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Jan Baars, *Aging and the Art of Living*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2012, 304 pp., hbk US\$60.00, ISBN 13: 978 1421 40646 6.

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related to former employment, education, *etc.* Indeed anyone hoping for a simple answer will be disappointed apart from the overarching theme of inequalities. The theme of inequalities needs stressing and is often missing in earlier studies. This is particularly brought out in Wendy Bottero's chapter on 'Social Class Structures and Social Mobility: The Background Context' (Chapter 2).

The chapters are varied in their approaches. They include those that use their own empirical research such as Martin Hyde and Ian Rees Jones in Chapter 5 where they use the International Social Survey Programme and the Citizenship Survey; and Alexandra Lopes who, in Chapter 4, uses the European Quality of Life Survey. Other chapters, such as Chapter 8 on caring by Christina Victor and Chapter 9 on social work by Trish Hafford-Letchfield, summarise the research and policies on these topics as well as discussing social class. Each chapter has extensive references and there is an excellent index.

What can the reader conclude about social class and, in particular, how it can be measured? A good summary of the issue of social class is the answer given by the author of Chapter 4, Alexandra Lopes, when she attempts to answer the question on how social class should be measured. She claims that it is a question worth asking 'even if we do not have a straightforward answer' (p. 53). This book is a good starting point for considering social class even if it does raise more questions than it answers – not a bad thing for an academic book.

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Jan Baars, *Aging and the Art of Living*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2012, 304 pp., hbk US$60.00, ISBN 13: 978 1421 40646 6.

Jan Baars wants us to 'learn to contribute to a culture that stimulates and supports aging people to lead full lives': his book aims to convince us that 'Developing an *art* of aging can help create such a culture' (p. 1). This book thus aims to make an intervention into its readers' lives, but it is conscious that they cannot change all by themselves: this is a social project too. For Baars, both as individuals and as societies we need to see the world, and ourselves in it, differently. While 'lifecourse' approaches stress the development over time of interrelated lives, Baars augments this by reflecting on 'life' from the inside: how the human condition is experienced by those who live it. This tends to be touched on rather slightly in gerontology. Researchers may mention that interviewees feel 'young', or feel 'old', or feel curious and engaged with life, or feel the opposite; but such accounts tend not to be envisaged as casting radical forms of insight on to the experience of living. This Jan Baars sets out to do, exploring ideas about the 'potential richness and fulfilment of later life' (p. 4). He celebrates humans' capacity for constructing their own lives creatively, together, and

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does so from an existential point of view that concentrates on *lives lived in time* (pp. 5, 7). One of this book's most important contributions is to make clear why and how discussion of what it is to be living in time is crucial for gerontology.

First, Baars argues that it is not mortality so much as finitude that is crucial to understanding the human condition. Finitude means that all our projects are destined for incompleteness, transience and change: everything has an end. This need not entail doom and depression, as long as we understand that it implies the need to work together, to identify with people and projects and causes beyond our own immediate concerns. 'The interhuman condition' is inherently vulnerable: only by developing our collective 'humane responses' can we form any remotely adequate response to it (pp. 201–3). This is where the '*art*' of living comes in. This seems to be an aesthetic concept only to the extent that it implies we need to sculpt our practices, shaping them into forms more appropriate for us as human beings than if they remained unconsidered reactions to immediate pressures. The concept borrows from the Greek idea of 'techne', even though practising a techne like medicine or boat-building is something you can learn, start and stop, unlike living, and something you exercise on an object separate from yourself. Baars would surely not wish us to adopt a technicist, rationalistic approach to doing things to ourselves in the cause of self-development; he would have more sympathy with those of the Greeks who stressed that we can only make moral and political progress in interaction with each other.

Baars sees reflection and a search for wisdom as heavily involved here, relating back to Socrates, for whom reflection meant 'knowing oneself' in the sense of knowing what human beings are capable of, what they are like: less dwelling on our personal identities or biographies than giving us the capacity to school and criticise ourselves and each other. For Baars, as for the ancient Greeks, the aim of this is flourishing or 'living a full life': not just flourishing in some particular area of human activity but flourishing 'as a human being'. To understand what this means, we need a philosophical anthropology that can contribute to a search for wisdom by cultivating debate about what a human being is. This book aims to be part of such a debate.

For Baars, we have been distracted from exploring this problematic by a historical tendency to admire philosophers offering ambitious, rationalistic systems, rather than those taking seriously the nature of personal experience. Among the latter he includes Augustine (shedding light on his profound analysis of time rather than navigating the deep shadows of his theological theories of original sin and predestination), as well as others who have interrogated the significance of time to human existence: Bergson, with his conceptions of *durée* and *le moiprofonde*, or Husserl and Heidegger. Baars stresses that for Heidegger, the past shows more openness than we might think: living in time is a constant existential engagement. Baars augments this position with understandings derived from Levinas, Bloch and Arendt, exploring human time in terms of

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hope and natality, stressing 'spontaneity, creativity, and the openness of the future' (p. 205). For him, this goes hand in hand with calls like Martha Nussbaum's for compassionate understanding of human predicaments and their meanings.

In principle, this supports Cicero's account of ageing as the culmination of a life well lived, a period in which the art of living practised by the older person means care for *others* as well as him- or her-self. This is not older age interpreted as staying young: Baars wants us to reflect on older age as a valuable period of life in itself. 'Serene leadership' (p. 114), for Cicero, might be attained if one has lived one's life appropriately and effortfully beforehand, aiming at the Stoic ideal of the 'harmonious culmination of the human life course instead of its decay' (p. 116). Notably, this is education for a whole life rather than for a career. Moreover, this type of wisdom does not arrive all by itself in older age, but must be treated as a long-term aim 'to love and search for' (p. 125).

Baars wants to bring these insights to bear on an understanding of shared life-worlds, and sets out in Chapter 5 to respond to Ricoeur's view that narrativity is the way we bring being in time into language. If we want to know what sort of person someone has been, we tell a story. If we dissent from the implications of that story, we tell another one. Even though, as Charles Taylor emphasises, such stories are themselves embedded in master stories that have existed long before we were born, Baars stresses that telling or performing stories must still be a creative process, and one for which we take responsibility. Hence he voices doubts about the institutionalisation of the 'life review' among carers for older people. Life stories, he rightly insists, are so vitally important that they must be genuinely listened to, not reduced to standardised pastimes (p. 191f.).

We are inhibited from understanding life in time by features of contemporary culture that include the dominance of chronometric, clock time, literal measurements of the time that has elapsed since our births. This is a feature also commented on emphatically by writers such as Bill Bytheway, as well as featuring strongly in the ideological use of the term 'choice' in conceptualisations of the lifecourse. Baars remarks in his first chapter that even if lifecourses today are 'destandardised' and 'individualised' in important ways, this brings with it a *greater* rather than a lesser dominance of chronometric time. He excoriates a 'causal' account of time, the assumption that being, say, 65, automatically causes one to be a certain sort of person with certain capacities and needs. His second chapter deals with the rise during the 20th century of gerontological and social negativity about older people, much of it associated with various guises of the Kansas City study, source of the 'disengagement thesis'. This culminated in what Moody and Sood call 'gerontophobic shame': being older became an embarrassment, unless 'being' could be reinterpreted as 'being busy' (p. 66). This is all part of the way the modern rational subject has come to be obsessed with the idea of control, and the fetishisation of measurement that comes with it. We prefer the illusion of 'the completely independent individual who thinks of himself as fully in

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charge' – someone who wants to age 'successfully (but only after a long, long youth)' (p. 149).

Baars remarks generously that his book is intended to be part of a dialogue and that he does not object to being disagreed with (p. 6). I could imagine a marvellous use of this text in which an on-line version were used by readers to propose amendments and additions, which the author would periodically accept, reject or revise. There is bound to be argument and dissent in relation to any good book. Personally I should amend his account of Adam Smith as advocating complacency about the types of personal development endorsed under capitalism (p. 19). Though Smith pointed out that industrialised societies could protect the poor more effectively than could famine-prone agricultural ones, he made clear that capitalism survives by encouraging us to want things that in fact are not good for us, corrupting our judgements and our moral sense. Or, while I applaud Baars's adoption of Nussbaum's term 'virtuous wisdom' for 'phronesis' in Aristotle, I would not adopt his version of the 'virtue of the mean' as a 'half-way house' between extremes. The 'mean' for Aristotle is an optimal state (extreme) whose constituents are appropriate to its circumstances, not a geometrical or arithmetic mid-point between excesses of too much or too little. Nor do I believe that in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle is stating straightforwardly how unpleasant older people are. For the most part, he mentions reputable opinions which an orator must take into account when speaking to a particular audience. These are not necessarily his own views. He offers what may be taken as elements of a sociology of knowledge *avant la lettre*, listing what people of his time *take* to be reliable assumptions about older people in everyday discourse. It is true that Aristotle himself seems to be somewhat pessimistic about older age, but his ethics and politics are not intended only for those who are young or in the acme of life. He intends us all to follow prescriptions whose stress on interrelated practices (in particular, friendship) should make them highly congenial to Baars.

This is important for the study of the lifecourse and the human condition not least because, as Baars suggests, to develop the art of ageing we need to know much more about wisdom. This was a topic explored more perspicaciously in the ancient world than it is now. While contemporary work on wisdom among psychologists underlines features such as personal characteristics and moral predilections, in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle's account of the ways we argue about human affairs can be treated as a surprisingly rich starting-point for analysing wise *reasoning*. Here Aristotle sees character, emotion and sociality interacting with judgement in conditions of endemic uncertainty, which would in principle suit Baars' approach well. Following this, in the tradition of writers on the art of living such as Foucault, Hadot or Nehamas, we need to be able to envisage how the 'techne' involved is intended to be applied: how does an art of living manifest itself in practical life? It is a mark of the excellence of this book that it adds weight and urgency to such questions. This publication – which contains an endless wealth of spurs to thought and engagement – should

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initiate a long and important conversation in which we learn to treat and to experience ageing more critically, much more creatively and with greater enjoyment.

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