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Reviews

Phil Mullan, *The Imaginary Time Bomb : Why an Ageing Population is not a Social Problem*, I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., London, 2000, 239 pp., ISBN 1-86064-452-X.

This is a book with a message. It is a vital message for social gerontologists but perhaps one which will not be welcomed unequivocally. Phil Mullan makes a powerful case that there is no demographic time bomb, nor any insurmountable social problems generated by the proportion of older people in the population – now or in the foreseeable future. The widespread perception of the 'time-bomb' is a very useful asset to many readers of *Ageing and Society*. It is a key card we can play when we are making grant applications, requests for staff and resources, or similar career-enhancing moves. We know that trustees, managers, students and most non-specialists take 'apocalyptic demography' for granted, and it raises the profile and significance of our work to be associated with such a vital social issue. However, in demolishing the myth, Mullan demonstrates how pernicious such illusions are, not only for older people, but also for society as whole.

The book has eight chapters including a short introduction and conclusion. The first three substantive chapters are about the demography and social history of population and population concerns. These are followed by three shorter chapters dealing in turn with pensions, health, and economic growth. The book is not original in the sense that it presents significant new data or new lines of analysis. What the book achieves is a clear, direct and polemical challenge to the popular perceptions of the issues. It achieves this by assembling a wide range of data and sources, and undermining, step by step, the foundations of the alarmist perspective. Chapter 2 – 'Ageing in perspective' – challenges the perceptions that population ageing is natural, new, and inexorably increasing, and that becoming old is a fixed process which makes old people become more alike. It presents an informed and detailed analysis of population change and the reasons behind that change. I found particularly effective his presentation of specific consequences of the British pattern of post-war fluctuations in fertility, and how the consequences of these can be mis-read as a general trend in population ageing into the future.

Chapter 3 is a social history of the concerns about population and the growth of the 'time-bomb' perspective. Mullan demonstrates how the concerns about population ageing, presented as a natural phenomenon, proved influential in helping forge an anti-welfarist consensus among key élites. He also suggests that there is a *fin de siècle* mood of anxiety aiding the acceptance of the view that current demographic ageing is dangerous. This section might have been strengthened by the integration of some of the influential sociology on risk and anxiety, but it does place the demographic

scare in the context of other anxieties and risks induced by contemporary social and economic change.

Chapter 4 explores the economic burden arguments and tackles the suggestion that class-like age-based differences of interest have developed. A central feature of Mullan's argument is that:

> Historically modern societies double their wealth about every 25 years. This pace of expansion projected into the next half-century dwarfs the extra cost for society from more elderly dependants. (p. 9)

The chapters on the 'Pensions bomb' and the 'Health bomb' are focused on British politics and social welfare. Mullan draws out the specific relevance of his demographic and economic analysis to the allegedly insupportable future burdens of pensions and older people's health requirements. For example, he argues that the greater concentration of illness and disability within older sections of the population is the product of reduced morbidity among younger age groups, not a result of greater elderly morbidity (which he also suggests is falling due to the improved health of successive cohorts). In the final substantive chapter the question 'can ageing stunt economic growth?' is answered through a review of economic literature which concludes that it is spurious to attempt to establish any determinate relationship between the pace of ageing and the pace of growth.

Mullan succeeds in putting the current ageing of our population in proper perspective and tackles the significant issues that have been raised with respect to the changing age profile. Some critics might query the polemical tone of the book, and perhaps the selection of sources or the quality of some of the diagrams. However, I think that would be to underestimate the significance of the publication and the need it fulfills. The book supplies a cogent and credible analysis to which one can direct those who need a corrective to a naive acceptance of the dangers of an ageing population.

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Ernest Furchtgott. *Aging and Human Motivation*. Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, New York, 1999, 396 pp., hbk $85.00, ISBN 0 306 46074 2.

In *Aging and Human Motivation*, the late Professor Furchtgott uses the construct of motivation to review a broad swathe of the psychology of ageing. The book begins with the biological side of motivation with chapters covering biological foundations, sleep and fatigue, pain, eating/drinking, and sexuality. The middle of the book covers health behaviours, stress, coping and ecological studies of stress and coping. He wraps up with chapters on the self, meaning of life, social relationships, achievement motivation and leisure. The book is an extraordinarily comprehensive coverage of the non-cognitive aspects of psychology and ageing. It could serve as a text for graduate or advanced undergraduate courses and will be useful as a reference resource.

The focus on motivation is a novel approach to organising a discussion of the psychology of ageing and the author's grasp of the scientific literature in

geropsychology is encyclopaedic. The ability to write with equal depth and reliable coverage of the literature across this range of topics is a rare and impressive achievement.

Beginning with a survey of biological systems that relate to motivation, Furchtgott summarises findings related to cerebral metabolism, neurotransmitters, the endocrine system and the immune system. His general conclusion is that age effects appear mostly when organisms are active, that older organisms do not reach the same peak levels of physical performance, cannot maintain maximum functioning for the same duration, and require longer to return to baseline resting states, as compared to younger ones. In a chapter exploring sleep and fatigue, he emphasises the interplay of physiological and psychological factors and notes that older adults experience normal changes in metabolism, a variety of illnesses, and take a number of medications that may induce fatigue. He also discusses a variety of psychological and social influences that may lead to performance decrements that are interpreted as fatigue, including the widespread expectation that age leads to tiring easily. In discussing pain and discomfort avoidance, he also emphasises the interplay of physical and psychological factors.

Turning to eating and drinking, Furchtgott concludes that the internal feedback systems that regulate hunger, thirst, and resting energy expenditure are impaired with ageing, a change that can lead to either underconsumption or overconsumption. However, he argues that these changes result in small effects on eating and drinking as compared with the effects of illnesses, medications, and long-established eating patterns. In the following chapter on sexuality, he likewise concludes that there are normative ageing changes in physiology that lead to some reduction in sexual activity, but that these are minor in their effects as contrasted with illness, medications, and social effects (such as the lack of a partner for many older women). He also argues that it is more difficult to get accurate sexual information from older adults because they were raised in an era when sexuality was a private matter. He notes a social change across the last several decades from thinking of sexual motivation as primarily procreation to thinking of it as pleasure and social contact. He concludes that there is little evidence that sexual activity is related to life satisfaction for older adults.

Furchtgott then turns to health behaviours, positing a desire to remain healthy as a putative human motivation. After reviewing literature on prevention of illness and maintenance of health, he concludes that older adults, especially the more educated, seek medical attention more quickly after the appearance of symptoms than do younger adults. This difference, however, appears to be due to physical and functional health differences rather than to beliefs, emotions, and social support influences. In general, he argues that we still know very little about motivational factors in health maintenance and that such influences seem to be specific to particular health behaviours, rather than general traits that favour good health.

In the next three chapters, Furchtgott discusses stress, coping, and ecological studies of stress and coping. Throughout this discussion he contrasts physiological (Selye), psychological (Richard Lazarus) and sociological (Pearlin) models of stress, calling attention to what each approach emphasises

and misses. Coping responses appear to change with age, with more emphasis on flexibility, acceptance of stressors, and secondary control. He includes some discussion of wisdom and of religious coping in this section.

In chapters on the self and on meaning in life, Furchtgott explores the potential of these topics to shed light on motivation through the life span. The discussion of the self summarises nicely the research on multiple selves, with differing self concepts for different domains of life (health, work, family) or for different time dimensions (past, present, future). Older adults typically have greater congruence of actual and ideal selves. He discusses the methodological difficulties in studying change in self concept over time. The discussion of existentialism and meaning in life is primarily an essay on the potential importance of this viewpoint in understanding older adults and to call attention to the scarcity of research on meaning in life.

The final chapters cover social relationships, achievement motivation, and leisure. In discussing social relationships, he describes the smaller, more family-oriented networks of older individuals and the continuing importance of social support for older adults. His contrast of disengagement theory, activity theory, and socioemotional selectivity theory is somewhat cursory. He concludes, I think incorrectly, that the theories are not mutually exclusive and seems to have missed the change in motivation for social contacts that is at the core of socioemotional selectivity theory. The chapter on achievement motivation calls attention to the importance of this construct in studies of young and middle-aged adults, and speculates whether achievement motivation becomes vicarious in the post-retirement years. Finally, he describes the importance of leisure at all ages in Western societies and the primacy of leisure in the post-retirement years.

As befits an author who was retired from active teaching at the end of a long career, Professor Furchtgott has an excellent grasp of the history of the fields of study covered. This historical perspective is often lacking in geropsychology and it provides a depth of understanding of how we got to the point where we are now in the research agenda reflected in current publications. He often adds to the historical perspective by tracing key concepts back to other fields and, at times, to ancient Greek philosophy.

As befits a scholar who has developed a gerontology programme and taught in interdisciplinary settings, Professor Furchtgott also displays a keen sense of how disciplinary background shapes theory and methodological approach to certain topics. He is also keenly interested in definitions and their influence on understanding, or clouding, our comprehension of each topic. In addition to his focus on the historical development of research and theory, he describes the definition of key terms, quite frequently pointing out that there are a multiplicity of definitions for each of these chapter topics. He argues convincingly that researchers and theorists are often talking past each other because they are using differing definitions of the topic at issue.

While the chapters typically begin very well and the middles show good to excellent coverage of the topics, the conclusions are often disappointing: the author seems to stop short of perceiving a new synthesis of the material that would take us into the future. His endings are no worse than average, but one expects that he is going to do better. One could also wish that he had included

something on cognitive ageing. There are motivational influences in learning, memory, and intelligence. There are also likely to be changes in motivation due to cognitive changes with age. None of this is included, nor is there any indication why they are omitted. From a clinical standpoint, one could wish for discussion of the paradox that people often seem to work against their apparent motivational interests, a key problem which has to be addressed in psychotherapy theories.

The book could have benefited from more detailed copyediting. Robert McCrae's name is misspelled throughout and there are quite a few of the kinds of errors that are not caught by computerised spell checking.

On balance, the book is an important contribution to geropsychology. It brings a thorough and scholarly approach to a neglected topic in psychology and ageing. By reviewing much of the field through a focus on motivation, Furchtgott not only revives interest in motivation and its role in ageing but also provides a fresh look at familiar topics and draws in topics not often covered in treatments of the psychology of ageing.

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Helen K. Black and Robert L. Rubinstein, *Old Souls: Aged Women, Poverty and the Experience of God*, Aldine de Gruyter, 2000, 243 pp., $23.95 pbk, ISBN 0 202 306348.

'It was, of course, a miserable childhood … Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and yet worse is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood.' This classic example of 'triple jeopardy' is Frank McCourt's introduction to the story of his childhood in the slums of Limerick in the 1940s. Happily, he escaped to the US to claim a share in the 'American dream', from rags to the Pulitzer prize. His story lost nothing in the telling but it lost him many of his childhood friends!

The 50 elderly Caucasian and 50 African-American women who tell their life stories in this study *Old Souls* grew up in the U.S.A. during the Depression years and still face the 'triple jeopardy' of gender, class and race, to say nothing of age. All are over 70, the average ages being 80 and 76 respectively for the two groups. The study was conducted in Philadelphia and New Jersey between 1993 and 1999. This study is qualitative and its employs the life story method to gain insight into the women's experience of poverty, of their methods of coping and of their assessment of their successes and failures in the light of the dreams and expectations of their youth. A control group of non-poor consisting of 62 women, average age 81, from the same ethnic groups were also interviewed. The working definition of 'poor' is the 1992 Federal standard for poverty. The non-poor had at least four times this income.

The authors, who are gerontologists, not students of poverty, revisit the issues raised in the *Culture of Poverty* debate of the 1960s. In particular, they examine the questions raised about that theory by Herbert Gans.

He refuted claims that the poor were so wedded to their sub-culture – as illustrated in the work of Oscar Lewis for example (Lewis 1961, 1966) – that they could not change their outlook or their lifestyles if they were given opportunities of employment, education and housing. Gans directed the attention of social scientists to the *aspirations* of the poor rather than their existing conditions (Gans 1970).

The results are very interesting indeed. First, the poor did not regard themselves as poor! The women defined poverty not in terms of finance but in terms of ill-health, family break-up and estrangement from children. The authors call this the paradox of poverty. The felt sense of deprivation of the women had more to do with emotional problems such as loneliness and bereavement than with material deprivation.

The women's expectations in early life had been based on success in marriage and family. The young women hoped to marry and raise a good family. This was to be their route to a better life. Sadly, these expectations were not always realised – many married feckless men and ended up bringing up children on their own.

These reverses, however, did not extinguish the spirit of the women. In fact, they succeeded in maintaining a high sense of self-esteem. They were proud of their achievements, in their role as mothers, in their ability to budget, to make sacrifices, to make a little go a long way: 'to make soup with one onion' as one woman put it. They cherished the independence they had gained through enduring the hardships of 'scrimping and scraping' in their earlier lives.

Among their coping skills is the central importance of God in the lives of these women. This relationship, the authors hasten to assure us, was 'not in the nature of an opiate to induce passivity. Rather it was based on a view of God as a long-time, loving and powerful friend'. Their faith is sometimes allied to a church, in other cases, especially in the case of the African-Americans, it is a personal spirituality born of a sense of the sacred and leading to a strong faith in the power of prayer. Their notion of God and of the after-life may not always pass muster with theologians, but it is a huge source of strength and consolation. God is intimately involved in their lives. They pray to Him in their difficulties and they feel that their prayers are heard, sometimes in very concrete ways. God is picking up his messages! The authors of this study conclude that: 'To ignore older women's experience of God is to diminish an all-encompassing reality of their lives'. It was this dimension which gave the book its title.

The book is absorbing and very readable. One leaves it with a profound respect for the resilience and resourcefulness of these elderly women. One cannot fail to be touched by their courage in the face of multiple social handicaps. Despite their great age they look forward to the future with hope. They have retained an earthy sense of humour. They have not only survived, they have mastered their 'smaller' world:

> I have been through thick and thin. I don't think there's a woman at my age that has been through the ups and downs, the knocks and the bruises as cruel as I've been through. And I have lived to tell it.

This from a 71 year old African-American signed away as a child for $80 by her mother.

Looking to the future another admitted to very occasional worries:

I like to think about now. When I can't sleep I keep on thinking about what I'm going to do when I get old, but only when I can't sleep.

She was only 96! Perhaps a better title for this very fine contribution to gerontology and the social sciences generally might have been *Great Souls!*

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Michael Mandelstam, *Community Care Practice and the Law*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 1999, 600 pp., £27.50 pbk, ISBN 1 85302 647 6.

This second edition of *Community Care Practice and the Law* is a substantial updating of the first (1995) edition. It is intended to reach a wide readership and is distinctive in its coverage of law, policy and professional practice in England and Wales. Given the range of law and policy and practice guidance in community care, Mandelstam is ambitious in his aim but he has succeeded in producing a text that is stimulating in addition to being of practical use as a reference text, through engaging in debate over key issues. For example, the copious amount of guidance that has accompanied community care legislation has been notoriously inconsistent and created problems for practitioners. Mandelstam provides a useful discussion of the tensions that exist between guidance and the 'labyrinthine' legislation that has been complicated by a 'stream of judicial reviews' since 1993.

In his view, the law needs to be understood in the context of political decision-making and administrative and professional practice. He makes the important point that the law is limited in its scope since 'lawful practice on the part of a local authority does not necessarily mean that people will get all the services they need …' (p. 43). He draws on ombudsman decisions and professional practice examples to illustrate this point and throughout the text, legal explanation is accompanied by discussion of the issues and illustrated by reference to cases.

The book is logically organised and information is generally accessible to the reader with or without legal training. Part I (Chapters 1–4) provides an introduction to the whole text, outlining the underlying themes and issues in contemporary community care. Chapter 2 is a helpful overview and summary of the contents of subsequent chapters.

Parts II and III form the main text, with comprehensive coverage of the legislation, government guidance and key cases. Part II (Chapters 5–13) covers community care assessment and service provision. This has wide coverage of familiar territory, including planning and reviews, support for carers, residential and non-residential care, nursing home provision, charging for care and joint working between professionals. Readers of *Ageing and Society* may like to note that there is a discussion of eligibility and age-related discrimination in practice. In particular, Mandelstam points out the mistaken assumption on the part of some local authority staff that the provisions of Section 2 of the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (requiring local authorities to provide services to disabled people) apply only to those under 65 years old.

Part III takes up National Health Service provision, including discussions of continuing care and hospital discharge and the problems that have been associated with these. Housing issues are touched upon in the chapter on home adaptations. Mandelstam acknowledges the wider significance of housing to community care but the book stops short of venturing into the whole range of housing law other than that covered by community care legislation.

Part IV provides a guide to remedial action in cases of dispute (Chapter 17), whilst Chapters 18 and 19 provide comprehensive digests of local ombudsman investigations and legal judgements, all of which have been referred to in Parts II and III.

In summary, this is a valuable reference text. It will no doubt be of great help to students on professional training courses and to a range of academics and professionals. Given the rapidly changing environment of community care law and policy, there will probably be a need for a further edition before very long.

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