

problem. Is this rhetoric simply a way of putting off the inevitabilities of living with some kind of disability as the Fourth Age impacts upon us? What is the relationship between these two paradigms and how can we balance optimism about the possibilities of age with a realism about the inevitable diminishment associated with the ageing process? Are we ever to be liberated from such denials? While this is not part of this book's brief, spirituality and the ageing process must always, surely, be discussed within these wider cultural and social paradigms. We look forward to MacKinlay's future work and hope that she will continue to hold before us the importance of an approach to the older person which takes in all of their needs, including the spiritual. It is to be hoped that her Centre will also be able to give voice to those practitioners who have something important and powerful to say about their lived experience of working with older people.

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Anne-Marie Mooney Cotter, *Just a Number: An International Legal Analysis on Age Discrimination*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2008, 356 pp., hbk £65.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 7546 7206 7.

Anne-Marie Mooney Cotter is a Canadian lawyer who is unambiguously committed to human rights and equality of opportunity: this book begins and ends with quotes from Martin Luther King's 1963 speech to the March on Washington. Mooney Cotter has written books on discrimination on grounds of race, gender and disability and this, her latest, takes on age. The title of the book is a motif running through the book: every chapter begins with a restatement of the seemingly simple aim: 'the quest for age as Just a Number', and every chapter ends with the phrase, 'in the pursuit of Just a Number'. In between, however, rather than anti-discriminatory rhetoric, she offers detailed accounts of the current legal and governmental position regarding age discrimination in a series of countries. She surveys eight – Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, USA, UK and Ireland – and includes chapters on the United Nations, the North Atlantic Free Trade Area and the European Union. The chapter that covers South Africa also includes material emanating from the Organization of African Unity and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Whilst it is disappointing that the survey does not extend to Asia, South America or individual European countries (other than the UK and Ireland), what Mooney Cotter has gathered together is a substantial body of pertinent information.

Her survey however does not extend much beyond selecting and quoting relevant sections of a wide range of acts, statutes, declarations, conventions, treaties, charters, codes, strategies, protocols, regulations and action programmes. Each is detailed in a separate section and altogether there are 73 sections. Turning to the legislation with which I am most familiar, the United Kingdom (UK) *Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006*, Mooney Cotter begins with a

concise but comprehensive two-page summary, and 19 pages follow, largely made up of lengthy extracts from selected key regulations. By and large, she refrains from commenting on the effectiveness of the selected documents. Her sole comment on the UK for example is: 'Overall, more emphasis needs to be given to "age proofing" systems of promotion and higher-level recruitment, and to encouraging career development for any age in the United Kingdom and Ireland' (p. 282). It is particularly disappointing that she fails to acknowledge that, by establishing a national default retirement age of 65 years, the UK government has sabotaged any possibility of career development around that particular age. Overall, despite the title, there is little analysis and it is clear that she approves of, and is keen to support these governmental initiatives. There is no acknowledgement that ageist legislation and regulation still exists. Her objective, it would appear, is to enable legislators (and campaigners) to compare progress in different countries and to use such information in order to increase pressure on governments to act against age discrimination, especially in regard to employment. In this context the book will be useful, although it will of course date fairly rapidly.

What most gerontologists will find extraordinary about the book is its title and aim. Taken literally, to pursue age 'as just a number' would appear to be an attempt to abandon what research has uncovered about age, in all its complexity, and to re-assert the proposition that age is a measure of time, nothing more and nothing less. Unfortunately, Mooney Cotter never details what she means by 'just a number'. The reader is left to deduce that, for her, age equality is achieved when the law no longer discriminates between people on grounds of chronological age, accepting that it is just a number of no relevance. In the second chapter, however, in a section headed 'Just a number', the first number is '80+', the 'very old', the fastest growing 'population group'. And one of the first statistics she offers is '600 million', the number of people in the world aged 60 years or over, and the reader might ask is 600 million 'just a number' too? So she accords certain numbers some significance: in addition to 80, the age of 65 is described as a 'milestone' (p. 12) and we are told that 'men and women who prepare for old age and are adaptable to change make a better adjustment to life after age 60' (p. 18). In this chapter, she draws heavily upon a limited range of rather dated American literature on ageism and, predictably, sets about challenging various 'myths'. In doing so, she constitutes 'older people' as a very diverse group (p. 25) among whom there are wide differences 'in their chronological age' (p. 13). Far from age being just a number, it is clearly the means by which a social category is defined.

Another disappointment with the book is that Mooney Cotter fails to undertake any kind of comparative analysis or to draw clear conclusions. Her final chapter, 'Conclusion to Just a Number', is just two pages and has not a single reference to any of the countries she has surveyed. She begins, however, with what is perhaps her most challenging claim: 'a deep embedded patriarchal authority is still keeping society on the designated track, as *de jure* discrimination has given way to *de facto* discrimination, and in essence, inequality, once obvious and accepted, is now hidden and protected in a most dangerous way' (p. 339). She offers no evidence to support this, but as it stands it is a spectacular hypothesis that urgently needs to be addressed. The price and content of the book imply that

it is destined for libraries. It is a compendium of information that will prove useful for students of the law and age discrimination, and for those who believe that campaigning is most effective when based upon detailed comparative evidence.

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Catherine Y. Read, Robert C. Green and Michael A. Smyer (eds), *Aging, Biotechnology and the Future*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2008, 296 pp., hbk £30.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 8018 8788 8.

This book is a collection of 19 short essays on diverse issues concerning ageing, biotechnology and ethics. The editors suggest their purpose is to start a debate around the questions: 'Of aging, what can we know? About aging, what must we hope? With aging, what can we do? At the beginning of the 21st century, at the intersection of a demographic revolution, each of these questions requires us to reach across disciplinary and professional lines to draw on the best from philosophy, theology, medicine, life sciences, nursing and psychology' (p. xxi). The contributors are limited to those from these disciplines and are all American. The book has been compiled by a team from Boston, Massachusetts based on the REVEAL (Risk Evaluation and Education for Alzheimer's Disease) study on the implications for genetic testing for Alzheimer's disease. The book is a mixture of speculative ethics; largely the ethics of stem cells, anti-ageing therapies and trans-humanism but also of gene therapies, gene testing, and artificial reproduction; with research reports of studies of centenarians and the psychological implications of gene testing for Alzheimer's disease. There are some very good papers summarising the key points at issue with the new biological knowledge and its technological potential, along with the ethical and social policy concerns they raise.

The papers are grouped into five sections. There is an introduction with two papers, one a succinct and well-reasoned account from the Executive Director of the Ellison Medical Foundation, Richard L. Sprott, that sets out the nature and potential of new biological understanding of ageing, and the other an un-referenced opinion essay from the Director of Health, San Antonio, Texas, Fernando A. Guerra, on the ethics and potential of new biotechnology, particularly stem cell technology. The remaining four sections are entitled, 'immortality', 'centenarians', 'genetic testing', and 'ethical and social perspectives'. The highlight for me was the interesting, well-balanced research reports on studies of those aged over 100 years. This section contained three papers, an excellent overview of what has been learned from studying centenarians from Thomas T. Perls, an account of the Georgia centenarian study from Leonard W. Poon, and a critical response to studies of centenarians from Dianne Scott-Jones. The final section has four papers and although entitled 'Ethical and social perspectives' is written exclusively by ethicists.

At the centre of the book are five papers based on the REVEAL and the related REVEALED study. They cover, 'Genetic susceptibility to Alzheimer disease',