

and challenge unhelpful perceptions' (p. 383). Strictly speaking, the only real opportunity identified is the creation of a significant resource for society through the expansion of the number of older people, who have much to offer in terms of supporting individuals, families and communities.

In the editors' summary of the 'risks' of population ageing, the widespread reliance on the age pension (New Zealand Superannuation [NZS]) is not prominent. They conclude that 'there is no fiscal case for major policy changes in the immediate future ... NZS, in its present form, is sustainable, given good economic performance' (p. 376). Yet elsewhere in the book there is evidence in support of early reform of retirement income provision, especially given the very long lead time needed for effective implementation. Individual authors note that NZS discourages private saving and the development of self-funded retirement, that a declining proportion of retirees will have mortgage-free home ownership, and that incomes from NZS will not keep pace with rising health costs.

Some omissions were noted, such as: discussion of the development of domiciliary and community services, which are very relevant to the important policy principle of 'ageing in place'; the contribution of pharmaceutical costs to public and private health expenditure; and the extent to which the New Zealand government's 'Positive Ageing Strategy' will need to adapt in the future, especially given the view that it may be less relevant to the baby-boom generation. There could also have been more discussion of the Maori and overseas-born peoples, in view of their representation in New Zealand's future aged population and the distinctiveness of their experiences of old age. Theories receive little mention, and 'positive ageing' and 'ageing in place' are the only policy-relevant concepts with any prominence.

In conclusion, the individual chapters make important contributions and will provide useful reference material for students and researchers. The book as a whole is a forum for discussion rather than a closely integrated work with broadly agreed conclusions. Various chapters emphasise the need for more research, that the work is intended only to stimulate discussion, or that there is much uncertainty. The book presents many issues that require further consideration. In particular, in a policy field where early, pro-active initiatives are often considered necessary – to address prospective labour force decline, funding shortfalls and welfare issues – the reactive stance of parts of the book is an important issue in itself.

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Ellen M. Immergut, Karen M. Anderson and Isabelle Schulze (eds),
The Handbook of West European Pension Politics, Oxford University Press,
New York, 2007, 968 pp., hbk £85.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 19 929147 2.

This edited volume considers the politics of pension-policy reform using case studies from 16 countries. The editors have three audiences in mind for this comprehensive analysis of the nuances of pension politics in Europe. They believe

that it will appeal to those interested in welfare states and institutional change, to students and practitioners of social policy, and to those interested in comparative and European politics. The usefulness for policy makers lies primarily in its concise outline of policy and policy reform since the 1980s, but it is principally an educational text and will be of most use to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The book is a refreshing departure from the ‘finance is everything’ thesis that has tended to dominate the pensions literature. It is also a welcome antidote to unilinear descriptions of a transition from welfare to post-welfare, through its attention to the complexities and intricacies of the pension reform process.

The book covers the 15 ‘old’ European Union member states – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – plus Switzerland. Each chapter, written by an expert in the area, describes the country’s political system according to the ‘veto points and veto players framework’ (outlined below), and then provides a brief historical overview of the pensions system. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the system’s structure, presented according to coverage, administration, financing and benefits. Finally, each chapter provides an analysis of the dynamics of pension reform from the 1980s to the present, assessing the way in which policy proposals have been constrained or facilitated by politics. The historical overviews are particularly helpful because they explain the constraints imposed on reform by the structure of the prevailing pension system.

The editors emphasise the influence of political priorities and political feasibility on pensions’ policy reform; hence the questions they address are ‘political’ questions. They ask: ‘Does the structure of government affect the dynamics of pension politics? Are some forms of government better than others at grappling with policy problems? Do some policies privilege some interest groups or voters at the expense of others? [and] How have nationally-distinct notions of fairness and justice affected the dynamics of pension politics from the 1980s to the present?’ (pp. 23–4). It is useful to ask these questions, because much analysis of welfare-state change focuses on the ideological work that takes place prior to pension reform, and the implications of that reform. While analyses of these are invaluable, their emphasis is on what happens before and after reform rather than what happens in the process of reform itself.

The editors provide a useful overview of a series of approaches to understanding pension reform and outline what they perceive to be the difficulties faced by these approaches. This is a valuable starting point for students interested in developing an understanding of the field. They are particularly critical of institutionalist approaches to pension reform that emphasise the effects of political institutions on pensions’ policy making, which they see as unable to explain adequately the dynamics of the reform process. One approach that attempts to remedy the pitfalls of institutional approaches is ‘veto points and veto players theory’. They argue that through its attempts to predict potential sites of struggle in the reform process, it provides better accounts of the dynamics. The ‘veto points and veto players framework’ sets out to identify the points in the legislative process at which particular parties, groups or individuals have the capacity to block or

impede the passage of legislation. This framework is used to structure the book and to develop a rough typology into which the 16 considered countries are placed.

In the process of their study, however, the editors expose some pitfalls of the veto framework. They note that initially they anticipated that the higher the number of veto players and veto points in a country, the greater the number of possible impediments to passing legislation, and the greater the difficulty in introducing far-reaching reform, but that this was not the case. Instead, they found that countries with a greater number of veto points and players had adopted more extensive legislative change, whereas countries with fewer veto points and players had experienced difficulty in introducing sweeping changes. These ‘deviations’ from the veto model can be explained by what the editors call ‘political competition’, that is, the impact of the system of voting, the proximity to election time, and the propensity of politicians to compete for the votes of particular groups of people, on the policy-making process. The editors supplement their veto framework, therefore, with an account of political competition. In sum, this book is likely to become a standard reference for all those interested in pension reform in Europe.

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Jesse F. Ballenger, *Self, Senility, and Alzheimer's Disease in Modern America: A History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2006, 256 pp., hbk £28.50, ISBN 13: 978 0 8018 8276 0.

Alzheimer's Disease (AD), named after German researcher Alois Alzheimer in 1907, is a dreaded affliction of our time. Not only do its causes and cure elude us, but it encapsulates an intense cultural fear about ageing itself. Historian Jesse Ballenger focuses on the modern self to address AD as an emergent crisis and describes how scientific expertise, gerontological advocacy, and American individualism combined to push AD to the forefront of the health research agenda. During the late 18th century, American physician Benjamin Rush considered dementia a natural consequence of ageing in the face of which older people could preserve their moral stature even as their incapacities grew. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, traditional values of moral selfhood gave way to the progressive, liberal soul of modern industry and science, prompting influential figures such as neurologist George Miller Beard and proto-geriatrician Ignatz Nascher to characterise senility as a pathological condition. Here Ballenger elaborates the scholarship of other historians of ageing, such as Carole Haber and W. Andrew Achenbaum, to claim that the contemporary problems of ageing developed as a consequence of modernity.

Ballenger is more original when he examines the transformation of the vague notion of senility into AD and accents issues of gender. While initially considered a disease suffered by patients too young to experience senile dementia, AD grew as a category that eventually colonised all cognitive losses associated with ageing.