distinguish ‘policy practice’ from other forms of social work, for instance, seems contrived. Distinguishing characteristics of ‘policy practice’ such as ‘legislative advocacy, media efforts or litigation’ (page 6) are also strategies advocated in community social work and radical practice. The idea that policy practice can be carried out by practitioners ‘with or without the participation of clients’ does not seem to sit comfortably with ethical commitments to empowerment and user participation – on whose behalf do policy practitioners seek to change policy? A related issue here is what expertise and authority social work contributes to the policy process. If policy work is distinct from other dimensions of social work, rather than an extension of casework and community engagement, what does it have to contribute to policy? Floating the policy work off into what seems to be the realm of disengaged lobbying and advocacy gives ‘policy practice’ a hollowed-out character that ‘identifies social policy change or contribution to policy formulation as its ultimate goal’ (page 6).

The editors’ concern for the value of the policy aspect of social work is striking. They have also have brought together a stimulating and insightful collection of case studies that enriches our understanding of the relationship between social work practice and policy work in different and dynamic policy contexts. However, it is a pity that in putting forward the idea of ‘policy practice’ they gave insufficient attention to examining and testing the idea in the light of the country case studies, and choose instead to deploy the idea in judgement of local practices.

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Ageing with Disability: A Lifecourse Perspective
Edited by Eva Jeppsson-Grassman and Anne Whittaker

This offering from the Policy Press and written by Eva Jeppsson-Grassman and Anne Whittaker is described as the first book to explore the issues of ageing with a ‘disability’. It adopts a lifecourse approach in looking at the implications of growing old with disability and the challenges to successful ageing. It looks at barriers, both within the individual, but also the service, support and professional barriers to choices and a good later life. The book includes chapters on growing old with a disability, ageing parents (and their disabled children) and mutuality between older disabled couples. Although the claim to be the first book to focus on ageing and disability can be contested, its explicit use of a lifecourse perspective, although well established in disability studies, is novel in focusing a whole book on ageing, lifecourse and disability. The book consists of eight chapters with substantive contributions on disability and ‘failing’ body; disability, age and identity; ageing successfully; being one’s illness; parenting in older age and disabled couples. The work is valuable in pulling together these facets to link previous unconnected debates about independence, caring relations, ageing with long-term conditions and
the inter-relationship between formal and informal care. The book is reflexive in the sense that policy, practice and disabled people’s lives are situated in the everyday challenges faced, and there are plenty of quotes from empirical studies to back up the assertions made and references to debates around care, support and independence.

What is less convincing about the book, and the reason I do not wholly agree with the book cover endorsements is that whilst it does aid our understanding of ageing and ‘disability’, it does not alas offer either robust policy analyses nor possible solutions. Indeed, a cursory glance at the book and index points to what is essentially a gerontological and sociological review, one which is largely skewed to care and carers as opposed to choices and independence narratives. The book is largely focused on Sweden and is, arguably, more concerned with care challenges rather than barriers to living a fulfilled life from a disabled person’s perspective. To support this with evidence, only three pages are devoted to disability policy, whilst over 20 are devoted to care issues. The book, although undoubtedly valuable, would more properly be titled something like: *Ageing, Care and Disability – A Swedish Perspective*. This is not to trivialize the content, but I am aware that the publisher is well respected in the field of cutting-edge policy work. As a book focused largely on carer burden, it is not surprising that the definitions are more likely to be about deficits and body failings, while small mention is made of barriers and policy shortcomings. Worryingly, disability is nowhere carefully defined and there are some major inconsistencies even within chapters. This is a real shame; some of the insights, especially those in Chapters 3 and 7, engage carefully if all too briefly with the needless barriers faced by older disabled people. The latter includes discrimination in the policy constructions of older people and the denial of welfare support over a given age cut-off as they are seen as inevitably disabled by that point. This is a pernicious policy assumption that I would have liked to have seen delineated further. To be very honest, my sense is that despite the very rich data and sensitivity of the researchers behind the chapters, the lack of deep comprehension of exactly what, for example, independence in later life means as a socio-political, not simply a care planning, issue leaves the reader wanting more. This concern could easily be attributed to a too close adherence to a certain model of disability—well not really, I liked the detail on how impairment and illness were very real challenges, we concur entirely on that. However, my view has always been that needless additional barriers and invidious distinctions in policy constructions require the most attention, as these are matters that as a society we can do something about. Ageing well and successfully should surely not be seen as inimical to very challenging impairments. The view that disabled people and an independent living approach can be melded however awkwardly with a concern for carers and wider family networks is one I hold on to. The book is surer footed in speaking about carers and much more tentative in saying what independence should mean for older people. It might have asked: what are the policy challenges for an ageing Europe in the light of new models of disability? What are the strengths and failings of these reconceptualizations? What are the constructions of disability in a changing global economy?
Having said all that, I would still recommend this book to students of gerontology and the sociology of ageing, disability and gender. The book is an honest one at the level of conveying fears, concerns and preferences that typify much about ageing. I would be a bit more cautious in saying this is a policy book of note, but a good read all the same.

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By Bernd Marin

Bernd Marin has attempted an extremely ambitious task to present a system of treatment of old age and disability from a global point of view. The book is a big tome (700 pages) and the reader may jump over those themes that are not so relevant for him or her. As a special case, Marin uses Austria, which is understandable, but could perhaps have been relegated to a special volume (part II), as well as the discussion on disability pensions.

The main question for Marin is, as the title says, how much ‘idleness’ is sustainable in an advanced welfare society or to put it in a more traditional manner: how big and long can pensions be and remain sustainable? Of course, the welfare state also supports idleness in other periods of life, but these are nothing compared to the costs of pensions in the coming years. For Marin, the ‘idleness’ of those still of working age is an important question because it affects the ability to pay for pensions.

I have never seen such a list of illustrious welfare state theorists praising the book on the inside and back covers: Anthony Giddens, Claus Offe, Abram de Swaan, David Coleman, Martin Kohli, Stein Ringen. This implies that the book is a real event in the field. Still it is much too large and unwieldy to directly become the work of reference. And in some cases, Marin gives only prescriptions: for example his list of what should be included in the modern ‘welfare mix’ is very comprehensive but not a product of direct analysis.

One interesting fact is that the age of retirement has gone down very steeply from the 1970s to the beginning of the 2000s (in Austria from almost 65 down to 59 from where it has started to climb only recently). Thus the gulf between the time of retirement and the time of death, previously very short, has widened considerably. This also implies that many people are suddenly very wealthy as measured by their lifetime pension wealth. Lifetime pension wealth ranges from €1.5 million (Luxembourg) to about €100,000 (Estonia) and the average is about €0.5 million. And of course the main determinant here is life expectancy. So those who lead very unhealthy lives are throwing away a lot of money (if you die, say five years earlier than expected, you lose on average in Europe, about €100,000–€150,000).

Another important point made in the book relates to the phenomenon of age inflation. Today, an average life expectancy of 15 years remains for those