


REVIEW

## Ageing Without Ageism? Conceptual Puzzles and Policy Proposals

Greg Bognar and Axel Gosseries, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2023, 284 pp., hbk £83.00, ISBN: 9780192894090

Kanav Narayan Sahgal 

Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, India

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*Ageing Without Ageism? Conceptual Puzzles and Policy Proposals* is a collection of 18 essays that examine various aspects of ageing, ageism, age-related politics and public policy from different philosophical and ethical perspectives. As noted in the Introduction, this book is timely owing to two key factors. First, given the increased emphasis on interrogating categories like gender, race, disability and sexuality in framing inclusive social policies, it is essential to critically assess ‘age’ as well. This involves examining whether age-based categorisations are distinct from other categories or not. Second, as societies face ageing demographics, there is an urgent need for policies that address these demographic shifts effectively (pp. 1–2). To that end, the essays in Part 1 (Chapters 1 to 7) primarily address philosophical questions related to age and ageism, while those in Part 2 (Chapters 8 to 18) concentrate on age-related policy issues intersecting with other critical areas, including education, health care, political participation, taxation and inheritance. It should be noted that the chapter numbering in the hardback edition is different from that in the online book.

In Chapter 1 ‘Age discrimination: is it special? Is it wrong?’, Katharina Berndt Rasmussen categorises four distinct forms of age-based treatment and, thereafter, employs three theoretical frameworks to critically assess the morality of age-differentiated treatment. In Chapter 2 ‘Does the badness of disability differ from that of old age?’, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen compares old age with disability, proposing a ‘moderate-bad-difference-view of disability’ that acknowledges the general disadvantages associated with disability while highlighting their complex interplay with social and non-social factors. In Chapter 3 ‘In defence of age-differentiated paternalism’, Viki Møller Lyngby Pedersen examines the feasibility of social policies that restrict children’s and adolescents’ liberties based on paternalistic grounds. Pedersen distinguishes between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ paternalistic policies, suggesting that while the justification for any form of paternalism generally weakens with age, the effectiveness of any specific policy measure will hinge on whether the ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ paternalistic approach is

adopted. Questions related to age-related paternalistic policies also appear later in the book (specifically, in Chapters 8, 12 and 13).

In Chapter 4 'Age and the social value of risk reduction: three perspectives', Matthew D. Adler examines three policy assessment frameworks – minimised cost–benefit analysis, utilitarianism and prioritarianism – to evaluate how each system values fatality risk reduction in relation to age. Using a simulation model based on US income data alongside a conceptual model focused on Covid-19 vaccine allocation, Adler explores how these frameworks might help address age-related disparities in risk and resource allocation. Chapter 5 'Can egalitarians justify spending more on the elderly?' by Paul Bou-Habib examines the ethical concerns surrounding welfare states' excessive spending on the elderly, with a focus on the allocation of funds for Alzheimer's disease treatment. In Chapter 6 'Age limits and the significance of entire lives egalitarianism', Axel Gosseries explores the relationship between the fairness of upper or lower age limits and the idea of equality over one's entire life. Part 1 concludes with Chapter 7 'Age universalism will benefit all (ages)', in which Simon Birnbaum and Kenneth Nelson also assess welfare state policy by examining data on income replacement in social insurance across several predominantly wealthy countries. Their findings suggest that nations with age-balanced social insurance policies achieve better outcomes.

Part 2 begins with Chapter 8 "Let them be children"? Age limits in voting and conceptions of childhood', in which Anca Gheaus explores the question of whether children should be granted voting rights. While not advocating for any particular position, Gheaus examines how thinking about specific forms of value and inequality in childhood can impact policy makers' evaluations of age as a criterion for setting voting limits. In Chapter 9 'Age and the voting-driving analogy', Alexandru Volacu argues in favour of age-adjusted voting rights, using driving rights as an analogous example to make this case. In Chapter 10 'Empowering future people by empowering the young?', Tyler M John advances the idea of 'youth future assemblies' to empower the youth vote, while simultaneously opposing the idea of giving young people additional votes as a means of countering political short-termism.

In Chapter 11 'Covid-19, age, and rationing', Greg Bognar cautiously defends the use of age and life expectancy in the rationing of medical resources during emergencies, drawing on publicly available guidelines and recommendations from triage processes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter 12 'Ageism in assisted reproduction', continues the discussion on health-care policy with Francesca Minerva questioning legal restrictions inhibiting women over the age of 45 from accessing assisted reproduction technologies and facilities. In Chapter 13 'An education resource account for early school leavers', Andrée-Anne Cormier and Harry Brighouse propose two arguments: first, ending mandatory schooling at age 16 for all students; and second, establishing an inflation-linked education resource account for each student who decides to drop out of school at 16 or 17, enabling them to utilise funds in this account to complete their education at a later stage in life.

In Chapter 14 'Differentiating retirement age to compensate for health and longevity inequality?', Vincent Vandenberghe utilises panel data from the European Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe to document the health status of individuals aged 50 and older across more than 20 countries. By calculating the degree

of retirement age differentiation necessary to equalise health at the time of retirement, Vandenberghe advocates for a differentiated retirement age policy – both between countries and within various socio-demographic groups within countries. In Chapter 15 ‘Aging in place and autonomy: is the “age-friendly” city initiative too elderly-friendly?’, Kim Angell explores claims made by both the elderly and the young regarding ‘aging in place’. Angell focuses on the purported desirability of age-friendly city initiatives, arguing against giving age a privileged status when viewed from the lens of personal autonomy.

Finally, Chapters 16 to 18 explore questions of tax and ageing. In Chapter 16 ‘An age-based delayed housing wealth tax’, Daniel Halliday proposes a delayed housing wealth tax. In Chapter 17 ‘Two types of age-sensitive taxation’, Manuel Sá Valente proposes two types of ‘age-sensitive’ tax regime – cumulative and age-differentiated income regimes. And finally, in Chapter 18 ‘An age-differentiated tax on bequests’, Pierre Pestieau and Gregory Ponthiere suggest a regime in which the taxation of bequests would explicitly depend on the age of the deceased.

Whilst this is a comprehensive collection of essays, organising them thematically by policy domain or methodological approach could have created a more coherent structure and enhanced the book’s overall readability and applicability for practitioners. For example, the final three essays on taxation (Chapters 16, 17 and 18) and those addressing paternalism (Chapters 3, 8, 12 and 13) could have been grouped together as distinct blocks, as could the essays on other topics like health care, voting rights and the role of the welfare state.

Of greater concern, the collection currently lacks representation from the Global South. It appears that neither the datasets nor the policy prescriptions adequately account for the diverse cultural contexts faced by low- and middle-income countries in this region. This absence raises concerns about the feasibility of some proposals, such as ending mandatory schooling at age 16, in jurisdictions with already very low levels of primary and secondary school enrolment and a weak education system.

Finally, to ensure greater accuracy and effectiveness, there is a need for deeper engagement with legal systems and theories when advancing policy prescriptions. Legal doctrinal principles may sometimes clash with philosophical perspectives, and these interactions must be carefully considered to ensure that policy recommendations are well-grounded and aligned with the legal context of specific jurisdictions. This is especially true for fields like taxation, which are typically entangled in a complex web of laws and proscriptions around group discrimination, which are often governed by case law in common law jurisdictions.

Despite these concerns, *Ageing Without Ageism?* is a valuable resource for anyone interested in age studies. The collection offers a diverse range of perspectives, providing important insights for policy makers and researchers alike.

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