

R E C E N Z J E

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PETER TAVEL; *PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN OLD AGE I.* PUSTÉ ULANY 2009: SCHOLA PHILOSOPHICA

The question of ageing belongs to the special category of frequently mentioned but at the same time abandoned problems of society. In western countries, ageing of population is the hot topic for sociologists and consequently for economists and physicians, too. Societies pay an attention on problems that represent the burden for society – how to cover the growing expenses for medical care, revenue payments, or salaries for people who take care of elderly. On the other hand, the source of all these problems – the question why old people remain abandoned in poor health and material resources – is constantly ignored. The picture of worshipful old age full of grace, wisdom and staidness definitely vanished with the arrival of new millennium. Nowadays, being old means to be alone, unhappy and ill. Facing the frequent complications of old age led into the more realistic picture, but caused harmful passivity, too. Illnesses, loneliness, and depressions are considered to be normal and integral part of old age.

Publication “Psychological problems in Old Age I” represents the exceptional work in this field. Unlike the similar works, it does not end up with the list of problems connected with ageing, but offers the dozens of ways how they can be understood and handled. Reasonable amount of theoretical information together with practical advices based on personal experience provides balanced text useful for all categories of professionals working with elderly (author is the supervisor of the Mobile Hospice Niederösterreich). It concentrates on three mentioned problems of ageing, but as author states, the others as psychical disorders, criminality, abuse of alcohol and drugs, or sexual problems will be elaborated in second part of the book - “Psychological problems in Old Age II” which he prepares. Author’s professional background and monographs focused on problems of existence and functioning in the society (“The Meaning of Life by V. E. Frankl”, “Man among Men”, “Selected Topics from the Social Psychology”, “The Value of Old Age”) is a guarantee for deeply scientific and at the same time very practical publication.

Opening chapters of the book present the brief characteristics of current society’s attitude towards old age and stress mainly the process of growing segregation of elderly. This short analysis is followed by the part dedicated to various theories

of ageing. Several concepts (e.g. biological, cognitive, social, cultural, anthropological etc.) are presented in order to cover different aspects, because “attempts to build up a theory that should explain all processes and consequences of ageing are unreal” (p. 219). In accordance with the practical aspect of the book, theories contain also the views of successful ageing. This part of theoretical background represents very inspiring intersection of gerontopsychology and positive psychology. The power of well-being, satisfaction, meaning of life, self-control, optimism, harmony between the planned and acquired, activity, engagement, etc. is presented and their influence for well-managed ageing is being discussed.

The most extensive chapter of the book refers to depression. This psychical disorder markedly lowers the quality of life and causes both psychical and physical discomfort. It often remains unrecognized as being sad, lacking energy and optimism, avoiding social contacts etc. is considered as a natural feature of old age. Author points to the possible specifics of this disorder in old age (compared to other life stages) and stresses the need of qualified diagnosis. Within this issue, he provides detailed diagnostic criteria as well as the suggestions for differential diagnosis and lists the suitable psychological diagnostic tools (e.g. Montgomery-Asberg Depression Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, Geriatric Depression Scale). Highly valuable part of the chapter consists of therapeutic programs designed for depression. Besides the overview of various therapeutic procedures, it also offers the step-by-step model of cognitive-behavioral treatment (Verhaltens-Einzelspsychotherapie von Depressionen im Alter – VEDIA program) with detailed program for each therapeutic session.

One of the most common types of illness typical for elderly is dementia. Typical symptoms relate to deterioration of cognitive functions, such as “failure of memory, mind, orientation, understanding, reasoning, ability of learning, speaking” (p. 221), but they may be accompanied also with “worsening of emotional control, social behavior and with weakening of motivation” (ibid.). The chapter dedicated to this illness starts with diagnostic criteria of dementia. It provides also information on classification according to the cause of illness – it specifies the vascular dementia, dementia within Alzheimer’s disease and dementias within other illnesses (e.g. Pick, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, and Huntington disease). The presented therapy of dementia is focused rather on specific problems than on ideological approach. The attention is paid on cognitive abilities, behavior, and emotions. Author does not present only the sum of theoretical knowledge, but he brings also new insights and valuable observations from his own professional experience. Worth of noting is for example the concept of “reminiscence bump” which explains the discrepancies in the amount of recalled information of elderly from the various periods of their lives.

The last chapter of the book refers to the relationships of elderly with their descendants. It is called “The role of the Grandparent” and concentrates on the unique relationship between the elderly and their grandchildren. It provides the general information on the role and position of grandparent according to the family system, type of upbringing, frequency and intensity of mutual contacts etc. Except the positive potential of grandparent-grandchild relationship it also points to the possible sources of conflicts. The chapter presents the results of massive psychological re-