er-gatherer population units are necessarily small and geographically dispersed; furthermore, these populations function (or have until recently) in relatively stable ecosystems. Vectors and infectious and parasitic agents of disease are also components of such systems. In the stable situation, transmission of autochthonous agents, especially by ectoparasites, is sporadic and focal—the diseases are endemic. New human susceptibles, appearing on the scene infrequently as newborns or migrants, will die sporadically, or survive as relative or absolute immunes. Epidemics undoubtedly occurred among the early hominids, as they do (rarely) among the modern hunter-gatherers and primates in undisturbed settings, but the majority of these epidemics must have been caused by agents transmitted by unspecialized, direct, respiratory and contaminative routes. Only agents of this kind can readily be introduced from outside into a stable ecosystem and a wholly susceptible population. Epidemics caused by vector-borne agents must have been rare, as is true among the modern primates and hunter-gatherers; and within the vector-borne group, epidemics due to transmission by ectoparasites must have been extremely rare.

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Gerontocracy

In *Science* (12 Aug. p. 723) it is reported, as it was too in the daily press, that the Fermi award for 1966 will be shared by three venerable nuclear scientists. It is not to belittle the immense merit of these scientists, but one cannot help being struck by the age of the happy laureates: respectively 87, 87, and 64, average: 79. I feel it is a pity to distribute such important awards to people already covered with honor, respect, and consideration when so many valuable young scientists await in vain any recognition of their efforts. I thought up to now that "gerontocracy" was the privilege of our old European civilizations. This event makes me change somewhat my opinion.

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