

LATER LIFE

Old age. John Vincent, 2003. London: Routledge; ISBN 0-4153-0548-9, 190 pp., £12.99.

It has been 15 years since Fennell, Phillipson and Evers pointed out that the sociology of old age is an underdeveloped subject. So a new book is much to be welcomed. Moreover, Vincent has developed his own approach (based on sociology and anthropology) and presents us with a product that is both informative and distinctive. The work extends over six chapters plus introduction and conclusion. He begins by explaining how old age is pre-eminently a social construction, while Chapter 2 adopts a cohort perspective to explain how attitudes and values of age groups belong to the era of their experience. His Bosnian interviews are used here in the first of several mentions. These two chapters supply a very useful content.

Chapter 3 opens out the discussion by consideration of global influences. One of the principal aspects under this heading is the trend towards ageing populations. The population pyramids shown in this chapter are among the best illustrations of the comparative approach. Among the important issues considered at this point is the one about the 'problem' of the increasing number of elderly people. Vincent argues that the issue of ageing needs to be considered in terms of the various defining topics: growing national wealth and its distribution, extent of unemployment, retirement age and re-employment options, benefits and so on. The 'problem' of an ageing population is therefore a decision of social policy, which need have no problem definition at all. The question of pensions is tackled in the next chapter together with the matter of how pension investment relates to the financial markets. The danger to pensions during the market downturn of recent years is a circumstance set against the view that pension capitalism opened up the possibilities of a form of workers control. Holes in pension funds hardly support such optimism.

Identity is the dominant topic of Chapter 5 and the issue is considered from several angles. The argument is that the elderly are brought into line with the expectations of the prevailing social definition. Even so, the aged can and, to some extent do, create their own world in certain respects, and this must have some effect on the wider social definition. Moreover, even the very elderly can find much in their lives that rejects society's prescriptive categorizations (Bury and Holme, 1991). The experiential self-definition of old age is covered in Chapter 1 but is not there argued as a subjective dismissal of old age, even though Kaufman's ageless self idea is featured

in Vincent's text. Though Laslett and the University of the Third Age are mentioned, neither the writer nor the movement is discussed as challenges to the prevailing definition of either the elderly or the economic domination of funded educational provision. Chapter 6 covers the matter of the medicalization of old age and questions of sickness and death and the dangers associated with the medical model are thoughtfully dealt with.

My regret is that so much is left out: reminiscence work and the use of autobiography, aspects of the sociology of leisure (such as the development of the package holiday), issues of education (to do, for example, with more consideration of lifelong learning) and perhaps some extended exploration of religious beliefs. However, I would certainly recommend the book to students of the topic area.

REFERENCES

- Fennell, G., Phillipson, C. and Evers, H. (1988) *The sociology of old age*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
 Bury, M. and Holme, A. (1991) *Life after ninety*. London: Routledge.

Terence Chivers
University of the Third Age

CHERISHING THEM

Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions. Martha C. Nussbaum, 2001. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; ISBN 0-521-46202-9, 751 pp., £30.00.

At one time it may have been accurate to say that Western society was frightened of emotion, but that has changed in recent years, and emotion has recently taken centre stage as the most fashionable issue in town. Work is developing at an extraordinary pace, in psychology, neuroscience and education to name but three disciplines, and is demonstrating from a variety of perspectives that emotions, far from being merely primitive responses to be suppressed, are at the heart of how we think, how we learn, and how we attribute meaning and value. We are recognizing, too, that we have the ability to do far more than respond blindly to feelings. We can think about them, organize them modulate them, moderate them, and shape them through reflection and learning (LeDoux, 1998). This perspective is often captured in shorthand by the term 'emotional intelligence',