

Iva APOSTOLOVA – Monique LANOIX (eds.), *Aging in an Aging Society. Critical Reflections*. Sheffield UK – Bristol CT, Equinox, 2019, 15,5 × 23,2 cm, viii-213 p., ISBN 978-1-781179-690-0

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Volume 73, numéro 3, septembre–décembre 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1079873ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1079873ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

ISSN

0316-5345 (imprimé)

2562-9905 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

McFarling, D. (2021). Compte rendu de [Iva APOSTOLOVA – Monique LANOIX (eds.), *Aging in an Aging Society. Critical Reflections*. Sheffield UK – Bristol CT, Equinox, 2019, 15,5 × 23,2 cm, viii-213 p., ISBN 978-1-781179-690-0]. *Science et Esprit*, 73(3), 438–442. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1079873ar>

sense to switch the positions of Chapters Eight and Nine, as the ninth chapter (“The Problem of Evil and Suffering”) seems to me to be a logical extension of the seventh chapter (which answers objections against the argument for God’s existence in Chapter Six), as the ninth chapter is concerned to combat arguments *against* God’s existence, while Chapter Eight (“God and Morality”) is, at root, concerned with the relationship between God and moral norms (perhaps even aligning it with the tenth chapter, on secularism).

Despite these few and minor negative remarks, for the goal of engaging the skeptic at the level of a high-school or university student, Koritansky has knocked it out of the park. Throughout *Engaging the Skeptic* Koritansky remains clear and concise, reducing complex issues to simple and digestible ideas in a manner that is, frankly, enviable. And yet, for all of their relative simplicity, Koritansky’s treatments of scientism, materialism, atheism, and secularism remain, in the words of one reviewer on the back of the book, “devastating”. I concur. Of particular note too is the fact that, instead of unloading numerous philosophical thinkers and systems onto the reader, Koritansky prefers in *Engaging the Skeptic* to keep his rival sources to a minimum; this is especially evident in the final three chapters, which are primarily engaged with the Euthyphro dilemma (Chapter Eight), John Leslie Mackie (Chapter Nine), and John Rawls (Chapter Ten).

Koritansky’s *Engaging the Skeptic* is a wonderful little book in that it accomplishes admirably its goal for its intended audience. At the time of this writing it is available from publisher Justin Press for the very reasonable price of \$14.95 CAD, which, surely, by far undervalues the worth of the content inside.

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When Iva Apostolova and Monique Lanoix organized the conference, *Building Hospitable Communities for Aging* in 2016, they could hardly have anticipated the events which would underscore the significance of this work to the public dialogue. In 2020, COVID-19 became that event. Those who were the first and hardest hit by COVID-19 were the aging and elderly. The reasons for this go beyond medical frailty but rather are reflective of the systemic and on-going under appreciation for the conditions within long-term care facilities. In the first 8 months of the pandemic, 80% of all fatalities were from long-term-care facilities. In some facilities, 80% of their residents succumbed to the disease. In an astounding admission of defeat, the Governments of Ontario and Quebec called upon the Canadian Armed Forces to assist them in a dealing with this man-made disaster. The report by 4th Division Commander, BGen Conrad Maikowski was scathing in its condemnation of the

mismanagement and incompetence under which these facilities operated. As shocking as these facts are, *Aging in an Aging Society*, demonstrates that not only is this unsurprising, it was inevitable and destined to be repeated unless we re-imagine our relationship with aging. Years before COVID-19 became a household acronym, *Aging in an Aging Society* attempted to do that very thing by exploring our understanding of our own aging, societies; relationship with aging, and the impact these factors have on how society cares for the aged.

In its simplest form, aging is our reward for not dying young. Despite this logic, we collectively have a hard time understanding aging. *Aging in an Aging Society*, takes a systematic approach to understanding both the challenges to aging and, more importantly, our failure to appreciate these challenges. In what follows, I will explore the themes offered by various contributors to *Aging in an Aging Society* who explore obstacles to our appreciation of aging. We will never appreciate aging as a society until we appreciate aging individually. While what will follow is elementary, it remains stubbornly elusive. What the authors do is uncover why and how we collectively dispense with the fact that we are all, as Dickens noted, “fellow passengers to the grave.”

To contextualize our relationship with our own aging, Iva Apostolova and Elaina Gauthier-Mamaril enlist the writings of Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) in *The Otherness Within: Reframing, with Spinoza, the Self's Relationship to Disability and Aging*. Where the authors are prudent to point out that Spinoza's writing does not relate specifically to aging, they do draw from his arguments factors that have had a tremendous influence on our understanding of it. By exploring Spinoza's worldview, Apostolova and Mamaril explore how these fundamental views obstruct a comprehensive and mature understanding of aging. As the authors point out, Spinoza's is a philosophy of life where meaning is derived from the affects one achieves. Stated otherwise, we gain meaning in life from what we do and the effects we achieve. However, this relatable metric of progress and contribution does not encompass the entirety of one's life and glorifies the athletes die young.<sup>1</sup> If, as Spinoza suggests, the value of one's life is proportionate to the effects one achieves, then the corollary is that as one ages, one life has diminishing returns. This has a dangerous connotation that foreshadows the destructive measure of human value of the Industrial Revolution. The authors cleverly point out that the influence of these ideas have had and continue to have a significant impact on our relationship with our own aging. If we are conditioned to believe that our value is contingent on our contribution to society, then it is only natural that we will accept that our value diminishes over time.

Spinoza further asserts that the inherent value in life can be determined by one's ability to live and function free or independent from the influence of others. This is an admirable concept, algebraic in its precision as that it isolates the determination of the value of one's own life from the contributing factors of others, but has singular limitations for the elderly and, as before, applies only to those near the prime of one's life. The reality is that the natural process of life means that this ideal condition is temporary. As we age many of us will return to a condition of necessary dependency. While this is natural from a human cycle perspective, in Spinoza's worldview,

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1. Alfred Edward HOUSMAN, *To an Athlete Dying Young* (1896).

this is a retreat from the human ideal. The natural takeaway from this is that since we age and become dependent, the ideal is impossible to achieve for the long term and is more of a parabolic apex to which we can strive but can only be momentarily achieved. From this assertion, is it clear that the more we age, the more we will become dependent and the further we will drift from Spinoza's ideal condition. The implication from Spinoza's understanding of human value, is that it is inevitable that rather than a sense of accomplishment, old age is an indicator diminished relevance. Unfortunately, this tendency to commoditize life and measure its value in industrial terms will not reverse itself. Even the respected elder-statesman becomes just another old person once she has been assigned to a wheel-chair or shows any other sign of mortality that requires the assistance of the society she spent her life serving.

Our view of ourselves as depreciating assets is one that is reflected in the larger society and this trend is examined in Part 2 of *Aging in an Aging Society*. Just as we are urged to recognize our diminished value as we age, as per Spinoza, this tendency is reinforced by the society in which we live. The aging have a fraught relationship with society or rather, society has a fraught relationship with aging. Our view of aging and the aged is shaped by our notion of the aesthetic ideal. This imposed understanding of beauty has more a profound effect how we assign standing in society. This superficiality is taken to a new level by society's opinion of aging which, especially in western society, approaches repulsiveness. Elizabeth Lanphier's contribution to the collection highlights the implication of our fixation on aesthetics and Christine Overall's piece reinforces the associated second and third order effects.

The aesthetic movement of Oscar Wilde proposed to appreciate inherent beauty rather than to search for hidden meaning. While this could be considered to be rather shallow and self-centered, what it did was apply value to something based upon the pleasure it gave – the rub has always been in quantifying this beauty. The aesthetic ideal is that beauty could be found in anything. This is far removed what we have now which takes all of the pettiness of the aesthetic movement and weaponizes one version of beauty against others. While Lanphier is not breaking new ground when she points out that society is fixated upon youth and beauty, especially in the female form, her conclusions extend far beyond the obvious.

We cannot deny that media and culture have a tremendous impact on the way we think and the way we perceive ourselves and the world in which we live. When we are constantly bombarded with one version of what it is to be perfect, we conclude that any deviation detracts from perfection. However, unrealistic, unhealthy and unkind this urged pursuit is, some trends are variable and episodic. Styles and fashions change and the some of the more unhealthy apparitions, such as *heroine chic*, *thigh gap* and *size zero*, have at least temporarily faded however, inescapable obstacle to perfection continues to be age. Lanphier points out that is hardly any room for the aged in defining who and what we are. This is not only ageist but also sexist as aging men retain their cultural relevance far longer than women. We see male cultural icons maintaining relevance well into old age while female icons disappear not only from *Page Six*, but more importantly, from our collective consciousness. This retreat from the public realm, either literally or metaphorically, is what Christine Overall explores in her chapter, *Aging and the Loss of Social Presence*.

The value of an aging citizen is seen to have an inverse relation to her age to the point where simply being of a certain age defines one's capacity to contribute to society. This generic and intellectually lazy analysis would be condemned if it were based on race but, strangely, it is accepted when it comes to age. This is not because it is any less offensive but because in some way this assumption is seen to be deserved. That tendency to marginalize the aged is done so for the very reason that they deserve it because they no longer have the same value and we as a society need to recognize that and save the aged from themselves.

We cannot feign indignation from this interpretation of the value of the aged because we are the ones who have thus defined it, in the first place. We can argue if it is right or wrong, but we cannot argue that it is. Art, both visual and conceptual, has always strived to either represent a reality or to escape from it. One could argue that, with respect to the aging body, there has been far more emphasis on escapism and this has overarching implications to our relationships with the concept of aging. Lanphier argues that instead of focusing on the injustice of it all, that we need to take more responsibility in the presentation of the aesthetic and the aging in particular. Artists and media need to present reality in all of its forms rather than its utopian one. Lanphier is advocating for a more responsible approach to addressing this aesthetic where there should be a reasonable representation of the aged in the arts and culture that define us. And this representation has to go beyond the trivial and insulting where the aged are considered hideous at worst and a disappointment at best. While this may or may not seem superfluous and unrelated to the real issues of aging in an aging society, our perceptions dictate our behaviour so we must be more discerning in what shapes them.

Ultimately, our perceptions guide us to a place where the aged are classified as those who need care but are incapable of determining the nature of that care. They are, to state it plainly, a burden that has to be dealt with. Magdalen Goemans writes eloquently about communities of care, such as *Convivium Cohousing for Senior*, where elders remain as engaged in the later phases of their lives as they had been in every other aspect of their adult life. The examples she employs are encouraging and need to be multiplied. However, these are the exceptions to the rule that sees most of our senior citizens warehoused and awaiting death. Goemans points out that there is no need to switch from a participant in one's life to spectator simply because one's physical and cognitive aspects are fading. Facing such a dire outcome of being reverted into a condition of geriatric childhood is really when one's quality of life diminishes. Unless this trend changes, the natural and logical outcome is not only sad and unfortunate, it is downright tragic. We are, in every way, indicating that the lives of seniors are of less value, they are a burden and their contribution is no longer welcome while at the same time as we are lowering barriers to Medical Assistance in Death (MAID). We need to ask ourselves if our medium is the message.

In *Aging in an Aging Society*, Apostolova and Lanoix present a series of papers that explore our understanding of our individual perception of aging, our societal perception and the implications this has on how care is delivered to the aged. In doing so, by revealing the foundations of the issue, they add not only clarity to an issue that we cannot afford to ignore, they reinforce the relevance of philosophy in public discourse. The authors demonstrate that philosophy is more than simply an

academic pursuit; on the contrary, it repositions itself in the centre of a debate on aging where it can resume its role in advancing understanding of the world and our place in it. As we continue to navigate the implications of COVID-19, we overlook expertise at our own peril. *Aging in an Aging Society* offers more than just insight, it affirms that the reach of philosophy extends beyond the ivory tower. It confirms that the medium is the message.

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## THÉOLOGIE

Jens SCHRÖTER, **Jésus de Nazareth. À la recherche de l'homme de Galilée** (Le Monde de la Bible). Genève, Labor et Fides, 2018, 14,3 × 22,5 cm, 320 p., ISBN 978-2-83091-673-7.

La première quête du Jésus de l'histoire naît à la fin du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle déjà, dans une période intellectuelle foisonnante qui voit notamment la naissance d'une exégèse dite historico-critique. La question passionne les biblistes et bien au-delà, comme l'atteste le succès de *La Vie de Jésus* d'Ernest Renan, qui devient un *best-seller* dans la deuxième moitié du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Si les publications se multiplient ensuite, y compris en francophonie avec les contributions, entre autres, d'Étienne Trocmé (1972), Jacques Schlosser (1999) ou encore Daniel Marguerat (2019), force est de constater, avec Jean-Paul Michaud<sup>1</sup>, que la quête « s'est un peu essoufflée récemment ». Or cette traduction montre que la thématique n'est pas épuisée et que la demande reste vive, y compris pour des publications dans la langue de Molière. Avec cette traduction de la 6<sup>e</sup> édition de la monographie de Jens Schröter sur le Jésus de l'histoire, *Jesus von Nazaret, Jude aus Galiläa – Retter der Welt*, parue en 2017<sup>2</sup>, Labor et Fides offre un précieux présent au public francophone. Après la parution en 2017 de l'ouvrage collectif *Jésus de Nazareth. Etudes contemporaines*, dirigé par Andreas Dettwiler, et avant *Vie et destin de Jésus de Nazareth* de Daniel Marguerat (Paris, Seuil) paru en 2019, la maison d'édition genevoise étend ainsi le spectre de la littérature disponible à ce sujet. Elle montre, de surcroît, toute l'actualité de cette thématique classique et rend accessible le fruit de longues années de recherches par l'un des spécialistes les plus éminents de la question. La qualité prodigieuse de la traduction, élaborée par Marianne David-Bourion et Gilles Sosnowski, n'en rend la découverte que plus agréable.

1. Jean-Paul MICHAUD, « Replongée dans le Jésus de l'histoire. Daniel Marguerat, *Vie et destin de Jésus de Nazareth* », *Science et Esprit*, 73 (2021), p. 241-259, ici p. 241.

2. La première édition allemande remonte à 2006 dans la collection « Figures bibliques » (Biblische Gestalten), Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig. Une traduction en langue anglaise est parue en 2014 chez Baylor University Press.