



Aging and Old Age

By Richard A. Posner

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Are the elderly posing a threat to America's political system with their enormous clout? Are they stretching resources to the breaking point with their growing demands for care? Distinguished economist and legal scholar Richard A. Posner explodes the myth that the United States could be on the brink of gerontological disaster.

Aging and Old Age offers fresh insight into a wide range of social and political issues relating to the elderly, such as health care, crime, social security, and discrimination. From the dread of death to the inordinate law-abidingness of the old, from their loquacity to their penny-pinching, Posner paints a surprisingly rich, revealing, and unsentimental portrait of the millions of elderly people in the United States. He explores issues such as age discrimination in employment, creativity and leadership as functions of age, and the changing social status of the elderly. Why are old people, presumably with less to lose, more unwilling to take risks than young people? Why don't the elderly in the United States command the respect and affection they once did and still do in other countries? How does aging affect driving and criminal records? And how does aging relate to creativity across different careers?

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a wide-angled, unsentimental, compelling look at old age, Posner, an economist and federal judge, punctures the widespread belief that the elderly constitute a selfish voting bloc and that the U.S. is becoming ominously gerontified. In his analysis, the alarmists have exaggerated the costs of an aging population and ignored the benefits, which include skills, experience, stabilizing maturity and worker loyalty. Posner's views are often iconoclastic, as when he asserts that old people are more self-centered than the young. He argues that physician-assisted suicide, if legalized for cases of terminally ill, pain-wracked or severely impaired people, might actually reduce the overall suicide rate among the elderly. He further maintains that legislation enacted in 1986 abolishing mandatory retirement at fixed ages in most occupations, harms elderly workers and perversely affects income distribution across the entire population. Posner investigates how economic factors influence a host of behaviors among the elderly, including creativity, automobile-driving habits, residence, voting and jury participation.

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From Library Journal

To some, the graying of American society is viewed as a threat to the country's social, political, and economic stability. Yet this book asserts that the cost of an aging society has been exaggerated and its benefits largely ignored. An economist and federal judge, Posner uses economic principles to create a framework for understanding the aging process and making policy decisions while exploring a variety of issues: why do older people commit fewer crimes, should there be a mandatory retirement age for judges, are older people more talkative, why do older people vote more than others? This learned work references the literature of gerontology, law, psychology, sociology, and biology, interspersed with observations on aging from Cicero, Shakespeare, William Butler Yeats, and Nietzsche. Some conclusions are obvious: older people are less likely to take financial risks. Others are more analytical: laws prohibiting age discrimination in employment probably do more harm than good to older workers. Overall the book is a creative way of looking at the challenges of an aging population. However, numerous footnotes and economic formulas limit the book's appeal. Recommended for collections strong on aging or economics. ?Karen McNally Bensing, Benjamin Rose Inst. Lib., Cleveland

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From [Booklist](#)

Posner (*Sex and Reason*, 1992) delves into what it's like to be old in America but with a decidedly unique spin. Posner argues that "economics can do a better job of explaining the behavior and attitudes associated with aging" than any other discipline and follows through with his economic guidelines for policy decisions. As the American population continues to age, the young worry that the old may be taking too much out of the system through social security and medicare. Posner sifts through all the evidence and, using his economic analysis, concludes that although the elderly are benefiting from these entitlements, they are certainly not "ripping off" the young. Posner also tackles age discrimination, various scientific models of aging, assisted suicide, and many other issues that affect not only the elderly but the larger society. A balanced and reasoned inquiry. *Brian McCombie*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andrew Evans:

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