industrialized society is analyzed through the lens of Ferdinand Tönnies theory (German sociologist and philosopher, 26.07.1855 - 09.04.1936), which points out what the distinction between traditional rural communities and modern industrialized society. The former are community that is based on the bonds of family and social groups such as the church. Small-scale communities tend to have common goals and beliefs, and interactions within them are based on trust and cooperation. Tönnies' theory, along with his work on methodology, paved the way for 20<sup>th</sup>-century sociology.

**Keywords:** *Social implications, capitalist industrial society, community, "natural will", "rational will", aging, social aging, demographic changes, life expectancy, labor markets and older workers, unemployment.*

**Rezumat.** Articolul analizează fenomenul îmbătrânirii umane și sociale, în încercarea de a răspunde la câteva întrebări legate de evoluția socială. Ce principii ar trebui să guverneze relația dintre individ și societate și cât de mult se extind obligațiile noastre față de ceilalți? În ce măsură ar trebui să intervină statul în reglementarea pieței? Cum se produce schimbarea socială și cum poate legea să asigure că toată lumea are voce? Distincția dintre comunitățile rurale tradiționale și societatea industrializată modernă este analizată prin prisma teoriei Ferdinand Tönnies (sociolog și filozof german, 1855-1936), care evidențiază distincția dintre comunitățile rurale tradiționale și societatea industrializată modernă. Primele sunt comunități care se bazează pe legăturile familiei și ale grupurilor sociale, cum ar fi biserica. Comunitățile la scară mică tind să aibă obiective și convingeri comune, iar interacțiunile din interiorul lor se bazează pe încredere și cooperare. Teoria lui Tönnies, împreună cu munca sa asupra metodologiei, au deschis calea sociologiei secolului al XX-lea.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Implicații sociale, societate industrială capitalistă, comunitate, „voință naturală”, „voință rațională”, îmbătrânire, îmbătrânire socială, schimbări demografice, speranță de viață, piețe de muncă și lucrători în vârstă, șomaj.*

## **Introduction - Development of social theories**

In the literature, old age is defined in terms of three criteria: chronological, functional and cyclical. The *World Health Organization* (WHO) considers ageing to be a lifelong process, starting before we are born. From a biological perspective, ageing is considered a phenomenon that occurs in almost all animal species, a result of the interaction between genetic, environmental and lifestyle factors that influence longevity. Old age is a natural and inevitable biological process that begins at birth [1]. Aging, as a phenomenon of the living world, is a process of regression, of deterioration that affects individuals, groups and populations.

At the level of the individual, in a broad sense, ageing is considered a multidimensional phenomenon that includes physical changes in the human body after adulthood, psychological changes that occur in the mind and mental capacities and social changes in the way the person is seen, in what is expected and what is expected of them. As such, the approach to this phenomenon needs to be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary [2]. A major problem facing modern society today is the "incarceration" of the world's population due to declining birth rates and high adult mortality. Population ageing is a worldwide phenomenon and our country is part of this general picture, facing worrying demographic changes that have medium and long term implications at demographic, social and economic level.

The interest of people in various fields in a better quality of life and, implicitly, in the aspects and consequences of ageing is reflected in the multitude of more or less contested definitions, studies and classifications. The most common classification of the period of human old age includes:

- the stage of transition to old age: from 65 to 75 years of age
- middle old age stage: from 75 to 85;
- the middle old age stage: over 85.

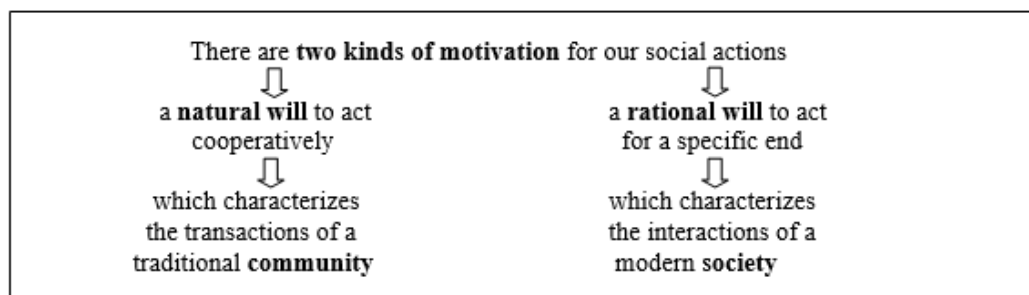
## **Social actions**

Many researchers have tried to answer the question "Why do we age?". Given that ageing brings obvious changes, primarily biological, most theories of ageing are biological in nature [4] Biological theories assume that ageing, including human ageing, is largely determined by a programme in the body's genes. Depending on the factor involved in the ageing process, these theories are grouped into several classes: cellular genetic theories, cellular non-genetic theories, which include accumulation, cross-linkage and free radical theories. Other theories that explain the aging process are physiological theories, such as immune system theory, endocrine theory, classical evolutionary theories, life rate theories.

But although each of the theories has successfully explained part of this phenomenon, none of them has been accepted as a definitive explanation. However, it is not yet known exactly why ageing causes the human body to lose certain functional abilities. What is known is that ageing is a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, including heredity, nutrition, disease and multiple environmental influences [5].

The age at which a person begins to be considered old differs according to historical era and culture [6]. Culture plays an important role in the experience of ageing, influencing perceptions of old age, attitudes towards the roles, rights and responsibilities of older people, and systems of care and support. The image of old age that is conveyed in a given society is extremely important for how older people are perceived by others, as well as for their self-

image. Although the elderly form a heterogeneous group and despite real difficulties in generalising to older people, most stereotypes exist. Stereotypes related to old age can be positive or negative and a person can hold multiple perspectives about a person or a group of older people. They are not fixed, but can change over time. The most common stereotypes associate old age with poor health and functioning, as well as regression to childhood age.



Humankind has evolved from gathering in small, **homogeneous communities** to forming large, **complex societies**.

↓

In traditional society, religion and culture created a **collective consciousness** that provided **solidarity**.

↓

In modern society, the **division of labor** has brought about increased **specialization** and the focus is more on the **individual** than the **collective**...

↓

...and **solidarity** now comes from the **interdependence** of individuals with **specialized functions**

↓

**Society, like the human body, has interrelated parts, needs, and functions.**

Modern industrial society brought **technological and economic advances**.

↓

But this was accompanied by **increased rationalization** and a **bureaucratic structure**...

↓

...that imposed **new controls, restricted individual freedoms,** and **eroded community and kinship ties**.

↓

**Bureaucratic efficiency has stifled traditional interactions, trapping us in an "iron cage of rationality."**

Many personal troubles must be understood in terms of public issues.

↓

But ordinary people **do not link their troubles** with the issues of **society as a whole**.

⇒ A "**sociological imagination**" can grasp this link and help **transform individual lives** by tackling social problems

↓

**Social scientists have a moral duty** to use their knowledge to reveal individual–social connections objectively.

**Useful definitions** (as in *Britannica* defined)

*Term:* The term *social sciences* is a collective term for all those scientific disciplines that deal with the phenomena of human social coexistence. Social sciences are also referred to as social sciences.

*Characterisation*

It is difficult to give a general characterisation because the various disciplines pursue extremely inhomogeneous interests in knowledge, differ greatly in their terminology and the methods used, and handle the weighting of theory and empiricism differently. What they have in common is that their research objects are always also acting subjects in this world. This means that their research results are always also backward-looking and the empirical verification of their scientific statements is difficult.

*Related disciplines*

Classically, the following disciplines are counted among the social sciences: Anthropology (social and cultural anthropology) and social philosophy, social ethics, social history, social psychology, sociology, pedagogy, educational science incl. social pedagogy, empirical social research, population science, ethnology (study of peoples), anthropogeography, art science, cultural studies, religious studies, religious education, law (jurisprudence), political science (political science), media studies, communication studies, linguistics, economics.

*Delimitations*

With regard to the methods and approaches used, there are overlaps between the social sciences, the humanities and the natural sciences. However, while the social sciences focus on the processes of human coexistence, the humanities are concerned with the cultural products of human existence, such as language, philosophy and mathematics. In contrast, the view of the natural sciences can be characterised as object-oriented. They attempt to explain the interrelationships, the structure and the emergence and decay of inanimate and animate nature.

**Social ageing**

Social ageing, while dependent on the biological process embedded in the nature of all living beings, has a special socio-cultural character when it comes to the human person. When we talk about ageing, we are talking about each and every one of us; a subject in the making who, moreover, will have to live in a society that is itself ageing. When we talk about ageing, we are talking about each and every one of us; a subject in the making who, moreover, will have to live in a society that is itself ageing.

**Towards sustainable social protection systems**

Ageing can create a situation of dependency or loss of personal autonomy. Dependency may be temporary or permanent depending on the evolutionary potential of each diagnosed condition [17]. The needs of partially or totally dependent elderly people may be of a medical, socio-medical, psycho-affective nature, and these are determined on the basis of a national scale of assessment of the needs of elderly people, which provides criteria for classification in degrees of dependency. The care of dependent persons can be provided at home or in institutions.

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Aging, as a phenomenon of the living world, is a process of regression, of deterioration that affects individuals, groups and populations.

Another category of needs faced by older people is retirement and economic situation. Retirement may be perceived as total withdrawal, loss or reward. The retirement crisis is overcome when the older person finds meaning, significance or is prepared to face this moment. The income of older people tends to reflect the differences in their working years, and there are older people living in poverty. Poverty among older people is part of the wider context of poverty in society as a whole, with both individual and structural causes. The problems faced by older people are structural rather than individual in origin [18].

There are situations in which older people, in addition to the needs that are caused by the ageing process itself, are faced with a series of needs resulting from mistreatment by a family member, by other people in the older person's permanent entourage or strangers and even by institutions which, although they have assumed responsibility for respecting the rights of older people, often ignore or do not respect them.

Abuse against the elderly, whether it occurs within the family or in an institutionalised environment, can take various forms, such as physical or psychological abuse. The fear of falling victim, common among older people in high crime areas as well as other older people, can affect their independence, mobility, health and personal well-being [19].

Poor housing, which is closely linked to health problems, leads to anxiety and loss of self-esteem, resulting in increased health and social care costs. Loneliness and isolation of older people and others create a need to belong, to have a meaningful and dignified life.

At level of the individual, in a broad sense, ageing is considered a multidimensional phenomenon that includes physical changes in the human body after adulthood, psychological changes that occur in the mind and mental capacities and social changes in the way the person is seen, in what is expected and what is expected of them. As such, the approach to this phenomenon needs to be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary [2]. A major problem facing modern society today is the "incarceration" of the world's population due to declining birth rates and high adult mortality. Population ageing is a worldwide phenomenon and our country is part of this general picture, facing worrying demographic changes that have medium and long term implications at demographic, social and economic level.

All periodizations of human life consider that death inevitably occurs in old age, and people's understanding of death, its definition and attitudes towards it are largely influenced by their culture. The attitude to death also depends on gender, religiosity and education. Qualitative research shows that death can be perceived as a mystery or a punishment. Old age brings an increase in the duration and frequency of cognitions about life and death and raises a number of needs such as bodily needs, psychological security, interpersonal attachment and spiritual energy, hope.

The elderly population is a vulnerable social group facing specific problems compared to other social segments. Meeting the needs of the elderly population to ensure a decent living covers a range of concerns, not only economic, but also social and psychosocial [21], and the design of programmes and services for the elderly should take into account the diversity of this vulnerable group. Meeting the various needs of older people is achieved by calling on a range of resources, whether human, material, economic-financial, legal, etc. Often, these resources are not within the reach and access of older people, so it is essential to involve family, relatives, acquaintances in the proper functioning of those who need them.

Elderly people have a number of rights provided for by the *Declaration of Human Rights*, the legislative regulations specific to the elderly. Elderly people with disabilities or mental retardation enjoy a number of rights worldwide, as set out in the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons* [22, 23].

Social care for older people must ensure that the rights of older people as set out in international treaties and conventions are respected.

In the developed countries, the main tension has been between to contain the growing deficits in social protection programs. We have noted the age at which any person is entitled to benefits of pension to reflect the increase in of life expectancy in the last few years decades. In 2002, the median pensionable age was 60 years for women in the 23 high-income countries of the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD). But, by 2035, according to the legislation in force in 2004, the median age for entitlement to pension will be increased to 65 years of age. In a way by 2035 in 15 of the 23 countries in the world. The median age of entry into the labor market, pension rights will be 65 years or older for men, and in 14 countries it will be 65 per cent years or more for women [8]. This may appear to be a very gradual development, but it is remarkable given that what has been observed over long periods of time (sometimes close to the century) with little or no change in the age at which a person is eligible for a retirement pension, despite significant increases in life expectancy.

**Table 1.**  
**Number of persons aged 65 years or over by geographic region, 2019 and 2050**

Region	Number of persons aged 65 or over in 2019 (millions)	Number of persons aged 65 or over in 2050 (millions)	Percentage change between 2019 and 2050
<b>World</b>	<b>702.9</b>	<b>1548.9</b>	<b>120</b>
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.9	101.4	218
Northern Africa and Western Asia	29.4	95.8	226
Central and Southern Asia	119.0	328.1	176
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	260.6	572.5	120
Latin America and the Caribbean	56.4	144.6	156
Australia and New Zealand	4.8	8.8	84
Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand	0.5	1.5	190
Europe and Northern America	200.4	296.2	48

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019*.

\*Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Before stereotypes and myths about older people can be considered true, it is necessary to know both the needs faced by older people and the resources available to meet these needs. There are many classifications and theorisations of human needs, but the best known are the pyramid of theories or reasons of Maslow [24] and the psychological theory of flow [10] (Csikszentmihalyi (1997). These two theoretical approaches consider that the needs a person faces throughout his life can be grouped into five main categories axiological needs for self-development (the need for truth, beauty, meaning and unity); needs for self-respect, self-respect; needs for belonging and love; needs for safety and security; physiological needs: food, water, sex, rest, shelter, warmth, etc. In satisfying most needs, the individual depends on others, which underlines the social essence of the human being and the fact that needs do not occur in isolation and are not isolated from each other. Thus, satisfying needs is not only a problem of the individual, but also of society, which has to take responsibility for ensuring the well-being of its members who, through their own resources and capacities, cannot satisfy these needs and, consequently, cannot integrate into the social system.

Studies show that there is great variability and individuality in the experience of the ageing process, and therefore in the experience of different needs and their satisfaction [25-29]. In addressing the problem of defining needs and the criteria for determining the need for a particular service, Bradshaw [30] (1972) describes the concept of social need and proposes four categories of needs: normative, felt, expressed and comparative. In the literature, there is increasing talk of social

assistance need, defined as "the minimum basic resources necessary for a dignified life and normal social functioning, not covered by the efforts of the individual/family concerned or by the social insurance components of the social security system", and residual social assistance need, which is the need for social assistance not covered by the social assistance system in the case of older people. The assessment of the needs of the elderly is regulated by *Law No. 17 of 6 March 2000* on social assistance for the elderly and is carried out by means of a social survey based on data on: conditions requiring special care; ability to manage and meet the basic requirements of daily life; living conditions; actual or potential income considered the minimum to meet the current needs of life. In order to determine the extent to which older people face these types of needs, it is necessary to understand the aspects of the ageing process resulting from the correlation of the bio-psycho-socio-cultural view of the ageing process with life cycles. The ageing process causes a number of changes in the human body that influence its physical functioning, the intensity of these changes being accentuated by the presence of certain chronic diseases. Thus, various changes can be evidenced in the field of sensory functioning, at the level of organs and anatomical systems, physical and mental health, psychomotor functioning, as well as personality. This process can be a normal one, called 'senescence', or a pathological one, considered an acceleration and exaggeration of the normal ageing process, defined by the term 'senility'.

An important trend that has emerged in recent years were to prevent departures early retirement. During the 1980 and 1990, many employers have used early retirement schemes to ensure that the company's employees are able to retire less painful restructuring or downsizing. For workers over 50 years of age, they offered generally bonuses or incentives in the form of benefits if they took voluntarily their retirement. The problem of this approach is that some of the most skilled and experienced workers have retired prematurely and sometimes without particular benefit to younger workers entering the labor market [5]. Moreover, employers have ultimately account solved a short-term problem in long-term burden on pension plans, a problem that is getting worse and worse as that longevity increases.

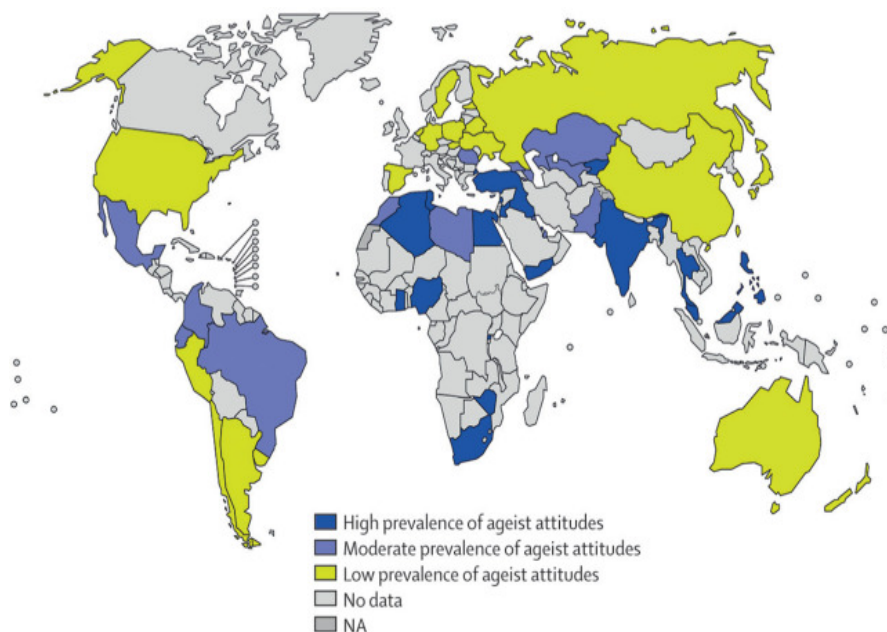
In 2005, the average activity rate of men 55 to 64 years of age was only 53%, i.e., 53%. well below the world average of 74% [These figures and those below concerning activity rates are taken from calculations made by the *Department of economic and social affairs*, (United Nations, 2005)]. Government are now considering taking measures to encourage workers to stay in the labor force working life; so that the age of the child will be effective retirement and corresponds to more at the mandatory age of departure, which is generally 65 years old in many European countries.

Activity rates are falling drastically for people aged 65 and over, but the figures vary enormously from one region to another. In Europe, the labor force participation rate of men, who are generally entitled to retire when they reach 65, is of about 8%. The contrast with other regions is striking: in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, in Latin America in particular, the rates of men aged 65 and over are of 57%, 37% and 38%, respectively. In these regions one can attribute this difference to the absence of schemes for retirement, or other support programs income for older people; this makes retirement an unattainable luxury for them. As far as women are concerned, regional differences are also important, but less pronounced: the rate of women's participation in the labour market is higher than that of men of activity ranging from 4% in Europe to 26% in the United States, 13 per cent in Africa and 14% in Latin America.

The social problems of old age are accentuated and amplified by stereotypes: "all old people are the same", "old people are unproductive", "the biggest consumers of medical services". And many others that portray them as powerless, sick and helpless, when in reality older people care for disabled family members or children, actively participating in their education. The most commonly used term when referring to the elderly is "disability", whether physical or mental. This gives rise to discrimination and prejudice, even to the marginalisation of older people.

In recent times the family has undergone a structural transformation from the traditional, multi-generational family to the nuclear family. The main cause is the changes in our life such as

urbanization and industrialization but also the desire of young people to start their own family, to be their own family. Of course, this transformation has accentuated the worsening of the condition of older people, especially in Romania where many face economic problems, but also by reducing their role and participation in family activities which has led to their isolation.



**Figure 1.** Prevalence of ageist attitudes.

### **Unemployment**

The problem of unemployment remains the major preoccupation of the authorities. The current recovery will not solve the problem of unemployment, just think of the problem of unemployment and social exclusion. It also represents an opportunity to at least partially resolve the problem of unemployment in rural areas. However, this is not enough to solve the problem of unemployment.

Unemployment can lead to people blaming themselves for their situation. But a sociological imagination would prompt such people to look to wider causes and effects. What was once regarded historically as a reliable “safety net” guarding against personal misfortune such as ill-health and unemployment, state provision of welfare is rapidly being withdrawn, especially in the areas of social housing, state funded higher education, and national health care.

### **Effects of unemployment**

#### *Frustration*

One of the most common emotions of the unemployed is frustration, which is closely related to dissatisfaction. This is heightened when the unemployed person attends several job interviews without success. It also worsens as time goes by.

#### *Loss of confidence*

Unemployment can affect self-esteem, especially when it lasts for a long time. Spending several months or years unemployed can lead to biased thinking that makes us think we are not good enough.

#### *Lack of habits*

When a person has been unemployed for a long time, their routines can be very different. After all, going to work is a way of structuring our day, as time revolves around



what we do both before and after work. Being unemployed can cause us to let go of routine and disrupt our lives.

### *Isolation*

If the person in question has been unemployed for a long time, it is likely that a sense of invisibility will invade them - as if they are not important to society - because they are not an active part of society. This feeling can lead to social isolation, embarrassment or depressive symptoms. Both the employed and the unemployed are increasingly protesting about job problems. But while the unemployed are looking for a job, the employed are trying to defend their position, two goals that are not always compatible. "Those who have a job are always being called in for overtime. Those without a job remain unemployed. There is a risk that society will split in two. . . on the one hand the over-employed and on the other the marginalised unemployed, who depend almost entirely on the goodwill of the former," the Italian magazine *Panorama* reports. In Europe, experts believe, the results of economic prosperity have been felt more by those already working than by those without jobs.

In addition, unemployment depends on the local economic situation, so in some countries, such as Germany, Italy and Spain, there are huge differences between the needs of one area and another [31]. Are workers willing to learn new jobs or even move to another area or country? This can often be a deciding factor.

### **The social effects of unemployment**

The diverse experiences of the unemployed result, for the majority of them, in an anomalous condition rather than in violent revolt or political radicalization. While the unemployment rate remains above 8% of the labour force, the unemployed are not a social group with a collective will and the potential for violent political action. The objective diversity of the unemployed is obviously not conducive to the development of a common identity. However, the survey conducted by P. Lazarsfeld (American sociologist of Austrian origin; 13.02.1901 - 30.08.1976) in Marienthal in the early 1930s, in a small Austrian town where the only factory had to close down, shows that a homogeneous population does not develop group cohesion either. A negative identity is unlikely to create a common consciousness and action.

This is undoubtedly the fundamental reason why the strictly political action of unemployment organisations in France has only ever concerned a very small minority of them. Moreover, the most active, or the most privileged, devote all their energy to really and symbolically escaping the condition of the unemployed, not to assuming or claiming it. The unemployed belong to the same administrative category; they do not form a real social group with a collective will that can be expressed in the political order.

The anomalous situation also explains why, while some unemployed people, who were active activists when they were employed, keep their activity as trade unionists, the status of unemployed people usually prevents them from compensating for their inactivity with other occupations.

An unemployed person who has never been active in a trade union or a political party does not use the time of unemployment to start a period of activist activity, which he or she feels humiliated and marginalized [32]. Stress, burn out, chronic fatigue syndrome, bullying, etc. Many terms have emerged in recent years to describe different forms of discomfort which epidemiologists group together under the term "psychosocial risks at work".

### Human ageing could be reversible

A renowned *Harvard Medical School* professor and researcher believes that human ageing could be reversible in less than 20 years, he said in an interview with US broadcaster CBS News, Mediafax reports. "So far, aging has only been reversed in mice. We will soon know if the method will work in the cocker spaniel breed," said Professor George Church, who leads 100 scientists in a lab at Harvard Medical School. He predicts that human ageing could be reversible in less than 20 years. Church's lab is also working on eliminating genetic diseases and making people immune to all viruses. Such projections are not unrealistic, he says: "Reversible aging is a fact that has been proven in eight different ways in animals." The process does not involve changing genes, but adding genes.

### Conclusions

The "problem" of social inequality can then be seen to be in the process of being resolved, provided that the state is able to ensure some redistribution through taxation and the provision of public services and that the government has the mandate to do so. Sociology has invested considerable effort in quantifying such differences in income and quality of life, while at the same time proposing necessary adjustments in public policy. Limiting itself to such an approach, however, does not make it possible to identify the source of these differences in income. Education, for example, can be seen as one of the main means of achieving a particular level of income, with different levels of education being reflected in and "justifying" different income levels. Seeing this correlation between education and income then raises the problem of unequal access to education and raises the question of how to address these unequal socially distributed accesses. Inclusion in networks of friends and relatives can also be seen as another key factor in improving employment prospects. The degree of isolation or exclusion from these networks can be measured and 'explain' differences in income and even non-access to employment. These 'second level' explanations - related to educational qualifications and inclusion in networks - form the basis of much sociological research on inequality and social policy. They tend to focus on quantifying cultural and social capital. The more these capitals are accumulated, the more they can be 'spent' in the search for suitable employment and income. Human ageing could be reversible in less than 20 years.

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