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Death and Social Policy in Challenging Times

EDITED BY LIAM FOSTER AND KATE WOODTHORPE

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-137-48489-5; £63.00 (hbk).

Despite the certainty that death comes to all irrespective of moral conduct or social status, an impeccable 'great equalizer' to quote Moodie's oft borrowed expression, the study of death is clearly left out in social policy analysis. Reflecting on my two-decade academic residency in a number of universities, I note that the serious study of death and dying, rather than the occasional 90-minute lecture on the subject, was much in rare supply. Despite always working in gerontology departments, I have never supervised or examined a thesis that focused on some interface between death and social policy. As Alan Walker underlines in the book's preface, it is puzzling why death has 'been largely ignored by the discipline that is specifically dedicated to the study of welfare "from the cradle to the grave"' (p. x).

Foster and Woodthorpe's *Death and Social Policy in Challenging Times* makes a rigorous and convincing case for death to be allocated a much higher priority in the social sciences, but especially policy analysis. The editors led an impressive group of renowned scholars to yield 11 rigorous and wide-ranging explorations and analyses on death, dying, end-of-life/palliative care, bereavement, inheritance, and funeral costs that provoke innovative ways of critical thinking about the final stages of longevity. Rather than focusing narrowly on 'death-specific policy', this edited collection demonstrates how death has implications for the workforce, families, financial services and even the distribution of housing. Sandwiched between introductory and winding-up chapters written by the editors, one finds nine chapters which push forward the fact that the need for end-of-life phase, death itself, and all the ensuing aftermath should be central to the policy agenda.

*Death and Social Policy in Challenging Times* is organized into three parts. Part I, 'Managing the End of Life', looks at social policy issues (Julie Ellis, Michelle Winslow and Bill Noble), the national context on end-of-life care in England (Erica Borgstrom), and euthanasia (Naomi Richards). This first part is very pertinent as it provides a historical context to the issue at hand, but proceeds to discuss the contemporary situation following the introduction of the National End of Life Strategy. The final chapter in this part embeds these discussions in real life situations and presents high profile cases as well as media perceptions. Part II, 'When Death Occurs', takes the reader to issues pertaining to the actual incidence of death, and focuses on funeral welfare (Liam Foster and Kate Woodthorpe), diversity of burial but especially

cremation (Julie Rugg), and marginalized deaths (Christine Valentine and Linda Bauld). We learn that very little is known about funeral planning, especially its financial impact, as well as that the less-spoken issue of how to dispose of the dead carries with it a number of unresolved tensions. The chapter on marginalized deaths has interviews with family relatives whose loved ones' death was linked with alcohol and/or drug abuse. The authors argue convincingly that the former have been completely neglected in policy and practice terms, since they actually need additional levels of support due to the stigma generally associated with abuse and self-destructive behaviour, which tends to exacerbate feelings of guilt, shame and failure. Part III, 'Beyond the Point of Death: The Aftermath' looks at the period beyond the point of death and deals with bereavement support (Jodie Croxall), bereavement and the workplace (Anne Corden) and inheritance (Karen Rowlingson). In the former chapter, the author argues that support for older bereaved people is neither forthcoming nor advocated in social policy frameworks due to the erroneous social constructionist assumptions that older persons are prepared to lose their loved ones and that they accept that death is an inevitable event. Corden's chapter on bereavement and the workplace raises an innovative query as to where the responsibility lies for managing and supporting bereaved workers towards their resolution of grief, and its impact on the well-being of colleagues and employers' financial concerns.

Foster and Woodthorpe's contribution is, without a doubt, a comprehensive and engaging discussion of that interface between death and social policy. It serves as an essential and necessary resource for both graduate students, as well as experienced scholars and policymakers alike. The book is not only testament to the need for social policy to focus more attentively on those issues relating to the end of life, but also includes clear and unmistakable policy directions for a 'good death for all'. *Death and Social Policy in Challenging Times* is certainly, and will be for many years, an invaluable resource of research on the strong need to embed the issues of death and dying in social policy debates not solely in the UK, but also beyond.

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Australian Public Policy: Progressive Ideas in the Neo-Liberal Ascendancy

EDITED BY CHRIS MILLER AND LIONEL ORCHARD

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This book offers a thought-provoking evaluation of the values that underpin contemporary Australian public policy. The central theme running through the book is an evaluation of the influence of neo-liberalism, making it possible to read either individual chapters or the whole book for consensus or divergence around the impact of neo-liberalism and the opportunities or problems it could present in the future.

The book is divided into five parts. Each chapter explores a different substantive policy area through presenting a potted history, the current policy