

the A124. Since it is concerned with claimants of all ages, the average gerontologist will have to work fairly hard to find the desired information.

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Alison J. Norman, *Rights and Risk. A discussion document on civil liberty in old age*, National Corporation for the Care of Old People (now Centre for Policy on Ageing). London, 1980. 96 pp. £2.00. ISBN 0 904 139 20 4.

‘When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.’ In the past, clearly, old age was not necessarily associated with personal rights or civil liberty. But then in the past few people enjoyed either the length of life or the number of rights we now aspire to. Unfortunately this contrast between past and present has not necessarily made society more sensitive to the civil liberties of the elderly, whose range of choice is narrowed not only by the inevitable constraints of ageing, but also by lack of imagination among many of those who in due course will join their ranks.

This clear and well-written discussion document illustrates the point admirably, providing both stimulus and material for reflection. It comprises seven main chapters, each concerned in one way or another with society’s tendency to protect the elderly from risk at the expense of limiting their opportunities for self-determination. The ways in which society does this however are various and the author rightly declines ‘to advocate simplistic or generalised reform’. She examines rights and risks, rather, in the familiar contexts in which everyday decisions affecting the elderly are made: the main chapters are concerned, respectively, with *Losing One’s Home*, *Compulsory Care* (with special reference to Section 47 of the 1948 National Assistance Act), *Freedom in Residential Care*, *Human Rights and Nursing Care*, *Consent to Treatment* and ‘*The Right to Die*’, *Fatal Accidents and the Role of the Coroner’s Court*, and *The Court of Protection*.

Although legal aspects of the subject are fully treated, this essentially practical approach tends, probably rightly for the book’s purpose, to reduce discussion of the underlying philosophical issues to a minimum. It does however allow the author to examine many of the circumstances and contingencies under which the rights of old people become restricted. Admission to institutional care, for example, is shown to be a more arbitrary procedure than many would like to think and the author emphasizes the need for proper geriatric as well as social work assessment and consultation, to ensure that the alternatives really have been exhausted, and that the long-term costs as well as the immediate benefits really have been thought through. These costs, as she observes, may be considerable. In one study cited, 25 per cent of old ladies admitted to a psychiatric hospital died within three weeks of admission, while in another it was found that 35 per cent of fatal accidents among 133 elderly people studied were to those living in institutions, although those living there in fact represented only 4.8 per cent of their age group.

Clearly, the elderly are not necessarily ‘better off’ in institutional care, and

while the author discusses the rigidities, despite recent improvements, of residential care generally, she finds it particularly necessary in considering longstay hospital wards to remind the reader of matters which, as she points out, 'are already well known to the point of tedium': 'lack of choice or control concerning diet, times of sleeping and waking, use of money, escape from external noise, personal clothing... the use of cotsides and "geriatric chairs" to immobilise patients'. 'Perhaps', she concludes, 'it is basically impossible to maintain human dignity in longstay hospitals and we should be looking much harder at alternatives in terms of community nursing homes and community domiciliary nursing?'

Some of the reasons why longstay hospitals restrict patients' freedom, the author suggests, have to do with the traditional authoritarian ethos of hospitals in general, with the traditional temptation in particular of the nursing profession to favour dependency, and with the contemporary low prestige of geriatric nursing. In this context the author might also have mentioned the significant role of auxiliary staff, whose position and influence in geriatric care clearly require further study. But a point which she does mention, namely that patients in longstay wards may be 'labelled like a piece of luggage... and even then not correctly addressed by name and title' well illustrates the fear of risk which underlies much unnecessary restriction of the rights of the elderly. In practice, as the author points out, fear of legal repercussions is often exaggerated, but professional attitudes to risk are often related to a not unfounded fear of social blame, reflected in press and public reactions. The paternalism which restricts the rights of the elderly is thus not something for which the professionals and other carers should too readily be blamed. It is, rather, essentially a failure of the public as well as the professional imagination to realize that we are all ageing. This sensitive and sympathetic book should help its readers appreciate that it is their own rights which are at risk.

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Arch Loughton, *Retirement: the New Beginning*, Bachman and Turner, London, 1976. 134 pp. £3.25. ISBN 0 85974 060 9.

This book is not typical of the do-it-yourself guides to an easy retirement which seem daily to appear on the bookstalls. Nor is it a serious competitor to Aleda Erskine's more creditable volume, *Time of Your Life* (Help the Aged, 1979). Neither is it written in the well reasoned manner of Paul Tournier's commendable work, *Learning to Grow Old* (SCM Press, 1972).

It is instead autobiographical in tone and didactic in mood. 'When I retired at the age of sixty-five... I decided that I wasn't going to let myself rest and rust out.' Arch Loughton has good health, a wonderful wife, tremendous grandchildren, adequate finances, and an amazingly wide range of interests. He also has an active Christian faith. Not surprisingly, his retirement has been as enjoyable as it has been successful. He has tutored pre-retirement courses for the last fifteen years.