

Jan Baars and Henk Visser (eds.) (2007). *Aging and Time; Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. Published in the Society and Aging Series, 202 pp., ISBN 978-0-89503-367-3 (cloth)

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Any research on aging is based on specific understandings of time and chronological (calendar) time is not always the best measure of time. Older people are defined as those who have lived a certain time and have less time left compared to other cohorts. Even at a more profound level, time figures. Older people are often asked to finish their professional careers and have more 'free time' and when certain measures such as dependency ratios are employed, the amount of chronological time lived is believed to indicate the assistance one requires or the burden one forms to society. Studying older persons as a separate category involves some time-risks for researchers. When the boundaries between 'the old' and the rest are made to seem static and stern, an artificial distance is created. Distancing devices are equally in place when, for the purpose of research, older persons are situated in an a-historical time and place.

The usage of time measurements in research on aging is not always explicitly conceptualised or questioned. In the interesting first chapters of *Aging and Time* Jan Baars explains that the scientific precision that is associated with chronological *time* has equally been attributed to constructions of chronological *age*. Chronological age has consequently been accorded great explanatory value. This has been at the expense of other more subjective time perspectives that can be measured through the recording of personal experiences and narrative articulations. Chronological time is indispensable, but a one-sided focus ignores the meaning of time and aging. The meanings of aging comprise among other things

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cultural variations in the ways time is organised in different societies, as well as the significance of individual processes of biological, social and emotional change. In my own research among older persons in Kerala (India) it was being a grandparent, getting grey hair or losing one's mobility that made people feel older. Chronological time was not considered very important and birthdays were rarely celebrated. Among Hindu's the 84th birthday was exceptionally important, but only because it meant having seen a 1000 full moons.

According to Baars it is because of gerontology's great involvement with organisational contexts that the processes of meaning giving have largely been ignored. What it means to become older may not matter much when population aging is primarily seen as posing bureaucratic and societal challenges. The authors of *Aging and Time* have taken up the challenge to think about time in relation to their own research interests. In chapters 3 to 5 they report on various psychological experiments. Elke van der Meer introduces the latest results from cognitive research and brain-based studies on psychological time. Freya Dittmann-Kohli investigates the temporal perspective of the self through tests that are designed to see whether the passage of time is indeed a more prominent element of self-experience in later life than in young adulthood. Warner Schaie consequently studies the concept of *event time* as a substitution for the over-rated calendar time. Appropriate designs for the study of event time that he suggests are based on the *Cattell Cube* and *O and P techniques*. Certain characteristics of data sets are highlighted that could be suitable for the identification of events and their dimensionality.

The last four chapters of *Aging and Time* contain an extended confrontation between biologist Eugene Yates and physicist Jos Uffink about their differing views on gerontology and time. The authors try to come to an understanding of aging processes that does not depend on a fixed external scale but is based on aging processes operating within the living organism. The point is to examine why people age differently when they share the same chronological age. In an interesting last chapter Henk Visser outlines the preconditions for interdisciplinary research on aging and points at the need for more data-oriented research.

For a *Society and Aging Series* book *Aging and Time* contains little on society. The focus of most chapters is on generalised and objectified bio-

logical and psychological processes as related to individuals rather than on cultural and social understandings of time and aging processes. The analyses are based more on materials obtained in a de-contextualised research laboratory than upon the recorded voices and experiences of older persons themselves. Yet, the authors of *Aging and Time* have made a multi-disciplinarian effort to write on this complex theme. The editors demonstrate clearly that studies on aging benefit from a further questioning of time, the defining factor – but how to define it?- of getting older.