

the development and implementation of age-related policies and strategies that fit with the needs of elderly prisoners: accommodation into established practice and procedures, structure of buildings, treatments and social activities, all of which were designed for younger, healthier inmates (Chap. 4).

Failure to address the differences between the needs of younger and older prisoners could be regarded as being inhumane – cruel and unusual punishment that not only compromises the physical and mental health, welfare and continued safety of all prisoners, staff and the general public, but also violates the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution (Chap. 6).

The main criticism of the book is the repetition of the discussions regarding the age at which prisoners are defined as ‘elderly’, and their physiological/chronological age. Perhaps this information could have been given as an introduction to the section in Chap. 1 entitled Overview of Chapters, and the relevant authors identified. The inclusion of several in-text references in paragraphs can make the information seem rather disjointed at times. The use of endnotes instead would be less distracting. It is strange that homelessness is not mentioned by all the authors who write about lifestyle prior to incarceration, as it plays a significant role in health and rates of recidivism. Although the book is based on quantitative data, some use of qualitative or observational research may have helped to illustrate personal in-cell difficulties.

## References

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Freelance Criminologist with special  
interest in elderly prisoners

BARBARA M. GLOVER

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Jonathan Silvertown, *The Long and the Short of It – The Science of Life Span & Aging*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013,  
194 pp., hbk US \$25.00, ISBN 13: 978-0-226-75789-6.

One of the few things we know about our future is that, sooner or later, we will die. No living being can escape from such a hard natural law. Despite

the scientific advancements and the socio-cultural ameliorations, our bodies seem indeed to be programmed for living up to a 'kind of pre-set' maximum number of years. The observation that everything degenerates with time has been concerning man for thousands of years, and probably will keep us busy for many more!

In this book entitled *The Long and the Short of It – The Science of Life Span & Aging*, Jonathan Silvertown conducts the reader into a wonderful exploration of current knowledge on ageing and longevity. He is particularly interested in showing how many intriguing stories are hidden behind this natural phenomenon, which subtly but daily affects each of us.

There are multiple ways to talk about the life experience and the ageing process. Silvertown chooses to take the reader closer to such a complex topic by providing examples from daily life, reminding us of legends and ancient myths, and presenting in plain words the most updated evidence from rigorous scientific literature. He illustrates the topic from multiple viewpoints, ranging from art to history, from fundamental research to clinical practice, from economics to ecology. Throughout the book, the reader finds him- or herself in front of an endless sequence of questions, which, in their simplicity, render evident the disproportionate ratio between what we know and what we don't, showing how the mechanisms of ageing and longevity often still remain obscure or apparently contradictory.

How do genetic features and environmental factors interact in the determination of both the quality and the quantity of years to be lived? Is it really so important to 'correctly choose our parents' in order to guarantee ourselves longer longevity? If a close relationship between the size of an organism and its longevity has been demonstrated, then how can the long lifespan (over 400 years) of the ocean quahog (scientifically known as *Arctica islandica*) be explained? Is it the senescence or the mortality rate most affecting longevity? 'Why does natural selection permit aging' (p. 88)? Have providers of life insurances understood the secrets for 'gambling' on their client's existences? Is it true that 'natural selection retires in old age'? (p. 91) What is the cost of reproduction in terms of survival? How can income inequalities affect the population's lifespan in our countries? These as well as many other questions can be found in this book. Of course, not all of them have definitive answers (surely not the writer's fault!). However, each of these arguments opens a Pandora's box of hypotheses, suggestions and apparently contradicting facts, which encourage the reader to ponder possibilities.

As suggested above, the complex topic of ageing and longevity is treated in a provocative way with the aim of both informing and stimulating the debate – making the book a good read! Given the comprehensive overview spacing across multiple specialties, everyone will likely discover unknown facts and data. Thus, readers with a scientific background may easily enrich their personal knowledge by finding information on the topic coming from fields far from their own expertise. On the other hand, lay readers may obtain a flawless introduction to an intricate matter while enjoying a well-written book. In particular, the book may be of special interest for

students and junior researchers interested in engaging their future in specialties related to research on ageing. This book may foster their curiosity, revealing how many natural wonders are concealed behind the apparent 'normality' of the ageing phenomenon.

As the author writes, 'everything about aging and longevity starts as a puzzle' (p. 153). The critical capacities of man have been assembling this magnificent mosaic since ancient times. Pieces are slowly coming into place, although some are still missing or looked at from the wrong direction. The good news in front of this extremely challenging task is that each of us may play an active role in the improvement of longevity. It is up to us to better appreciate and understand the 'life-time experience' of ageing, a process that every one of us daily experiences (even at this very exact moment while reading).

Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Toulouse, France

MATTEO CESARI