

Active Ageing:

Solidarity and Responsibility in an Ageing Society

Andreas Kruse



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Key words

Active ageing – ageing society – civil engagement – equal opportunities – intergenerational justice – intergenerational solidarity – old age – productivity – religiousness – social integration – societal responsibility – spirituality.

Executive Summary

- (I) Since gerontological research began, successful ageing has been associated with maintenance of activity, focusing on both individual aspirations to engage in personally meaningful activities, and on roles and functions that challenge, facilitate and motivate individual activity in a given society and culture. **Requirement:** To further develop cultural models of active ageing and increase use of the psychological and social strengths of old age.
- (II) Successful ageing is also associated with continuity in lifestyles and competences. Maintenance and further differentiation of interests, competences and activities are a basis for satisfaction and well-being in old age. **Requirement:** To ensure critical appraisal of and flexibility in age limits, preventing exclusion of older people from areas of societal responsibility.
- (III) Older people significantly contribute to the human capital of a society. Productivity in old age is expressed in numerous material and immaterial forms. **Requirement:** To encourage a stronger focus on productivity in political and public discourse, supporting civil engagement of older people, by, for example, developing incentive systems (and possibly also financial adjustment).
- (IV) The significance of social integration, participation and shared responsibility for a positive attitude towards life is not restricted to younger ages. Therefore, old age must be considered in a cross-generational context, namely, in the sense of taking responsibility for younger generations

(generativity). **Requirement:** To open new possibilities for intergenerational encounters in communal contexts, and to support and further develop existing possibilities (e.g. in community centres).

- (M) Sophisticated knowledge systems and strategies are bases for a productive and creative life in old age. Creativity is not a matter of age, but of a history of creativity (biography). **Requirement:** To develop further educational programmes, to integrate creativity into discourses on old age (e.g. government campaigns focusing on creativity in old age) and to integrate older people into political commissions to develop future scenarios, recommendations and strategies for cultural and political initiatives.
- (VI) Perceptions of old age and ageing have an impact on ageing processes, and on intergenerational relations and societal opportunity structures. For example, empirical studies show that work performance and motivation in older workers are influenced by age stereotypes that are communicated in various occupational contexts. **Requirement:** To communicate heterogeneity of competences and lifestyles in old age. The heuristic distinction between a third (competent) and a fourth (vulnerable) age must be rejected. Consciousness of the possibilities for living a productive, creative life of shared responsibility, even in the highest age groups, must be increased, since doing so further motivates people to maintain a positive attitude towards life, in spite of diseases and disabilities.
- (VII) In analysing religiousness and spirituality, this expert report differentiates between an 'intrinsically' and an 'extrinsically' motivated religiousness, pointing to the

significance of the former (but not the latter) for not only chances, challenges and boundaries of development in old age but also for readiness to forgive. Empirical studies show that intrinsic religiousness enhances the ability to cope with finitude. Spirituality is defined as transcendent connectedness. Religiousness and spirituality have numerous forms and expressions in old age; churches' activities and community work must accommodate to this heterogeneity. The expert report gives an overview of theories of ageing which consider the experience of transcendental connectedness as a potential of old age that furthermore is helpful for establishing 'integrity' in late life. **Requirement:** To develop greater awareness on the part of the churches of heterogeneity in religious faith among—especially older—people.

- (VIII) The expert report emphasises the maintenance of intergenerational justice, in the sense of equal possibilities for all generations to live a 'good life'. Engagement of older people is believed to contribute to the maintenance of intergenerational justice, which could be further supported by flexibility in age limits. Such flexibility must not constrain future prospects of younger generations; empirical studies suggest that, to the contrary, increases in engagement of older people have a positive impact on future prospects in younger generations, since older people's engagement contributes to the prosperity of the whole population. **Requirement:** To promote the increasing importance in political and public discourse of further developing favourable conditions for intergenerational justice.

Introduction

Population ageing does not imply inevitable decreases in a society's competitiveness or decreases in intergenerational solidarity. Moreover, current demographic change is contributing to an increasing societal (and also scientific) interest in the possible contributions of older generations to the development and cohesion of society.¹ The respective 'contributions' refer to both an individual and a societal perspective, to actual and future resources and potentials of older people as well as to societal preconditions that have to be fulfilled to develop, expand and realise the potentials of older people.

Initially, European ageing policy primarily focused on the frailties and limitations of older people and on welfare policy to address those issues. Ageing policy was understood as something to be done for rather than *with* older people. This traditional view has been gradually replaced by a new perspective focusing more on older people's capabilities, resources and potentials. Demographic change, once discussed more or less exclusively in terms of a burden on society—particularly on social security systems—is now conceived of more as a challenge, not least as an opportunity for the development of a more productive and accommodating society.

¹ United Nations, *First International Plan of Action on Ageing* (New York: UN, 1982); United Nations, *Second International Plan of Action on Ageing* (New York: UN, 2002); World Health Organisation, *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework* (Geneva: WHO, 2002).

Definitions

Active, productive and creative ageing

There is a long tradition in gerontology of relating successful ageing to maintaining activity in old age. As early as the 1960s, particularly in the context of the classic controversy over propositions of disengagement theory, decreases in social roles and functions were interpreted as primarily reflecting prevalent misconceptions of old age and ageing, ageist stereotypes and attitudes that contaminate external perception as well as self-conceptions and development of competences.² Although this pointed line of reasoning obviously neglects the significance of economic, political and social structures as well as interindividual differences, the hypothesised relationships between role activity, self-concept and satisfaction with life are still important for understanding positive or successful ageing.³

² R. J. Havighurst, 'Successful Aging', *The Gerontologist* 1/1 (1960), 8–13; R. J. Havighurst, 'Dominant Concerns in the Life-cycle', in L. Schenck-Danzinger and H. Thomae (eds), *Gegenwartsprobleme der Entwicklungspsychologie* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 1963), 301–31; U. Lehr, *Psychologie des Alterns* (Meisenheim: Quelle & Meyer, 1972); B. Lemon, V. Bengtson and J. Peterson, 'An Exploration of the Activity Theory of Aging: Activity Types and Life Satisfaction Among In-movers to a Retirement Community', *Journal of Gerontology* 27/4 (1972), 511–23.

³ R. Fernández-Ballesteros, and N. M. Mendoza-Ruvalcaba, 'Toward a Definition of "Successful" Ageing', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 3–14; A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Potenziale des Alters im Kontext individueller und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Potenziale im Altern: Chancen und Aufgaben für Individuum und Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 3–29; U. Lehr, 'A Model of Well-being in Old Age and Its Consequences for Further Longitudinal Studies', in J. F. Schroots (ed.), *Ageing, Health, and Competence* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1993), 293–300; U. Lehr, *Psychologie des Alterns*, 9th ed. (Meisenheim: Quelle & Meyer, 2009); J. W. Rowe, and R. L. Kahn, 'Successful Aging', *The Gerontologist* 37/4 (1997), 433–40; H. Thomae, 'Psychologische Modelle und Theorien des Lebenslaufs', in G. Jüttemann and H. Thomae (eds), *Persönlichkeit und Entwicklung* (Weinheim: Beltz, 2002), 12–45; G. E. Vaillant and K. Mukamal, 'Successful Aging', *American Journal of Psychiatry* 158 (2001), 839–47.

After the focus of research in gerontology increasingly shifted from questions of old age to questions of ageing, with the latter conceived of as a lifelong process, it became apparent that chronological age in itself is a poor predictor for functional capacity. For example, Busse and Maddox⁴ wrote in their summary of results from the Duke Longitudinal Studies, 'The Duke Longitudinal Studies began without benefit of a master theory of human aging. They ended without benefit of a master theory of human aging. They ended without producing one and without compelling reasons for believing that a single, sovereign theory of aging would be possible or useful.'

Plasticity, historical embeddedness and contextuality; and heterogeneity due to a dynamic and continuous interplay of age-connected and disconnected developmental factors were considered as theoretical propositions in research on life span development.⁵ At the same time, particularly in the US, the claim for possibilities of task-oriented life after retirement was articulated by a steadily growing number of older people and assertively supported by policymakers, not least, because the provision of financing for old age and for health care became prominent policy issues. However, the discourse on possibilities of productive life in old age was still primarily committed to an instrumentalistic and economic understanding of productivity, almost exclusively focusing on the production of goods and services with distinct material value.

⁴E. W. Busse, and G. L. Maddox, *The Duke Longitudinal Studies of Normal Aging 1955–1980* (New York: Springer, 1986), 135; See also H. Thomae, (ed.), *Patterns of Aging: Findings from the Bonn Longitudinal Study of Aging (BOLSA)* (Basel: Karger, 1976); H. Thomae, 'Contributions of Longitudinal Research to a Cognitive Theory of Adjustment to Aging', *European Journal of Psychology* 6/2 (1992), 157–75.

⁵P. B. Baltes, 'Theoretical Propositions of Life-span Developmental Psychology: On the Dynamics Between Growth and Decline', *Developmental Psychology* 23/5 (1987), 611–26; P. B. Baltes and S. L. Willis, 'Enhancement (Plasticity) of Intellectual Functioning in Old Age: Penn State's Adult Development and Enrichment Project (ADEPT)', in F. I. M. Craik and S. Trehub (eds), *Aging and Cognitive Processes* (New York: Plenum, 1982), 353–89; P. B. Baltes, 'On the Incomplete Architecture of Human Ontogeny: Selection, Optimization, and Compensation as Foundation of Developmental Theory', *American Psychologist* 52/4 (1997), 366–80.

The modern understanding of active ageing developed from a more comprehensive understanding of productivity.

In our culture, productivity is commonly associated with the making of things (production) and material values. Discussion of a productive life in old age regularly refers to societal productivity, that is, enrichment, promotion, maintenance and relief of social systems. However, the term productivity is neither restricted to participation in the labour market or voluntary activities nor confined to manual expression.⁶ Instead, an adequate definition of productivity must also consider intellectual, emotional and motivational expressions of productivity.⁷

Proceeding from a comprehensive understanding of productivity, several possibilities for leading a productive life in old age can be distinguished: Being interested in the development, living conditions and vital interests of younger people; the transmission of information to younger generations; and the self-responsible reflection on experiences and knowledge systems of younger generations are examples of intellectual and emotional productivity in old age,⁸ since intergenerational discourse can initiate emotional and intellectual differentiation in older and younger participants. Moreover, by leading an independent and

⁶ M. M. Baltes and L. Montada (eds), *Produktives Leben im Alter* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1996); R. N. Butler, 'Health, Productivity and Aging: An Overview', in: R. N. Butler and H. P. Gleason (eds), *Productive Aging* (New York: Springer, 1985), 114–20; A. Walker, 'The Principals and Potential of Active Ageing', in S. Pohlmann (ed.), *Facing an Ageing World: Recommendations and Perspectives* (Regensburg: Transfer, 2002), 113–18.

⁷ A. Kruse, 'Productivity and Modes of Human Activity', in S. Pohlmann (ed.), *Facing an Ageing World: Recommendations and Perspectives* (Regensburg: Transfer, 2002), 107–12; A. Kruse, 'Alter neu denken – Kategorien eines veränderten kulturellen Verständnisses von Alter', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010a), 63–81; Kruse and Schmitt, 'Potenziale des Alters im Kontext individueller und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung', 3–29; U. Lehr, 'Erfahrungswissen in der Zivilgesellschaft', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Potenziale im Altern: Chancen und Aufgaben für Individuum und Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 31–40; U. Staudinger, 'Psychologische Produktivität und Selbstentfaltung im Alter', in M. M. Baltes and L. Montada (eds), *Produktives Leben im Alter* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996), 344–73.

responsible life, even when confronted with serious problems, older people can have a positive impact on younger people's future prospects and abilities to cope with problems and difficulties.

A good example of a productive intergenerational dialogue initiated by older people's coping processes can be found in a study by Kruse and Schmitt⁹ on identity and life review in Jewish emigrants and extermination camp survivors. In this study, one principal way of coping with stressful reminiscence—whereby stressful memories generally became more intense with advanced age—was based on an individual need to engage for the benefit of others as well as for the society as a whole. This way of coping reflected an intense preoccupation with the future prospects of younger people, a commitment to the younger generation as well, in terms of sociocultural and political issues. The respondents wanted to sensitise others to societal and personal responsibility, to maintain democracy and to prevent fascism and anti-Semitism. For example, they visited schools as contemporary witnesses and contributed to a responsible handling of history that way.

⁸ D. P. McAdams et al., 'Stories of Commitment: The Psychosocial Construction of Generative Lives', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72/3 (1997), 678–94; D. P. McAdams et al., 'Continuity and Change in the Life Story: A Longitudinal Study of Autobiographical Memories in Emerging Adulthood', *Journal of Personality* 74/5 (2006), 1371–1400; D. P. McAdams and E. de St Aubin, 'A Theory of Generativity and Its Assessment Through Self-report, Behavioral Acts, and Narrative Themes in Autobiography', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62/6 (1992), 1003–15.

⁹ A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, *Wir haben uns als Deutsche geföhlt. Lebensrückblick und Lebenssituation jüdischer Emigranten und Lagerhäftlinge*, (Darmstadt: Steinkopff, 2000); A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Reminiscence of Traumatic Experiences in (Former) Jewish Emigrants and Extermination Camp Survivors', in A. Maercker, M. Schützwohl and Z. Solomon (eds), *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: A Lifespan Developmental Perspective* (Seattle: Hogrefe & Huber, 1999), 155–76; E. Schmitt and J. Hinner, 'Altersbilder und Identität als Grundlage für die Förderung zwischenmenschlicher Akzeptanz und Solidarität', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 147–57.

Realising the potentials of a modern understanding of active ageing distinctly depends upon intergenerational solidarity, with older people's aspirations, motivations and opportunities explicitly reflecting the potentials of a given society.¹⁰ Support for active ageing is motivated by the superior ambition to substantiate a society for all ages. Consequently, the guiding principles of active ageing¹¹ explicitly include rights and obligations. According to the principle of subsidiarity, society is considered to be responsible for guaranteeing adequate opportunities to develop, expand and realise the potentials of old age, and older people are considered to be obliged to use the opportunities offered by society to realise a life of self-responsibility and shared responsibility.

Since the 1960s concepts of activity have regularly been justified by referring to capabilities and competences preserved in even the highest age groups. Taking a primarily individual perspective, modern concepts of active ageing can be understood as preventive concepts: Continuous engagement in personally meaningful relationships and contexts and the systematic use of chances and opportunities can prevent or at least substantially delay physical, psychological and social losses and deficits. Referring to more recent definitions of productivity, it is further argued

¹⁰ S. Biggs and I. Haapala, 'Generational Intelligence and Sustainable Relationships', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 13–145; A. Walker, 'The Social Creation of Poverty and Dependency in Old Age', *Journal of Social Policy* 9/1 (1980), 49–75; A. Walker, 'Ageing in Europe: Challenges and Consequences', *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 32/6 (1999), 390–7.

¹¹ M. Hüther, 'Vertrauen im Wandel und Vertrauen in den Wandel—Die Bedeutung des langen Lebens für den politischen Diskurs', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 219–30; Kruse, 'Alter neu denken', 63–81; S. Pohlmann, 'Die politischen Implikationen des Alterns', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 207–18; Walker, 'The Principals and Potential of Active Ageing', 113–18.

that, even when suffering from severe physical losses and decreased independence, people are still able to use their capabilities and options to be productive for the benefit of others or society as a whole.¹² Therefore, from a primarily societal perspective, modern concepts of active ageing can be understood as a means of using the life competences of the elderly as human capital for society.

Life competences refers to experiences, strategies and knowledge systems that people have acquired in earlier phases of the life span¹³ and through lifelong learning processes. Life competences develop in the context of coping effectively with tasks and challenges. Building up life competences in earlier years is a basic requirement for successful development in advanced age, that is, coping effectively with the challenges and demands of life in old age. Such challenges and demands include practical and psychological as well as interpersonal and ethical issues. Consequently, our understanding of life competences is not limited to physical and cognitive strategies and knowledge systems acquired in the context of educational and occupational activities. Life competences are also reflected in ethical judgements, voluntary activities for other people and the willingness and readiness to take responsibility for oneself, for others or for society. Empirical findings show that active coping with developmental tasks, opportunities and limits of life can lead to the establishment of 'expert

¹² L. Montada, 'Machen Gebrechlichkeit und chronische Krankheit produktives Altern unmöglich?' in M. M. Baltes and L. Montada (eds.), *Produktives Leben im Alter* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996), 328–92.

¹³ A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Adult Education', in J. E. Birren (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gerontology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), 41–9; A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Psychology of Education in Old Age', in N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 4223–7; A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Adult Education and Training: Cognitive Aspects', in N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 139–42.

knowledge' or 'wisdom' with respect to questions of life.¹⁴ Expert knowledge or wisdom is not limited to old age; it can be developed in earlier years as well. The only prerequisite for the development of expert knowledge or wisdom is the conscious and responsible preoccupation with a multitude of problems, tasks and challenges in different periods of life. Therefore, empirical findings support a perspective on lifelong educational processes that accentuates the development of the person, rather than the cultivation of specific knowledge and skills.

Active ageing is not only a productive but also a creative process.¹⁵ Creativity most notably refers to the ability to generate something new. In this context 'something new' does not necessarily refer to the production of goods or ideas.¹⁶ Creativity can be observed in numerous different contexts, for example, in arts or technology, but also in interpersonal relationships. Growing older is commonly associated with losses in learning abilities, curiosity, openness, and precisely, creativity. Creativity still has a 'young' image.¹⁷

¹⁴ P. B. Baltes and U. Kunzmann, 'The Two Faces of Wisdom: Wisdom as a General Theory of Knowledge and Judgment about Excellence in Mind and Virtue vs. Wisdom as Everyday Realization in People and Products', *Human Development* 47/5 (2004), 290–9; P. B. Baltes and U. M. Staudinger, 'Wisdom', in G. L. Maddox (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Aging* (New York: Springer, 1995), 971–4; P. B. Baltes and U. M. Staudinger, 'The Search for a Psychology of Wisdom', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2 (1998), 1–6; U. Lehr, 'Erfahrungswissen in der Zivilgesellschaft', 31–40; U. Staudinger, 'Lebenserfahrung, Lebenssinn und Weisheit', in U. Staudinger and S.-H. Filipp (eds.), *Enzyklopädie der Psychologie, Entwicklungspsychologie des mittleren und höheren Erwachsenenalters* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 2005), 739–61.

¹⁵ S. Arieti, *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, 'Die Ausbildung und Verwirklichung kreativer Potenziale im Alter im Kontext individueller und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Kreativität im Alter* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 15–46; U. Lehr, 'Kreativität in einer Gesellschaft des langen Lebens', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Kreativität im Alter* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 66–85; D. K. Simonton, 'Career Paths and Creative Lives: A Theoretical Perspective on Late Life Potential', in C. E. Adams-Price (ed.), *Creativity and Successful Aging: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches* (New York: Springer, 1998), 3–20.

¹⁶ L. Rosenmayr, 'Productivity and Creativity in Later Life', in S. Pohlmann (ed.), *Facing an Ageing World: Recommendations and Perspectives* (Regensburg: Transfer, 2002), 119–26; L. Rosenmayr, 'Über Offenlegung und Geheimnis von Kreativität', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Kreativität im Alter* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 87–101.

¹⁷ Kruse and Schmitt, 'Die Ausbildung und Verwirklichung kreativer Potenziale im Alter im Kontext individueller und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung', 5–39.

However, growing older can facilitate creativity. Older people often have a better overview of readily available alternatives than younger people. Moreover, in old age there is often less pressure to succeed, implying that older people are better able to afford unconventional solutions. Willingness and capability to take responsibility for oneself and others are preserved in old age.

The question is not whether older people are more or less creative than younger people, but rather, under what circumstances creativity in old age can develop and what the specific qualities of creativity in old age are. In general, older people are not more or less creative than younger people, but compared to the latter they show different kinds of creativity and performance ability. Empirical research suggests an 'old age style of creativity': late-life creativity intends to reduce complexity, and this is supposedly where life experience becomes a bonus.

Beyond artistic and technological activities, everyday creative actions of older people become apparent in scrutinising and possibly accommodating facts, possibilities and ideals.¹⁸ Older people who continually reflect upon their aspirations and ask themselves how they want to live their age are creative. Such reflection need not focus on questions of age and ageing. In all areas of life, beliefs, habits, norms and values can be subject to creative action. In this regard, older people can occupy a privileged position because of their life experience, that is, experience in dealing with various individual and social circumstances and contexts, not least, experiences in coping with dilemmas and conflicts. Against the background of lifelong experiences, taking a generalised and comprehensive perspective which enables

¹⁸ See contributions in A. Kruse, *Kreativität im Alter* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011).

one to recognise broader relationships and to develop heretofore disregarded alternatives—in terms of personal as well as societal opportunities and options—should be considered as a substantial potential of old age. Another potential for creativity in old age lies in taking responsibility for others. Such joint responsibility is particularly apparent in families where relatives are supported in various ways. But also outside their own families many older people contribute to finding solutions for new or previously unrecognised problems. Civil society in particular is a place to test oneself in new roles of responsibility.¹⁹ Whenever problems and difficulties are identified and solutions are suggested in an unreflective manner without asking for possible alternatives, there is an opportunity for civil engagement. Civil engagement starts with challenging habits and established processes and responsibilities—in the family, neighbourhood and community, but also in more global contexts. Self-formation and codetermination in civil society are always based on creative and productive action.²⁰

Altogether, a comprehensive understanding of creativity suggests that in old age there is a particular demand for creativity. Since lifelong practices and capabilities that were once effective as a matter of course no longer work as usual (e.g. because of restricted mobility or decline in speed and precision of information processing), new strategies of coping with daily life have to be developed by the individual in a creative way. In this regard, creativity means being open to new technologies, gaining new competences

¹⁹ T. Klie, 'Reflexionen zur zivilgesellschaftlichen Dimension des Alterns', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 245–60.

²⁰ Deutscher Bundestag, *Fünfter Altenbericht der Bundesregierung: Potenziale im Alter* (Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag, 2006); Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Sechster Altenbericht der Bundesregierung. Altersbilder in unserer Gesellschaft*. (Berlin: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2010).

and finding new solutions and ideas which allow for the expected quality of daily life to be maintained under changed conditions, continuing self-care, self-responsibility and shared responsibility. Creativity in old age sometimes implies long-lasting coping processes, requiring new views of the self and the world, or the development of strategies for compensation.

Misconceptions stating that older people are less creative than younger people regularly confound two levels of creativity in old age, an individual and a societal level. Even if these two levels are closely linked—individuals are always creative within a given society; a creative society always implies that there are creative individuals—they should be differentiated, since realisation of creative potentials in old age demands a social context that does not insist on established routines but is open to bringing common praxis into question, and developing and trying out new solutions.

Generativity

According to Erikson's theory of personality development over the life span, realisation of generativity becomes an important developmental task in middle adulthood, in the seventh of a total of eight psychosocial crises. Erikson emphasised the connection to productivity and creativity, even though his understanding of generativity primarily focused on family relationships, particularly bearing and raising children. Today, generativity is no longer understood as a concept 'within' the individual but as a relational and multiply contextualised construct that links the person to the social world.²¹

²¹ P. Coleman, 'Generativity and Reconciliation in the Second Half of Life', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Leben im Alter: Eigen- und Mitverantwortlichkeit in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Politik* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 159–66; McAdams and de St. Aubin, 'A Theory of Generativity', 1003–15.

The current understanding of generativity follows the conceptual and methodological framework provided by McAdams.²² From this perspective there are two motivational sources of generativity—cultural demand and inner desire. Cultural demand as a facet of generativity can be further explicated as reflecting the age structure of society and normative developmental expectations. In this context it should also be considered that cultural demand for generativity can substantially change over time. For example, against the background of demographic change, interest in possibilities and preconditions of development and effective use of strengths and potentials of old age has grown worldwide. But generativity is not only prompted by society; not only societies have benefited from generative action. Inner desire as a second motivational source of generativity refers to two complementary basic human needs: a ‘need to be needed’, to have meaningful relations to others, and a need for ‘symbolic immortality’, to invest resources and potentials into things that outlive the self. The aforementioned motivational sources of generativity are reflected in two further facets of generativity, namely, a conscious concern for, and a commitment to take responsibility for, the next generation. The translation of concern and commitment into generative action depends on what has been described by Erikson as ‘belief in the species’, that is, ‘to place hope in the advancement and betterment of human life in succeeding generations, even in the face of strong evidence of human destructiveness and deprivation’. Moreover, generativity is conceived of within the larger context of life-story theory of adult identity. From this perspective adults construct and try

²² D. P. McAdams et al., ‘Stories of Commitment’, 678–94; D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson and A. Lieblich, *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (Washington: APA Books, 2006); A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, ‘Lebensläufe und soziale Lebenslaufpolitik in psychologischer Perspektive’, in G. Naeyele (ed.), *Soziale Lebenslaufpolitik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 138–73.

to live out a 'generativity script', which not only reflects past generative action but is also important for current generative concerns and commitments as well as for an understanding of what is worthy to outlive the self—what can and should be transmitted to others to live on through generative efforts.

Generativity scripts are conceptualised as an important aspect of identity in higher age groups. In this context two aspects of identity become particularly important: First, identity—in the sense of an understanding one has of oneself and one's own development—is established in the context of narration. Adults define themselves and their position in society in terms of a life story that provides life with unity, purpose and meaning. Specific events and developments do not have an impact on individual identity in itself. Instead, they are selected from a magnitude of possible relevant events and developments (which, moreover, can be interpreted and evaluated in very different ways) and integrated into a coherent story that, starting from early adulthood, regularly becomes more and more a definite story. This story becomes the principal basis for understanding not only recent but also past events and developments. Second, identity develops and becomes important in social interaction. Although referring to an individual understanding one has of oneself, identity in old age cannot be understood without considering social representations of old age and ageing, societal expectations and availability of social roles and opportunity structures, for example, in the sense of a 'generalised other' or a 'me', representing societal expectations and values. As a consequence, processes of social change can have a sustainable impact on individual identity.

Intergenerational equity

The concept of intergenerational equity reflects the notion that chances and opportunities available for different age groups can be negatively interdependent.²³ As a consequence, the pronounced promotion of development, maintenance and utilisation of the potentials of old age might imply decreasing opportunities for development and realisation of potentials in later-born cohorts, particularly when available resources are scarce. Therefore, promotion of old-age potentials must also be considered in the context of developing a child-friendly society.²⁴ In the long range, an anti-child society is not capable of surviving, and a sustainable realisation of old-age potentials is only possible in a child-friendly society. In this context, it should be considered that societal innovation is perceived and evaluated subjectively by the members of the given society, with perceptions and evaluations being not necessarily congruent with objective standards. As such, for instance, young people might view enhanced labour force participation of older workers as a form of age-based discrimination, even if they themselves *benefit* from a corresponding development. Accordingly, a sustainable promotion of old-age potentials requires an intergenerational perspective and a continuous effort to establish transparency of the aims and measures of ageing policy.²⁵

²³ S. Pohlmann, 'Die ethische Dimension der Generationensolidarität', *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 38 (2005), 233–41.

²⁴ P. Coleman, 'Generativity and Reconciliation in the Second Half of Life', 159–66; F. Lang and M. Baltes, 'Brauchen alte Menschen junge Menschen? Überlegungen zu den Entwicklungsaufgaben im hohen Lebensalter', in L. Krappmann and A. Lepenies (eds.), *Alt und jung: Spannung und Solidarität zwischen den Generationen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997), 161–84; E. Olbrich, 'Das Alter: Generationen auf dem Weg zu einer "neuen Altenkultur"?' in E. Liebau (ed.), *Das Generationenverhältnis* (Weinheim: Juventa, 1997), 175–94.

²⁵ M. Hüther, 'Vertrauen im Wandel und Vertrauen in den Wandel', 219–30; Klie, 'Reflexionen zur zivilgesellschaftlichen Dimension des Alterns', 245–60; Pohlmann, 'Die politischen Implikationen des Alterns', 207–18.

All over Europe there is a substantial increase in the absolute number and relative proportion of older people. Consequently, ageing policy, which has existed as a discrete field of action in policy only for a few decades, is continuously becoming more important. As a challenge, ageing policy is confronted with continuously changing circumstances. Successful ageing policy—not only in terms of successfully implementing measures to reach predefined political aims but also in terms of defining adequate aims of political action—must be attuned to various other fields of political action. There is probably no other field of political action which is not only forced to continually accommodate to changing societal contexts, but whose constitutive element—in this case, the group of older people—is so rapidly becoming more and more heterogeneous. Physical and intellectual capacities can be expected to be even less correlated to chronological age; in a few decades, a non-negligible part of the population aged 65 years and over will be much more similar to those 45 years of age today than to today's 65-year-olds. Simultaneously, another significant part of today's 65-year-olds will suffer from a disproportional number of, not least, lifestyle-determined impairments, and appear to be much older than today's 65-year-olds. It is the task of ageing policy to promote sustainably the individual and collective developmental potentials of active, creative and productive older people, without neglecting the individual and social needs and interests of vulnerable older people with particular need for care. Even today, bringing together these requirements is an exceedingly difficult challenge for ageing policies.

Ageing policy is sometimes (mis)understood as social policy for older people, basically aimed at guaranteeing material security and health care. However, ageing policy is the entirety of measures focusing on maintaining, or

supporting the changing, life situations of older people. Hence, housing and transport as well as education, employment, participation and engagement are further important issues of ageing policy; development of ageing policy is a cross-sectional task, since it is influenced by and has an impact on many other fields of policy: economic and financial policy, cultural and educational policy and family policy.

Modern ageing policy emphasises the basic requirement to offer older people equal opportunities to live a best possible, independent and self-determined life within and for the particular society. Policy measures for older people should be inspired by the basic aim of establishing a cultural context which allows for a competent and active ageing in the midst of the society, and simultaneously can guarantee security and care for older people who suffer from impairment and disease. However, ageing policy must also compete with the task of dealing adequately with needs, interests and opportunities of younger and future generations.

Essentially, political questions of old age have to be dealt with in the context of comprehensive generational discourse: Supplies and rights in favour of the elderly as well as societal demands have to take account of possible implications for the following generations. In a sense, generational equity means that what is spend for one generation is no longer available for other generations, and thus, potentially puts these generations at a disadvantage. Therefore, policy for one generation must be balanced with policies for other generations.

Aspects of generational equity are not only important for maintaining intergeneration contracts—a basic cultural element of modern states—but also for the self-concepts

of older people. A positive impact on older people's self-concepts can be expected, insofar as an intergenerational perspective enables them to find new sociocultural roles, that is, a basis for shared responsibility for living in old age. Equally important is that, due to this perspective, old age is increasingly integrated into the political and public spheres. To quote Hannah Arendt: The private dimension is enriched and expanded by the political dimension.²⁶

All ages have to be regarded as equal, not only with respect to rights but also with respect to obligations. Consequently, older people must not only claim their rights; rather, they are, regardless of whether they are already retired or not, obliged to the state and society. Considering present demographic changes, older people will have to take responsibility for further development of society. Societies are no longer able to relinquish the contribution of older people. Demographic change is irreversible. The ability of European societies to exploit the potentials of old age will be decisive in meeting the challenges of globalisation, structural change and international competition, and being prepared for the necessities of reform and innovation to maintain prosperity.

Continuity

In his philosophy of the present George Herbert Mead wrote, 'We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so. . . . [T]he past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future.'²⁷ Life is organised and structured by people themselves. As early as in adolescence people begin to create a coherent life

²⁶ H. Arendt: *Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (München: Piper, 1960).

²⁷ G. H. Mead, *Philosophy of the Present* (Chicago: Open Court, 1932), 12.

story which—in normal circumstances—becomes more and more a definite story, a basis for reconstructing and understanding the past, for interpreting and evaluating the present, and for anticipating the future, setting aims, making plans and pursuing and adjusting goals. In psychology, there is a longstanding controversy as to whether self-consistency is a need even more important than self-respect and self-enhancement, since coping with stress and challenges, or more general self-regulation processes, seems impossible without establishing and maintaining at least some kind of continuity. Following the life span developmental theory of Erikson,²⁸ establishing ego integrity in the context of reviewing one's life is an indispensable task at the end of human life; if people do not succeed in this task, they are expected to suffer from despair and feel disappointment with their own lives. This last psychosocial crisis is initiated by changes in older people's situation at the end of life and further reinforced by social demand. Ego integrity is conceptualised as a positive ending point of lifelong identity development, with identity defined as awareness of self-sameness and continuity, and the style of one's individuality coinciding with one's sameness and continuity as perceived by significant others. Reaching ego integrity implies being able to accept one's life as a whole, including lost opportunities and unfulfilled aspirations and expectations. Similarly, more recent gerontological theories, for example, continuity theory proposed by Robert Atchley²⁹ and socioemotional selectivity

²⁸ E. H. Erikson, H. Q. Kivnick and J. M. Erikson, *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (New York: Norton, 1986), 50.

²⁹ R. C. Atchley, 'Continuity Theory of Normal Aging', *The Gerontologist* 29/2 (1989), 183–90; H. Thomae, 'Probleme der Konzeptualisierung von Altersformen', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Psychosoziale Gerontologie, 1: Grundlagen* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 1998), 35–50; Thomae, 'Psychologische Modelle und Theorien des Lebenslaufs', 12–45; H. Thomae and U. Lehr, 'Stages, Crises, Conflicts and Life Span Development', in A. B. Sorensen, F. E. Weinert and L. R. Sherrod (eds.), *Human Development and the Life Course* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1986), 429–44.

theory proposed by Laura Carstensen,³⁰ conceptualise continuity as a precondition for satisfaction with life and subjective well-being. The aforementioned theories elucidate that role activity in younger ages is a significant moderator of the relationship between older people's actual activity in specific social roles, satisfaction with these roles and satisfaction with life. The suggested need for continuity can explain results of empirical research which at first sight seem to contradict claims for promoting activity as well as claims for promoting disengagement: those older people who in younger ages were engaged in specific social roles regularly benefit from continued role activity, whereas those who were earlier not much engaged sometimes benefit from disengagement. Likewise, socioemotional selectivity theory elucidates that decreases in social contacts and social roles can have different outcomes, depending on how older people succeed in satisfying individual motives for emotional regulation, identity and information in maintained, possibly optimised, social relationships (with these motives changing gradually over the life span because of systematic change in future time perspective).

³⁰ L. L. Carstensen, D. M. Isaacowitz and S. T. Charles, 'Taking Time Seriously: A Theory of Socioemotional Selectivity', *American Psychologist* 54/3 (1999), 165–81; L. L. Carstensen and C. E. Löckenhoff, 'Aging, Emotion, and Evolution: The Bigger Picture', in P. Ekman et al. (eds.), *Emotions Inside Out: 130 Years after Darwin's The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1000 (2004), 152–79.

Self-responsibility as an ethical concept and an empirical concept

The concept of *self-responsibility* refers to an individual's ability and motivation to lead a daily life congruent with subjectively important needs, norms and values, and to reflect upon questions of one's own personality and identity as well as the possibilities and limits of one's personal life situation.³¹

Notwithstanding general physical and cognitive decline, older people also possess potentials and strengths that enable them to successfully compensate for age-related deficits, in working contexts as well as in everyday life.

Considering the experience and potential of older people to continue to contribute to their communities in their later years, an ageing society cannot dispense with the civil engagement of its older people. Older persons as well as younger persons are able to contribute innovations to society and sharpen its competitive edge.³² Indeed, it is more and more apparent not only in scientific but also in public (and political) discourse that changes in age do not necessarily imply losses in economic competitiveness. Intergenerational equity and solidarity appear to be on the rise.

However, these more optimistic scenarios of population ageing presuppose that older people already are, or can be, motivated to use their strengths and potentials for society—that older people are adequately engaged in, accepted

³¹ A. Kruse, 'Selbstständigkeit, Selbstverantwortung, bewusst angenommene Abhängigkeit und Mitverantwortung als Kategorien einer Ethik des Alters', *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie & Geriatrie* 38/4 (2005), 223–37.

³² Kruse and Schmitt, 'Adult Education', 41–9.

by and rewarded through their interactions with society at large. In Germany, older people already contribute to intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion by means of social and political engagement with and/or for younger generations.³³ It is apparent from the available survey data that even in the ninth decade of life, family relationships reflect reciprocity in exchange of instrumental and emotional support. Numerous associations, clubs and initiatives could not exist without the voluntary activities of older people. Older people contribute considerably to the socialisation of younger generations (not only in their own families) and to the functioning and sustainability (and affordability) of the German social security system.³⁴

Foundations for the realisation of old-age potentials are laid in the earlier phases of the life span. It is due to developmental processes in earlier phases of the life span that health and productive capacity can still be increased in old age, and that capacity for new learning expands over the entire life span. As with health status and education, self-responsibility and shared responsibility in old age also depend on previous developmental processes and social inequalities. Those who perceived their individual development in childhood and in middle and older adulthood as other-directed and uncontrollable (and therefore had only limited opportunities to develop skills, competences and habits promoting self-responsibility and shared responsibility) will probably not develop an optimal lifestyle in old age. Similarly, it could be shown that early learning experiences are a good predictor of learning motivation and activities in

³³ E.-M Kessler and U. M. Staudinger, 'Intergenerational Potential: Effects of Social Interaction between Older Adults and Adolescents', *Psychology and Aging* 22/4 (2007), 690–704.

³⁴ S. Pohlmann, (ed.), *Facing an Ageing World: Recommendations and Perspectives* (Regensburg: Transfer, 2002).

older adulthood and old age. Nevertheless, people are always agents of their own development, regardless of social status, biography and chronological age (e.g., avoiding risk factors and adopting health-promoting nutrition and physical activity have a marked impact on health status also in very old age).

The ethics of responsibility and the need for a new understanding of old age

When we turn to the question of human beings' basic responsibilities, we take as our point of departure the *coram* structure, which we use as a conceptual framework.³⁵ The Latin *coram* can be translated as 'to keep in sight'; the term *coram public* as 'in front of the public' (the community, the society, the world). Proceeding from this conception, three spheres of human responsibility are differentiated, which, taken together, illuminate the meaning of old age for individuals as well as for societies. The first sphere of responsibility is individual self-care, the person's responsibility for and to oneself. The second sphere of responsibility concerns individuals' shared responsibility, their willingness to engage for the benefit of others and society. The third sphere

³⁵ Kruse, 'Selbstständigkeit, Selbstverantwortung, bewusst angenommene Abhängigkeit und Mitverantwortung als Kategorien einer Ethik des Alters', 223–37; A. Kruse, and E. Schmitt, 'Potenziale im Alter–Person- und Gesellschaftskonzepte zum Verständnis eines selbstverantwortlichen und mitverantwortlichen Lebens im Alter', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Potenziale im Altern* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 14–32; A. Kruse, 'Ältere Menschen im "öffentlichen" Raum: Perspektiven altersfreundlicher Kultur', in H. W. Wahl and H. Mollenkopf (eds.), *Alternforschung am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007), 320–39.

of responsibility is the individuals' obligation to God and creation, their joint responsibility for succeeding generations, including those not yet been born.

The term *joint responsibility*³⁶ implies the individual's ability and motivation to empathise with others, to engage for the benefit of others, to contribute to the fulfilment of other people's needs and to engage for the good of society as a whole. As a concept, joint responsibility refers to the principle of subsidiarity, which is founded in the Christian social ethics of Nell-Breuning³⁷ and states that matters of social welfare, ideally, should be handled in their immediate place of origin, that is, by the smallest, lowest or least centralised competent authority. Central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks that cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. The concept of subsidiarity refers to both the utilisation of existing potentials (of the individual, the family, municipalities) to manage tasks and challenges, and the obligation of more global social structures to offer the necessary support. Accordingly, the principle of shared responsibility and solidarity accentuates both obligations of older people and obligations of society: Older people should take responsibility for development and maintenance of old-age potentials and use them in support of themselves and others. Society must guarantee the underlying conditions necessary for development, maintenance and realisation of old-age potentials.

The concept of caring communities is closely related to the idea of subsidiarity. Caring communities are defined by their members' willingness to take joint responsibility for

³⁶ A. Kruse, 'Der Mensch in seinen Beziehungen: Eine Verantwortungsethik und Verantwortungspsychologie des hohen Erwachsenenalters', in C. Polke et al. (eds.), *Niemand ist eine Insel: Menschsein im Schnittpunkt von Anthropologie, Theologie und Ethik* (Berlin: deGruyter, 2011), 112–26.

³⁷ O. V. Nell-Breuning, *Soziallehre der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977).

others. It is the basic idea of caring communities that many services that people need to (re-)establish and maintain an independent and self-responsible life—not only in old age but over the whole life span—which cannot be offered by members of the family or social security systems, can be rendered by neighbours, acquaintances and friends in the community. Obviously, non-profit civil engagement of caring communities not only contributes to social cohesion in the respective locality but also contributes to substantial relief of social security systems. In this regard, supporting the development of caring communities is a possible way to compensate for impending deficits in sustainability and effectiveness of social services.

In terms of social policy, determining the appropriate structures for the balance of individual and societal responsibility is crystallised in the principle of *institutional subsidiarity*. Subsidiarity means that the individual and the community in the narrow sense should act first and that the state should intervene only when there is no alternative. First, the individual's resources should be strengthened, so that he or she is able to lead an independent, self-determined and socially active life. Here it is important to assist the individual in creating or changing environmental conditions in accordance with personal needs and values. Where the individual is not able to cope alone, assistance should be sought first from family members, neighbours, self-help groups and voluntary welfare organisations, and the state should be called in only as a last resort. This aspect gains special importance in cases of *high vulnerability*, a risk that increases in the fourth age. Vulnerability is demanding not only for the individual but also for society. To what extent should society provide support for the individual in his or her effort to sustain or regain an independent and

personally responsible existence? How clearly defined is the obligation of the society to put available resources of the social security system, for example, health insurance, to use in supporting old people? And with a glance at the demographic developments in many developed countries, to what extent will the decision-makers and the policymakers in these societies be prepared to take the part of people of old age when the resources of the social security system are even more severely limited than is the case today?³⁸ Will the needs of people who are reliant on comprehensive treatment, rehabilitation and long-term care still be sufficiently represented and acknowledged in public discourse?

Religiousness, well-being and civil engagement

Aspects of religiousness are interpreted in the context of psychological constructs as well as in that of empirical results, referring to the close relations between religiousness or spirituality and subjective well-being, participation and engagement for the benefit of other people ('shared responsibility').

Starting with the psychological constructs, gerotranscendence, generativity and integrity are seen as those psychological constructs which are of particular significance in understanding psychological effects of religiousness and spirituality on 'active ageing'.

³⁸ A. Walker, 'Ageing in Europe: Challenges and Consequences', 390–7.

The *theory of gerotranscendence*³⁹ postulates an age-increasing willingness to incorporate one's own life into comprehensive (or 'full') terms of reference. Being beyond oneself—the key element of gerotranscendence—encompasses the feeling of being absorbed into other people's lives (especially into the life of younger generations) as well as the feeling of being embedded into an extensive context or cosmic order.⁴⁰ In characterising gerotranscendence, it is helpful to take up the differentiation between life time (*Lebenszeit*) and universal time (*Weltzeit*), which was introduced by Blumenberg.⁴¹ Differentiating between individual life time and cosmic universal time highlights the human being's motive for *transcendence*, which can be defined as the motive for feeling embedded into a cosmic order that the individual can trust in. Gerotranscendence is also discussed in the context of religiousness or spirituality—empirical results point to the increasing willingness of the elderly to interpret one's own life from a universal perspective in the case of a positively evaluated religious socialisation.⁴² The universal perspective in this case not only refers to a cosmic transcendence, but also includes the advance towards generativity, meaning to identify with the younger people's lives, to feel with them, to share their concerns and to motivate and support them.

³⁹ L. Tornstam, 'Gero-Transcendence: A Meta-theoretical Reformulation of the Disengagement Theory', *Ageing: Clinical and Experimental Research* 1/1 (1989), 55–63.

⁴⁰ A. Kruse, 'Zur Religiosität und Spiritualität im Alter', in P. Bäurle et al. (eds), *Kreativität, Spiritualität und Psychotherapie* (Bern: Huber, 2005), 30–45; U. Lehr, 'Kreativität in einer Gesellschaft des langen Lebens', 66–85; A. Wittrahm, "'Unsere Tage zu zählen lehre uns. . .'" Theologische Bausteine zu einem Altern in Freiheit und Würde', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Potenziale im Altern: Chancen und Aufgaben für Individuum und Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010), 131–43.

⁴¹ H. Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

⁴² Wittrahm, 'Unsere Tage zu zählen lehre uns ...', 131–43.

The *theory of generativity*⁴³ postulates an age-increasing motive to engage for the benefit of other people, to pass one's own knowledge to younger people, to identify with their future, on condition of (a) having developed and 'lived' the attitude of shared responsibility in former stages of life, and (b) finding opportunity structures in the present which motivate the individual to continue a life of shared responsibility. Religiousness and spirituality do affect generativity in old age positively, if '*human being[s] in relationships*' as well as '*parishioners*' and '*shared responsibility*' were personally significant issues in the biography.⁴⁴ Here, the high potential of religiousness and spirituality for the understanding of the human being as *a being in relationships*, and consequently for generativity, is highlighted.⁴⁵

'Integrity' is a key component in the theoretical work of Erikson and of Peck.⁴⁶ Here, integrity is interpreted as the motive for a personal life review, accepting one's own biography in its developmental potentials as well as in its limitations and limits and interpreting the life as something that has been necessary and good. In theoretical works, there is very often established a relation between integrity and religiousness or spirituality.⁴⁷ On the condition of a positively perceived religious socialisation there is an age-related increase in the willingness to incorporate one's own life into full terms of reference, which are often interpreted as '*divine*'; these full terms or divine references motivate the

⁴³ E. H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York, 1959); Erikson, Kivnick and Erikson, *Vital Involvement in Old Age*; A. Kruse, 'Offenheit, Generativität und Integrität als Entwicklungsaufgaben des hohen Alters', in A. Kruse (ed.), *Kreativität im Alter* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 112–28; D. P. McAdams, *The Person: An Introduction to the Science of Personality Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 2009).

⁴⁴ W. Härle, *Menschsein in Beziehungen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005).

⁴⁵ Kruse, 'Der Mensch in seinen Beziehungen', 112–26.

⁴⁶ R. Peck, 'Psychologische Entwicklung in der zweiten Lebenshälfte', in H. Thomae and U. Lehr (eds.), *Altern: Probleme und Tatsachen* (Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1977), 530–44.

⁴⁷ H. H. Dalai-Lama and H. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).

individual to perceive the individual life course as necessary and good—this is also true when a lot of limitations and limits are remembered.

Empirical research points to the noticeable effects of *intrinsically motivated religiousness* on *subjective well-being*. Intrinsically motivated religiousness refers to the individual's identification with beliefs and practising of faith out of an *internal* motive. Intrinsically motivated religiousness consolidates the ability and willingness to reflect deeply on developmental potentials and limits of life, thereby supporting acceptance of one's own finitude. Being able to accept one's own limits and finitude has a positive impact on well-being.⁴⁸ Finally, there is a close relation between intrinsically motivated religiousness or spirituality and fundamental trust in life as well as the ability to forgive. By contrast, *extrinsically* motivated religiousness—practising faith out of institutional duties and *not* out of an internal (spiritual, religious) motive—is negatively correlated with well-being, trust and the ability to forgive. Extrinsically motivated religiousness often is associated with the idea of a 'deprecating God'; this idea impedes acceptance of the limitations⁴⁹ of human existence. In this case the individual does not experience him- or herself as a being protected by God, but is instead full of fear, expecting punishment rather than forgiveness.

The close relations between internally motivated religiousness and social participation as well as engagement for the benefit of other people (shared responsibility) are explained by *congregational life* and *apostolic succession* as significant themes of people being religious

⁴⁸ R. Emmons, 'Spirituality: Recent Progress', in M. Csikszentmihaly and I. S. Csikszentmihaly (eds.), *A Life Worth Living* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 203–4.

⁴⁹ K. Jaspers, *Philosophie* (Heidelberg: Springer, 1932).

and practising their faith.⁵⁰ Here, the idea of a ‘caring community’, understood as a community combining family and neighbourhood, has its place: The caring community represents the moral model of a human society, showing its strengths in cases of individuals and families dependent on support.⁵¹

Self-image of age and ageing, age stereotypes and realisation of old-age potentials

The extent to which older people perceive themselves as full-value members of a given society who—aside from decreases in objective resources—possess strengths and potentials which can be used effectively for others, not least, reflects dominant representations of old age and ageing, respectively. The hypothesis of a strong correlation between social images of old age and ageing, which one-sidedly accentuate deficits and decline, and a limited range of opportunities for older people to establish and maintain continuity and self-worth by engaging in meaningful roles, and thereby realise the potential to lead a life in self- and joint responsibility, marks not only the starting point of

⁵⁰ K. Pargament and A. Mahoney, ‘Spirituality: Discovering and Conserving the Sacred’, in C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 647.

⁵¹ Klie, ‘Reflexionen zur zivilgesellschaftlichen Dimension des Alterns’, 245–60.

social psychological and gerontological research on age stereotypes but also a basic assumption of recent theories on the development and maintenance of behavioural dependency in older people. For example, in an extensive research programme on learned dependency,⁵² it could be shown that deficits in performing activities of daily living in institutions are by no means determined primarily by biological decline; nor are they irreversible. Instead, allegedly needed support received from caregivers often reflects scripts that reinforce dependency support and ignore independency in daily activities. Intervention measures aimed at changing caregivers' images of old age and ageing by enhancing knowledge and skills in behaviour modification and detailed reflection of interactions between caregivers and older people can contribute to older people regaining substantial and sustainable everyday competences. Similarly, in the context of the Communication Predicament of Ageing model, it could be elucidated⁵³ that over-accommodation in speech behaviour (e.g. in the form of patronising speech or baby talk) regularly has a severe impact on older people's opportunities for self-presentation and successful behaviour in intergenerational interactions, implying that deficit-accentuating stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies, automatically reinforcing younger people's unfavourable expectations and, in the long term, contributing to sustained losses in older people, due to disuse of competences.

Although there is still a controversy as to whether deficit-accentuating age stereotypes have a direct impact on social

⁵² M. M. Baltes, *The Many Faces of Dependency in Old Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵³ J. Harwood, H. Giles and E. B. Ryan, 'Aging, Communication, and Intergroup Theory: Social Identity and Intergenerational Communication', in J. F. Nussbaum and J. Coupland (eds.), *Handbook of Communication and Aging Research* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995), 133–60; E. B. Ryan et al., 'Psycholinguistic and Social Psychological Components of Communication by and with the Elderly', *Language and Communication* 6/1–2 (1986), 1–24.

behaviour,⁵⁴ primarily threaten older people's self-concepts, and therefore necessitate adaptation of social behaviour, or might also be used by older people themselves in downward comparisons to support self-esteem,⁵⁵ there is consensus among researchers that activation of deficit-accentuating age stereotypes has a negative impact on self-worth and productive capacity, at least, in those people who fear, expect or already perceive decreases and deficits (in the sense of 'stereotype threat'⁵⁶).

Regarding the aim of improving the life situation of older people, age stereotypes are significant, at least, in a fourfold manner: as general beliefs about the course and malleability of ageing processes; as self-assessment and anticipation of one's own ageing processes; as beliefs about characteristic attributes of older people; and as beliefs about demands, needs and requirements, social rights and duties of older people.⁵⁷

Taken as general beliefs about the course and malleability of ageing processes, age stereotypes have an impact on anticipation, perception and interpretation of developmental tasks and respective societal structures of opportunity;⁵⁸ on

⁵⁴ J. A. Bargh, M. Chen, M. and L. Burrows, 'Automaticity of Social Behavior: Direct Effects of Trait Construct and Stereotype Activation on Action', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17/2 (1996), 230–44; I. V. Blair, 'The Malleability of Automatic Stereotypes and Prejudice', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6 (2002), 242–61.

⁵⁵ J. Krueger, J. Heckhausen and J. Hundertmark, 'Perceiving Middle-aged Adults: Effects of Stereotype-congruent and Incongruent Information', *Journal of Gerontology* 50/2 (1995), 82–93; B. R. Levy, 'Mind Matters: Cognitive and Physical Effects of Aging Self-stereotypes', *Journal of Gerontology* 58/4 (2003), 203–11.

⁵⁶ T. M. Hess et al., 'The Impact of Stereotype Threat on Age Differences in Memory Performance', *Journal of Gerontology* 58/1 (2003), 3–11.

⁵⁷ Schmitt and Hinner, 'Altersbilder und Identität als Grundlage für die Förderung zwischenmenschlicher Akzeptanz und Solidarität'.

⁵⁸ A. Freund and P. B. Baltes, 'Entwicklungsaufgaben als Orientierungsstrukturen von Entwicklung und Entwicklungsoptimierung', in S.-H. Filipp and U. M. Staudinger (eds.), *Entwicklungspsychologie des mittleren und höheren Erwachsenenalters* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 2005), 37–79; See also Thomae and Lehr, 'Stages, Crises, Conflicts and Life Span Development', 429–44.

the dynamics between goal selection, commitment, goal pursuit and goal adjustment;⁵⁹ on attending to, avoiding and creating developmental contexts; and on using options of development.⁶⁰ Here, stereotypes are conceptualised as ‘normative conceptions of development’,⁶¹ that is, allegedly verified knowledge about occurrence and sequencing of characteristic changes in social roles, physical and psychological attributes, developmental expectations, developmental tasks and social opportunity structures.

As self-assessment and anticipation of one’s own ageing processes—‘ageing self-stereotypes’—age stereotypes have been shown to impact subjective well-being, control beliefs and affect development of physical and mental abilities and social participation. In the Ohio Longitudinal Study of Aging and Retirement—after controlling for age, objective health, sex, income, social integration, ethnicity, subjective health and socio-economic status—study participants showing more positive self-perceptions of ageing in 1975 had better functional health in 1995 than study participants with more negative self-stereotypes.⁶² In further analyses, the various relationships could be shown to be moderated by internal

⁵⁹ J. Brandtstädter, ‘Hartnäckige Zielverfolgung und flexible Zielanpassung als Entwicklungsressourcen: Das Modell assimilativer und akkommodativer Prozesse’, in J. Brandtstädter and U. Lindenberger (eds.), *Entwicklungspsychologie der Lebensspanne. Ein Lehrbuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 413–45; See also Thomae, ‘Probleme der Konzeptualisierung von Altersformen’, 35–50.

⁶⁰ J. Brandtstädter, ‘Entwicklungspsychologie der Lebensspanne: Leitvorstellungen und paradigmatische Orientierungen’, in J. Brandtstädter and U. Lindenberger (eds.), *Entwicklungspsychologie der Lebensspanne: Ein Lehrbuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 34–66; A. Kruse and E. Schmitt, ‘Differenzielle Psychologie des Alterns’, in K. Pawlik (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Psychologie—Angewandte Differenzielle Psychologie* (Göttingen: Hogrefe, 2004), 533–71; Thomae, ‘Psychologische Modelle und Theorien des Lebenslaufs’, 12–45.

⁶¹ H. Heckhausen, R. A. Dixon and P. B. Baltes, ‘Gains and Losses in Development Throughout Adulthood as Perceived by Different Adult Age Groups’, *Developmental Psychology* 25/1 (1989), 109–21.

⁶² B. R. Levy, M. D. Slade and S. V. Kasl, ‘Increased Longevity by Positive Self-perceptions of Aging’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83/2 (2002), 261–70; B. R. Levy et al., ‘Longitudinal Benefit of Positive Self-perceptions of Aging on Functioning Health’, *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* 57/5 (2002), 409–17.

control beliefs and protective health behaviour, which both coincided with more positive self-stereotypes. Moreover, 23 years after baseline assessment, study participants with more positive self-stereotypes had a 7.5-year increased initial life expectancy. Clearly, valuation of life was a significant mediator of the relationship.

As beliefs about characteristic attributes of older people, age stereotypes impact the extent to which people orient themselves towards the perceived age of interaction partners; as well, age stereotypes affect people's perceptions of allegedly characteristic attitudes, competences and deficits, and interpretations of specific behaviour. Age stereotypes coincide with role expectations, which can build substantial barriers to development and use of individual abilities and competences in favour of older people's needs, aspirations and preferences. The Communication Predicament of Ageing Model⁶³ predicts that chronic use of over-accommodative speech in intergenerational interaction has fatal consequences for older people; a communication style attuned to alleged deficits in the long term contributes to a perceived loss of control in older people, with the latter initiating processes of social, physical, mental and emotional decline. It has been suggested that an activation model be developed as further specification of the Communication Predicament of Ageing model, by integrating research on age stereotypes as prototypes. Proceeding from the latter, over-accommodation should only occur when specific prototypes of older people are activated. In a study, expectations for communication with older people significantly varied, depending on the activated prototypes. However, general

⁶³ Ryan et al., 'Psycholinguistic and Social Psychological Components of Communication by and with the Elderly', 1–24; E. B. Ryan, M. L. Hummert and L. H. Boich, 'Communication Predicaments of Aging: Patronizing Behavior Toward Older Adults', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 14/1–2 (1995), 144–66.

attitudes towards old age and ageing proved to be an even better predictor of intergenerational communication, suggesting that categorisation of older people as belonging to specific prototypes is an insufficient condition for accommodation of behaviour in intergenerational communication.

When accepted as beliefs about demands, needs, social rights and duties of older people, age stereotypes impact the establishment, responsibility and competence of social institutions and institutional practice. By this means, age stereotypes contribute to societal definitions of opportunities for development, to allocation of resources, to development and realisation of age potentials and to individual conceptions of intergenerational solidarity and generational equity.

Life events do have purpose or meaning in themselves; purpose and meaning are imputed in a life span-specific and situation-specific manner. Consequently, decreases and deficits in ability and competence do not necessarily correlate with subjective experience of potentials and barriers. Depending on their individual abilities to integrate decreases and deficits into a coherent life story and to establish, re-establish and maintain continuity, people might be more or less able to proceed from subsisting on once-perceived potentials to joint responsibility and active ageing. However, it should be borne in mind that stereotypes accentuating the decreases and deficits of old age can threaten continuity, since the validity of a constructed life story seems time limited and dependent on the course of ageing processes. Results from Schmitt⁶⁴ therefore support Levy's hypothesis that age

⁶⁴ E. Schmitt, 'Aktives Altern, Leistungseinbußen, soziale Ungleichheit und Altersbilder: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis von Resilienz und Vulnerabilität im höheren Erwachsenenalter', *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie* 37/4 (2004), 280–92.

stereotypes increasingly become ageing self-stereotypes, which develop impact not only as explicit but also as implicit concepts.⁶⁵

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Research on the nature and impact of age stereotypes basically points to the necessity of developing a new culture of ageing. This task requires societal creativity.

To focus on ageing instead of age (developmental dynamics)

The possibilities for older people to lead their lives according to individual life plans, values, goals and aspirations, as well as the willingness to use their existing potentials for themselves and others, depend upon developmental conditions that are partly contingently encountered and partly self-created. Such possibilities depend also on experiences and competences developed in coping with idiosyncratic, not least, self-constructed, developmental tasks. Compared with earlier phases of development, old age is rather more than less heterogeneous. As a consequence, chronological age is a good predictor for

⁶⁵ Levy, 'Mind Matters', 203–11; B. R. Levy and M. R. Banaji, 'Implicit Ageism', in T. Nelson (ed.), *Ageism: Stereotypes and Prejudice against Older Persons* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 49–75.

neither developmental status nor developmental conditions.⁶⁶ Generally, social inequalities do not decrease in old age, and much less by themselves. If anything, material and social resources available in old age can be described as the result of an accumulation of advantages and disadvantages.⁶⁷

In ageing societies, the term *age* is too static and too narrow to account for the variety and dynamics of individual living conditions and paths of development. The term *age* is too much committed to the idea of a uniform, sharply defined stage of life, and therefore should be replaced by a comprehensive idea of ageing. Since developmental processes reflect not only a variety of person- and situation-specific factors of influence but also their interaction, personal and environmental attributes, not least, are affected because of individual goals, values and preferences and engagement in the formation of one's own development;⁶⁸ therefore, chronological age must not be used as reference value in defining living conditions. Age limits, and regulating rights and duties exclusively on the basis of chronological age and allegedly corresponding aspirations and needs, must be relinquished. Privileges must not be granted or refused by reference to chronological age alone, without considering available resources, potentials and needs of individuals. The latter implies that cultural peculiarities have to be considered explicitly. Consequently, politics, organisations and institutions have to consider distinctiveness of cultural contexts when advocating messages, offers and measures for older people. Age limits often are implicitly or explicitly associated with a particular need for protection in old age.

⁶⁶ Kruse and Schmitt, 'Differenzielle Psychologie des Alterns', 533–71.

⁶⁷ Kruse and Schmitt, 'Lebensläufe und soziale Lebenslaufpolitik in psychologischer Perspektive', 138–73.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

This association can strengthen and stabilise age stereotypes accentuating deficits and decline. However, protection from old-age vulnerability is an important aspect of social integration, intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion. Therefore, suspending age limits is not an aim in itself; justification of age limits must be reflected on a case-by-case basis.

To support development of a new culture of ageing

Supporting the development and realisation of active, productive and creative ageing depends on the dominant representations of age and ageing in a given society. Against this background, developing differentiated perceptions of old age and ageing, considering the heterogeneity of the older population, is an important task for ageing societies. Older people need differentiated conceptions of old age and ageing to anticipate developmental tasks, develop necessary resources and effectively use existing resources in coping processes. In addition, younger people benefit from differentiated conceptions of old age and ageing in terms of adaptive self-regulation, goal pursuit and goal adjustment. Moreover, younger people need differentiated conceptions of old age and ageing to understand and adequately meet the specific limits, needs, strengths and potentials of the people they interact with every day. As a consequence, all members of an ageing society are obliged to be more creatively concerned with old age and thereby to contribute to the development of an age-friendly culture.

The term *age-friendly culture* can be further specified in three ways: First, age-friendly culture refers to a sociocultural context that puts the features of older people—their resources as well as their values, needs and interests—in the centre of the public sphere, in a similar way to those of younger people. Such a context enables members of all generations to lead lives of joint responsibility and social participation. Second, age-friendly culture refers to a context that considers and affirms the possibilities as well as the limits of action and development in old age, for example, fragility, finitude and defectiveness of human existence. In an age-friendly society people are not depreciated, marginalised or discriminated against because of their perceived weaknesses. Third, age-friendly culture refers to a balance between, on one hand, self-responsibility and joint responsibility of the individual, and on the other, society's responsibility for the individual, which falls between the availability principle and the self-responsibility principle. This balance is constitutive for subsidiarity.

Focusing on old age, subsidiarity has to be understood in a new way. Today, older people are only seldom those in need of help and support; more often they are the ones able to offer help and support to people in need, who belong to younger as well as older generations. The latter point is of principal importance also for understanding intergenerational solidarity.

Focusing on collective representations of old age and ageing, and social integration of older people in European societies, it becomes evident that consciousness of an age-friendly society is still lacking. Visions of a constructive use of older people's human resources have still not been developed; public spheres addressing older people as jointly responsible and competent citizens have still not been established. Current discourse on ageing and demographic

change still focuses on financing social security and views older people as a burden on society. No doubt, demographic change is a challenge for social security systems. However, there is also no doubt that older people could increasingly contribute to creation of value by using, ideally, time—and in many cases also material—resources to support younger generations. Since an age-friendly culture has still not been developed, there is the basic problem, articulated regularly also by older people, that individual resources and potentials are not transmitted into societal resources and potentials.

There is agreement among economists and ergonomists that a sustainable development of labour force potential is only possible when labour force participation of older women and men is increased. Here, extra-occupational qualification, health protection (prevention) and continuous adjustment of workplaces to match profiles of competences have a positive impact on labour performance, creativity and innovative capacity. Here, further flexibility in age of retirement is one component of a comprehensive strategy; older workers' sovereignty in terms of time (not only age of retirement, but also volume of work, and working period) and areas of work should be increased.

Furthermore, ageing societies should be more sensitive to the potential of civil engagement to relieve government expenditure. No doubt, population ageing is also a challenge to maintaining or re-establishing intergenerational equity. Besides the increased labour force participation of older people, strengthening older peoples' engagement for civil society is a necessary contribution to sustainability of intergenerational equity. Moreover, demographic change also refers to intragenerational equity as a complement to intergenerational equity, for example, in the sense of considering increases in tax load for people possessing higher resources.

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About the author

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Andreas Kruse (born August, 1955) is Director of the Institute of Gerontology at the Heidelberg University. Since 1989 he has been a member of the German government's Expert Commission for the German National Report on the Situation of Older People, he was chair of the third and fifth Expert Commission and is now also chair of the sixth. Prof. Kruse is ranked as one of the most prestigious gerontologists in Germany and was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, among others.

