performance, and memory have become the hallmarks of successful personhood. Such reflection will appeal to readers from all professional backgrounds as providing a way forward away from the medical pathologising, cultural stereotyping, and gerontological idealism that have dominated the AD experience.

Department of Sociology, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada STEPHEN KATZ

doi:10.1017/S0144686X07006745

Robin Blackburn, *Age Shock: How Finance is Failing Us*, Verso, London and New York, 2006, 336 pp., hbk £19.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84467 013 0.

This book in my view says nothing new. The author has already rehearsed many of the arguments in *Banking on Death* (Blackburn 2002). I do not understand where he is trying to take us, apart from the revision and repetition of a Meidner plan (Swedish socialist and an architect of the Swedish Wage-earner Funds) which he has repeated many times. The book is an unoriginal summary of issues in pensions, relying on quotes from and references to others.

The author summarises the never-ending litany of financial scandals, corruption, self-serving Chief Executive Officers and disgusting self-interest, all of which are intrinsic to the private system of pensions that prevail particularly in the United States and United Kingdom. For those who follow this trail of rip-offs and unapologetic merchants of self-aggrandisement, there is nothing original here. In fact the flaw of the book is that there is no theoretical framework to offer a deeper understanding of the system; just one thing after another in a sometimes tiresome, descriptive and revelatory manner. Tut-tutting is all very well, as page after page reveal yet more outrageous episodes. The author's 'analysis' could not hold a candle to something like Charles Kindleburger's book, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (Kindleburger 1996), in which there is a riveting attempt to explain rather than just describe. There is no reference to this in the book.

The numerous typos are annoying, and the reference in the index to Chile does not exist. I also wish that pension experts, of whom I guess Blackburn is now one, would ensure that their references to the seminal and destructive World Bank (1994) report, emphasised the word 'and' in its subtitle: *Averting the Old Age Crisis: Policies to Protect the Old AND Promote Growth.* The fact that the author has missed this suggests to me that he does not understand the real arguments for private pension provision. Financial scandals are neither here nor there given the economic growth arguments proposed for the extension of private pensions, and the subsequent collapse of the thesis on its own terms.

After the first 264 pages in this vein, the author repeats his obsession with Meidner. I have heard Blackburn suggest that Meidner should have received the Nobel Prize for Economics. And he's right: the author's attempt to update the Swedish proposals for share levies, localised investment agencies and radical investment agendas deserves discussion. But he has already discussed them, and I don't see what they have to do with pensions *per se*. That is the mistake of the book. Blackburn is laying out a transformation of relationships between corporations, shareholders, workers and investment practices. The book's title is therefore misleading. Why not have entitled it *A Meidner Plan for Britain* and have done with it, and stop trying to 'shock' us?

Indeed, the title or phrase 'Age shock', reminds me of all the other shock-horror descriptions of the increasing numbers and proportions of old people in the world. Pensions' 'time bomb' was one; 'doomsday scenario' another. The World Bank excelled in warning us that governments would go bankrupt and that the metaphorical roof was about to cave in because of us wrinklies. At the conference where I heard the author commend Meidner for a Nobel Prize, another paper explained how the amount of money required for the increase in pension liabilities over the next 50 years in the European Union of the time was nugatory (Concialdi 2006). Nor is there mention of that contribution in the book.

Blackburn has fallen into a right-wing trap: the pension shock requires more private solutions of one sort or another. More regulation and social ownership (Mondragon is dragged in as part of the cause), and we will have a better structure of investment. A new collectivism will banish the financial scandals. There are already plenty of commentaries on Mondragon and a few other local, co-operative experiences. What does Blackburn add?

References

Blackburn, R. 2002. *Banking on Death – Or, Investing in Life: The History and Future of Pensions*. Verso, London.

Concialdi, P. 2006. Demography, the cost of pensions and the move to pension funds. *Review of Political Economy*, **18**, 3, 301–15.

Kindleburger, C. 1996. *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*. Third edition, Wiley, New York.

World Bank 1994. *Averting the Old Age Crisis: Policies to Protect the Old and Promote Growth*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Independent Researcher, Buenos Aires and London, also Visiting Fellow, University of Sheffield, UK

RICHARD MINNS

doi:10.1017/S0144686X07006757

Alfred E. Stillman, *Home Visits: A Return to the Classical Role of the Physician*, Radcliffe, Oxford, 2007, 128 pp., pbk £24.95, ISBN 13 978 1 84619 074 2.

As a trainee physician I spent two summer spells working as a general practitioner on the coast in Devon in southwest England. After morning surgery I was given a list of patients to visit at home, mainly with minor illnesses and injuries, but always included among them were a few 'chronics'. On one occasion I saw an older woman whose mobility was gradually getting worse and who had numerous other health problems. I discussed her care with the 'senior partner' and the conclusion was to request a domiciliary visit from the local geriatrician. The geriatrician and I met up at the patient's home; he advised me what to do and