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FOREWORD

The Biblical age whereof the psalmist sings has become the average life expectancy for modern man, at least in countries enjoying the advantages of modern industrial society and its concomitants, improved public hygiene and high standards of medical care. But not only can we hope to live longer; due to the increasing concentration, standardization, and bureaucratization of the productive process, most of us must also expect to retire quite a few years before the actuarial reaper comes. There also will be fewer grandchildren to look forward to: as a matter of cold demographic fact, it is the decrease of the birth rate in advanced societies rather than increased life expectancy that produces a population structure with a significantly high proportion of older persons.

How will society adapt itself to a state of relative superannuation? Will a proportionate decrease in the labor force through retirement, further accentuated by later entry into productive employment due to increased standards of education and training, significantly affect rising levels of production—the very lifeblood of modern industrial society? And can the economic system as a whole become a gigantic retirement savings institution for the entire population? If not—and even if so—can and should those who work contribute an “unearned” portion of the national income to those who have retired from the productive process, be it in the form of increased public services or decreased public burdens?

These are some of the issues faced by a society in which the proportion of the older population is undergoing an unprecedented increase. But individuals face the same problems on a different, much more personal plane. How will they who no longer “achieve” fit into an achievement-oriented society? And even if society affords them an adequate chance and sufficient means for self-realization in old age, will they be psychologically capable of coping with the problems of radical adaptation at such an advanced stage of their lives?

The present symposium has something to say on all of these questions. In sum, its message is one of hope. It is inspired by the optimistic belief that an imaginative, creative, and above all, responsible society will find ways and means to take good and generous care of those who in the past have taken good and generous care of it.

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