Chris Phillipson (ed.) (2013). *Ageing*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 218 pp. ISBN 978 0 7456 3084 7 (hardback)

Reviewed by Chris Gilleard*

Ageing is one in a series of books published by Polity Press under the general rubric of "key concepts." Written by one of the leading figures in social gerontology, the book consists of ten chapters divided into three sections. The first section outlines the socio-demographic nature of ageing, the second social divisions and inequalities in later life, while the third section addresses "new" pathways for later life. The aim is to outline the major characteristics and consequences of contemporary ageing societies and the changes in the institutions that once secured a place for old age.

The book begins with the acknowledgement that the ageing of populations represents a novel feature of the 20th century. The demographic transition that occurred during that century was associated with falling rates of mortality and fertility. The fall in mortality was initially evident amongst the young; in the latter decades it extended to the old. Rising life expectancies of people aged over 60 are the latest phase in that transition, leading to the ageing of the ageing population and the growth of "the oldest old." Chapter 2 starts by asking the question "is population ageing a problem?". The author concludes by arguing that what is required is a new generational politics, a new "agenda for change in preparing for an ageing society." I think that means "yes."

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The next chapters concern the development of ideas about age and ageing and of social theories of ageing (but not in that order). They pursue the theme of "preparing a new agenda" by taking stock of how societies have realised the idea of ageing within the individual life-course and how the social categorisation – or designation – of old age has been deployed. Different ways of realising and understanding ageing have different consequences for how society responds to its older citizens. Achieving a secure identity, Phillipson argues, is "a major task for older people in the future." Part of the difficulty in securing such an identity is of course the presence and persistence of new and old divisions within the older population.

The second section addresses some of these social divisions in later life. The first chapter in this section examines later-life income – pensions – as one such source of division. The complexities of pension provision and future uncertainties concerning state pensions are highlighted. Understandably, given the book and the author's provenance, the discussion emphasises the position of older people in the United Kingdom. Securing later-life income is however a global issue; less national detail and more attention to the global issues of pension provision might hence have made for a better balance.

The next chapter deals with inter-generational relationships and the social ties of later life. While there is much discussion of changing family relationships, the emergence of new forms of community with more diverse relationships, and the variable sources of social capital that present-day seniors draw upon, little is said concerning the inequalities that such variety creates. Given the theme of inequalities and difference, the chapter does not clarify whether changing patterns of kin and non-kin relationships are leading, or may in future lead to, systematic patterns of unequal exchange.

Another key element in the "divisions" of later life is the ageing of later life itself. The contested construction of "late old age" forms the main topic of Chapter 8. The relative "individualisation" of later life noted in the previous chapter is treated as more problematic for addressing transitions in later life – especially those associated with poorer health and functional abilities. How best to render later life less unpredictable forms the substance of the final section.

Addressing the future of ageing, the author explores several ''new pathways'' based on extending working life and expanding educational opportunities. In a sense, such developments might be seen as reducing the institutionalisation of the life-course, enabling issues of education and work – normatively the prerogatives of youth and adulthood – to permeate the whole of life. The final chapter searches for new solidarities arising from population ageing based on inter-generational, caring, and international ties. The emphasis is upon developing policies to foster those links.

Overall, this is a little book packing a meaty punch – not a textbook, but a useful source to promote thinking about society and the direction in which population ageing seems to be taking it. For me there was a little too much emphasis upon the state as the lever of change and too little on the market, the media, and the cultural processes in which ageing is imbricated. The future may be imagined but I am not sure that it is realised by policy.