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## SOCIAL ASPECT OF HUMAN BEING

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### Youth as a Representation of Essentialities of Human Being

**Purpose.** This article reveals the importance of the analysis of the theory of generations to identify the essential characteristics of the phenomenon of youth. **Theoretical basis** of this study is socio-philosophical anthropology, i.e. philosophical anthropology using certain methods of sociological, socio-psychological and ethnological research, as well as philosophical comprehension of the application of these methods in special sciences. **Originality.** The authors rethought the theoretical and practical potential of generational theory through its reconceptualization based on philosophical anthropology, which created an opportunity to shift research attention from the attempts to identify superhistorical characteristics of youth to the identification of the essential nature of specific historical and sociocultural features of young people as representatives of a particular culture. **Conclusions.** Defining the youth phenomenon requires accounting at least three constraints that on the one hand, play a role of warnings that deter from theoretical and practical errors in the study of the youth phenomenon, and on the other hand, guidelines for identifying real, specific characteristics of youth as a social phenomenon. Limitations of theoretical and practical analysis of young people are as follows: first, the need to consider demographic data not as final, but only as initial and preliminary, such that require further substantive socio-cultural analysis; second, the inadmissibility of ignoring the cultural diversity of the manifestations of the youth phenomenon, instead the need to identify the special characteristics of youth of different ethnic, religious and other groups; third, the need to take into account the specifics of self-identification of those who identify themselves as young people as a social group.

*Keywords:* young man; youth; philosophical anthropology; generation; theory of generations; ageism

### Introduction

In the modern world, as it was 100 years ago in the time of the German thinker Max Scheler, the founder of philosophical anthropology, we observe a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, man as a self-sufficient phenomenon is a whole, but at the same time he/she is scattered as a different subject of certain sciences each time. However, despite the current accumulation of vast arrays of empirical data on man and increasing number of competing concepts of man proposed by special sciences, the need for theoretical understanding of man as a holistic phenomenon is more urgent than ever. In other words, if we want to find the answers to the age-old questions about the nature and vocation of man, i.e. his/her place in the universe, we should look for these answers in the relentless conceptual synthesis of certain aspects of human nature and its specific manifestations. At the same time, for us, as for Scheler, the key role of its metaphysical dimensions remains axiomatic. As the Ukrainian philosopher Anatolii Malivskyi (2021) notes: "understanding the question of what man is and how it is possible to comprehend his metaphysical nature has become relevant not for the first time in our days" (p. 131).

This aspect (its significance) is clearly underestimated in the process of studying man by some specialized sciences, including sociology. It is illustrative that in the modern context a crit-

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ical attitude to metaphysics is combined with increased attention to the peculiarities of the bright forms of the presence of metaphysical principles in youth, which is characterized by openness to the world and aspirations for the future.

Appeal to young people as the embodiment of hopes for the future has been quite common since the ancient world, and has not been spared by classical philosophical teachings about man as the subject of their research. Modern philosophical anthropology also studies the phenomenon of youth. Taoism, after its founder, the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (1988), considers the child as a symbol of unrealized but therefore the fullest potential. Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, addressed young people as not spoiled by accepted social customs and prejudices more capable of impartial assessment and balanced rational thinking, as evidenced by Plato (2021), the student of Socrates and the American historian of philosophy Peter J. Hansen (2019). To some extent, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1992) used youth as a way of life as an example when he wrote: "One should live by looking ahead, although one can understand life only by looking back" (authors' transl.).

Indeed, it is young people who objectively have the greatest potential and are most inclined to change themselves and the world. In this sense, young people should be considered as a certain stage in the formation of man. Even the ancient Greek politician and thinker Solon divided all human life into sevens, i.e. ten periods of seven years, and if at the end of the second period there are signs of physical maturity, then only after the end of the fifth period a man ceases to strive for the unfulfilled, according to the American historian of philosophy Deborah T. Steiner (2014). And if this stage is proposed to take as an example, one should first find out why. The German anthropologist Helmuth Plessner (2020) based human nature in general on the inherent desire of young people to see their essence outside themselves, to feel unrealized: man is an eccentric being, puts his/her essence outside him/herself.

In a situation of social crisis and worldview doubts, honesty and uncompromising nature, which are generally rightly attributed to young people, look like a fulcrum for radical social criticism and cleansing society of all obsolete, and young people themselves are considered as social carriers not only of ideas but also practices of social change.

Indeed, youth is perhaps the most potentially productive period of human life. However, young people do not always realize this potential properly and to the full. Well-known sociocultural phenomena of the so-called "lost generation" proposed by the American historian Craig Monk (2018) and the phenomenon of "superfluous man" studied by Kelly Hamren (2011), the American literary scholar and one of the recent new concepts proposed by British social thinker Guy Standing (2014), is the term "precariat" to denote a new social class of unemployed or part-time employed and temporarily employed people in society, many of whom are young people. Social and economic conditions, cultural peculiarities and some other reasons act as obstacles for young people to realize stereotypical expectations from them.

In such circumstances, a balanced assessment of young people taking into account the objective capabilities and objective limits of the youth is essential.

Philosophical anthropology adheres to an academic approach to the essential issues of human cognition, and therefore can act as an objective and value-neutral judge in situations of fierce social battles in which science is used to achieve goals not only external to science (political, economic, religious, etc.), but generally incompatible with the ethics of cognitive honesty and impartiality. In particular, modern humanities research is often captivated by political fashion and instead of providing a systematic scientific substantiation of theoretical and practical problems, it

provides a scientifically superficial but politically correct service of certain popular ideas and myths, giving them the appearance of trustworthy scientific theories.

### Purpose

The purpose of this article is to clarify the importance of the analysis of the generation theory to identify the essential characteristics of the phenomenon of youth. The methodology is socio-philosophical anthropology, i.e. philosophical anthropology using certain methods of sociological, socio-psychological and ethnological research, as well as philosophical comprehension of the application of these methods in special sciences.

### Statement of basic materials

#### *Generation theory: a kind or opponent of ageism?*

In modern philosophy and sociology, one can find both supporters of the generation theory and followers of a rather radical liberal position on this issue, who are critics of ageism. It is not necessary to oppose these two value positions, but it is due to their radical opposition they acquire a cartoonish look, as well as lose contact with those scientific studies that have provided objective grounds for both the theory of generations as one that seeks clear differentiation between the features of different generations, and for the theory of equality of different generations.

In their special article on ageism, Israeli scientist Liat Ayalon and German researcher Clemens Tesch-Römer (2017) define this socio-cultural phenomenon as follows: "Ageism is defined as stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination against (but also in favour of) people because of their chronological age" (p. 1).

Obviously, the main disadvantage of ageism is biological determinism, which may be justified in biological research, but takes on caricatured forms when biological criteria begin to be used as determinants outside of biological science, particularly, in the human sciences as a social and cultural being.

At first sight, the theory of generations also appeals to the purely biological characteristics of human, more accurately, it unites people into large social groups according to their age, not taking into account their other characteristics, and sometimes defining these other characteristics, social and cultural, through the prism of age as a defining feature. In such a biological version, the theory of generations almost coincides with the position of ageism and therefore inevitably acts as an opponent of the critique of ageism and appears almost as a scientific justification of ageism itself.

However, ageism can have not only biological theory as its theoretical basis, but also socio-cultural theory: certain "typical" social and cultural characteristics can be quite rigidly attributed to different generations, creating certain stereotypes. Thus, young people can always be perceived as revolutionaries, as the theorist of the so-called "youth revolution" of the late 1960s, German-born American philosopher Herbert Marcuse (2005) of the Frankfurt School of Social Research was prone to. One can also stereotypically perceive older people as conservatives. There is even a common expression attributed to Benjamin Disraeli: "If you're not a liberal when you're 25, you have no heart. If you're not a conservative by the time you're 35, you have no brain".

However, it is on the example of social and cultural characteristics that the radical difference between generational theory and ageism becomes apparent: the representatives of the revolutionary generation remain so for life; they prove to be revolutionaries not only at a young age, but

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also in older and great age. Detailed research on this phenomenon has been carried out, in particular, by American theorists William Strauss and Neil Howe. Similar to the generation of Revolutionary Prophets, according to these researchers, there are generations of Artists, Travelers and Heroes who also form a kind of archetype in youth, a socio-cultural matrix that is preserved and manifested throughout life (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

However, such a program for the manifestation of a certain type of social strategy for the whole generation looks somewhat stereotyped and can hardly correspond to the real diversity of individual and group characteristics of each particular society. Critical remarks have already been made by Ukrainian researchers, such as the philosopher Mykhailo Boichenko (2019), about the need to take a more targeted and specific approach to defining generations and their periodization, but it is worth going even further in this critique.

*Philosophical and anthropological approach to the concept of youth*

The Law of Ukraine "On Basic Principles of Youth Policy" defines youth as follows: "Youth (young persons) are the persons aged 14 to 35 who are the citizens of Ukraine, foreigners and stateless persons who are legally in Ukraine" ("Zakon Ukrainy", 2021).

This is a very thorough approach, but its successful implementation in practice requires a preliminary philosophical comprehension of its potential. Some concerns about the attribution of certain social groups and individuals to youth should be noted in advance.

First, youth is not only a physical characteristic, but also expresses intellectual, emotional and volitional mobility. They are to some extent correlated with physical maturity and preservation of certain physical abilities, but are not rigidly determined by them. There are many cases of early development. In particular, the so-called children prodigies. Many of them graduate from school at an earlier age, enter universities and start working, if not entirely as adults, then at least sometimes they make such scientific and technical discoveries that most adults have failed to do in their entire lives. There are also cases when older people, for whom the period of maturity has ended, and it is time for legal rest from work, find themselves not only functionally capable in many respects, but also in some characteristics superior to adults and even young people. Of course, these cases are deviations rather than they set the norm of an expanded understanding of the youth concept. Yet, they convincingly remove the determination of youth phenomenon only by the level of physical development and other biological parameters typical of young age. Herewith, in the legislation of most countries, young people are determined by age. Thus, in Ukraine it is the age from 14 to 35 ("Zakon Ukrainy", 2021).

Second, there is a socio-cultural specificity of the definition of belonging to the youth, which can vary considerably from one historical epoch to another and from one country and civilization to another. In recent times, the age of youth was much lower. It was possible to get married, to work, to participate in other events, including public ones, from a much earlier age than modern law allows. And even today, the age of majority varies from country to country and depends largely on local traditions, religion, and culture. Even in one country, such cultural differences can sometimes be felt. They may be related to traditional cultural diversity. For example, in Ukraine, there are several ethnic and cultural groups in the Crimea that have a significant cultural identity, not only compared to "mainland" Ukraine, but also among themselves (Drapushko, 2012). In addition, active global migration has been an important factor in enhancing such cultural diversity, providing new, powerful impetus to enhance multiculturalism not only as a form of cultural policy but also as a description of the state of affairs in a growing number of modern

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countries, especially economically developed ones. This is why modern French philosopher Alain Badiou (2019) writes about the emergence of the phenomenon of the global proletariat, which is moving on an unprecedented scale from economically poor countries to economically rich. To the phenomenon of the global proletariat one should add the increasingly massive phenomenon of refugees, which is gradually gaining almost global proportions, according to Slovenian researcher Vlasta Jalušič (2017).

Finally, third, the social self-identification of the individual plays an important role in determining belonging to the youth. Of course, one cannot attribute a certain individual to the youth as a social group only on this basis, ignoring the objective functional capabilities and socio-cultural characteristics of this individual. But, on the one hand, the objective characteristics if there is no subjective one may not give the expected final effect: a young person may behave infantile or as a retiree, not showing a desire to belong to youth as a social group. Of course, such a kind of retreatism, may become a mass phenomenon, as in modern Japan, according to Italian psychologists Fiorenzo Ranieri and Luciano Luccherino (2018), as well as Japanese psychologists Roselin Yong and Kyoko Nomura (2019). In this case, all young people as a social group begin to acquire new characteristics. But even in this case, a negative subjective self-identification with typical ideas about youth leads to the neutralization of some objective abilities to be young. One should want to be young. That is why, on the other hand, older people who already left a young age can behave like young people for a long time. There are now more and more objective reasons for this, namely, due to the significant improvement in the life quality of older people. According to American psychologists Manfred Diehl, Michael Smyer, and Chandra Mehrotra (2020): "Decades of research have shown that biological and psychosocial aging are not as predetermined as had been thought for a long time".

Certainly, this can only be an outward similarity to young people, the choice of appearance of a young person: appropriate clothing, hairstyle and so on. Such people often choose a way of life in entertainment, as if they still have parents who will provide financial support for this and will be a reliable foundation they can always turn to in a critical case and get guaranteed help ("insurance"). But there are a lot of quite serious people, mature enough, who are embarking on new projects with youthful enthusiasm and stubbornness, working as if they still have an inexhaustible supply of energy. Such people are often identified as young in spirit, restless in creativity. They are characterized by increased activity and responsible life position, uncompromising and maximalism of youth. Thus, self-identification with young people is an important characteristic that can be called a good reason, compared to the necessary objective reasons: the ability to be young.

*Establishing restrictions for the application of generation theory as an explanatory theoretical position on the study of the youth phenomenon*

Based on the above, the theory of generations can serve more as an aid in determining the phenomenon of youth. Conversely, the philosophical and anthropological definition of the phenomenon of youth, its successful philosophical and anthropological conceptualization make it possible to delineate age contours and value content more accurately in a specific social or historical definition and study of generations, in particular, distinguishing them from each other. This imposes certain restrictions on the application of the generation theory both on the boundaries of its theoretical applicability and adequacy, and on its internal theoretical content.

The first restriction is caused by the inability to base youth research solely on demographic data. Demography provides only basic source material that needs further interpretation, and both

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social groups younger than nominal "youth" and social groups older than demographically defined youth should be analysed at the same time.

The second restriction concerns the observance of differences in the study of age groups of the representatives of different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, etc. For each such special group there should be a separate study and accounting the possibility of adjusting the age limits, both up and down the age scale of the beginning and completion of youth. Not only age parameters but also meaningful characteristics of young people, their cultural and social distinctive features may differ for different cultural groups.

The third restriction concerns the need to conduct a survey on one's own age self-identification of the representatives of formally different age groups. This may reveal additional adjustments in defining youth as a social group. Such a survey should be accompanied by the open questions that will allow taking into account the respondents' own variants for the reasons why they attribute themselves to a particular age group. It is a source of constant expansion and renewal of those characteristics of young people that are subject to scientific study and philosophical comprehension.

Accordingly, at least three value determinacies in the functioning of youth as a community should be monitored each time. Such value determinacies are objectively inherent in young people, so it is necessary to identify and record their specific embodiments during the formation of theoretical knowledge about specific youth communities, and on this basis – the definition of the general concept of youth. According to Ukrainian philosopher Mykhailo Boichenko (2019), the first value determinacy is the identification of demographic characteristics: the size and social role of young people in society can vary significantly (from baby boom to widespread child-free movement) depending on the attitude to youth in society. The second value determinacy relates to the identification of specific social and cultural tasks that culture (ethnic, religious, etc.) assigns to young people: creation of something new, keeping the traditions, reception of the best examples from the outside (such as secondary modernization in case of cultural revolution). The third value determinacy relates to the existence of certain common group ideals that unite the youth of each culture. These ideals act as the embodiment of youth self-awareness as a self-organized social group, they are a concentrated expression of social values that unite young people, determine their behaviour and the importance of this group of young people for society and its development.

### Originality

The authors rethought the theoretical and practical potential of generational theory due to its reconceptualization based on philosophical anthropology, which created an opportunity to shift research attention from the attempts to identify superhistorical characteristics of youth to identification of the essential nature of specific historical and sociocultural features of youth as representatives of a particular culture.

### Conclusions

Generation theory can be an important tool for conceptual comprehension of the phenomenon of youth, which makes it possible to identify its specific characteristics and avoid uncritical prejudices and ideological stereotypes. To that end, we should turn to philosophical anthropology as a basic methodology for rethinking the theory of generations. The most adequate version may not be biological anthropology and its philosophical conceptualizations, but social and cultural

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anthropology, conceptualized as socio-philosophical anthropology. As such, the latter appears as a general theory and explanatory platform for specific social research, including sociological.

Defining the youth phenomenon requires accounting at least three constraints that on the one hand, play a role of warnings that deter from theoretical and practical errors in the study of the youth phenomenon, and on the other hand, guidelines for identifying real, specific characteristics of youth as a social phenomenon. Under this approach, it is necessary to determine not the abstract characteristics of youth, but the methodological limitations that guide the practical field research of youth, which reveals its distinctive properties each time. Limitations of theoretical and practical analysis of young people are as follows: first, the need to consider demographic data not as final, but only as initial and preliminary, such that require further substantive socio-cultural analysis; second, the inadmissibility of ignoring the cultural diversity of the manifestations of the youth phenomenon, instead the need to identify the special characteristics of youth of different ethnic, religious and other groups; third, the need to take into account the specifics of self-identification of those who identify themselves as young people as a social group.

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## Молодь як репрезентація сутнісних характеристик людини

**Мета.** Дана стаття спробує з'ясувати значущість аналізу теорії поколінь для виявлення сутнісних характеристик феномену молоді. **Теоретичним базисом** цього дослідження є соціально-філософська антропологія, тобто філософська антропологія з використанням окремих методів соціологічного, соціально-психологічного та етнологічного досліджень, а також філософським осмисленням застосування цих методів у спеціальних науках. **Наукова новизна.** Авторами здійснено переосмислення теоретичного та практичного потенціалу теорії поколінь завдяки її реконцептуалізації на основі філософської антропології, що створило можливість переключити дослідницьку увагу зі спроб виявити надісторичні характеристики молоді на виявлення сутнісного характеру конкретно-історичних і соціокультурних рис молоді як представників певної визначеної культури. **Висновки.** Визначення феномену молоді потребує врахування щонайменше трьох обмежень, які відіграють водночас роль, з одного боку, застережень, які утримують від теоретичних та практичних помилок при дослідженні феномену молоді, а з іншого боку, орієнтирів для виявлення реальних, конкретних характеристик молоді як соціального феномену. Обмеженнями теоретичного і практичного аналізу молоді виступають: по-перше, необхідність розглядати дані демографічних досліджень не як остаточні, а лише як вихідні і попередні, такі, що потребують подальшого змістового соціокультурного аналізу; по-друге, неприпустимість ігнорування культурного розмаїття проявів феномену молоді, натомість необхідність виявлення особливих характеристик молоді різних етнічних, релігійних тощо груп; по-третє, необхідність обов'язкового врахування специфіки самоідентифікації тих, хто відносить себе до молоді як соціальної групи.

*Ключові слова:* молода людина; молодь; філософська антропологія; покоління; теорія поколінь; ейджизм

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