

Aging and Human Nature: Perspectives from Philosophical, Theological, and Historical Anthropology, edited by Mark Schweda, Michael Coors, and Claudia Bozzaro. Berlin: Springer, 2020. Pp. 287. \$119.99 (hardcover); \$84.99 (paperback); \$89 (electronic).

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Inspired by the international workshop “Homo Senescens: Aging and Old Age in Philosophical, Theological and Historical Anthropology” organized in October 2015 by the editors Mark Schweda, Michael Coors, and Claudia Bozzaro at the Center for Health Care Ethics (ZfG) in Hanover, Germany, this anthology addresses profound philosophical reflections on aging as a fundamental part of human existence and thus “helps to integrate and interpret the increasing mass of empirical information” (3). Linking philosophical traditions (starting with Greek philosophy through philosophical phenomenology to existential philosophy) with socio-scientific findings, the contributions illustrate the possibilities of philosophical analyses for research in Aging Studies. Due to the fact that the majority of authors mainly publish in non-English languages, the anthology opens theoretical-philosophical, theological, and historical-anthropological reflections to an international audience. The reflections revolve around the temporal and spatial dimensions of human existence as linked to individual aging. In this way, with its nineteen chapters, the anthology provides an insightful overview, including current empirical research as well as reflections on classical concepts from philosophical anthropology.

In the first part, Thomas Rentsch, Andreas Kruse, and Heinz Rügger present their central theses in relation to aging as a fundamental human constant, which demonstrates the strength of this anthology. The three distinguished scholars address the foundations of research conducted in the German-speaking discourse of Social Gerontology. In foregrounding the concepts of individuality, potentiality, and dependency, they give insight into the ways these concepts intersect with the socio-political and socio-economic contexts in German-speaking countries.

The inventory of central concepts is continued in the second part, which focuses on the spatiality of human existence. Phenomenology as the important theoretical reference becomes clear in three contributions that foreground corporeality and spatiality, concepts that shape the whole anthology as prevalent theoretical frameworks. For example, in their contributions on the aging body as a “lived history” and as gendered phenomenon, Wim Dekkers and Maren Wehrle undertake a phenomenological analysis of the connections between temporality and the body as well as gender and the body. Here, specifically phenomenological distinctions such as “Leib” and “Körper,” but also “from within” and “from the outside,” as well as a “first-person” and a “third-person” approach (64) allow for an in-depth analysis of the body and aging. Drawing on phenomenological classics such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, Christina Schüe’s contribution deals with the spatial dimension of corporeality and discusses the concepts of “inhabiting space” and the “dis-embodiment of experience” (101) in three case studies.

Phenomenology continues to be a central theoretical reference in the third part, which focuses on the importance of the temporal nature of aging. Aging and its social constitution through and with narratives is treated in connection with the meaning of metric time calculation, embodied time, and time structures in the life course. For example, Christine Overall presents a special aspect of temporality as a constant to human nature, its finiteness, and the resulting reactions that reveal inherent norms.

The fourth part deals with relationality as a social dimension of human existence. Frits de Lange claims that this becomes particularly visible in older age as a “radicalization of the human condition” (178) and suggests that we understand human relationality as responsiveness, assigning great importance to how we interpret care in human relationships in older age. In its critical function for society, care is further explored by Hartmut Remmers, who approaches care work from the perspective of historical anthropology. Applying the same disciplinary perspective to the concept of intergenerational relationship, Jörg Zirfas illuminates the importance of generationality in older age both in history and in modern society.

The volume's fifth part features diverse perspectives on age from public and scientific discourses. Philosophical analyses of basic concepts such as human nature, vulnerability, and dignity are placed next to theological and spiritual questions about the role of meaning in human aging. The contributors in this section draw on personal perceptions as well as literary representations of aging. Theoretical concepts such as gerotranscendence are presented and critically questioned in order to support the idea of a good life in older age.

The diverse contributions of the present anthology provide an excellent overview of aging and old age as a fundamental anthropological phenomenon and open up current – mostly European – critical socio-gerontological research for international discussion. Empirically informed, the fundamental questions of theoretical philosophy are proposed with regards to the concepts of temporality and spatiality of human existence. These are strongly influenced by the European phenomenological tradition as well as by classics of philosophical anthropology. The anthology challenges further engagement with Aging Studies within the framework of theoretical philosophy and invites an inquiry from the perspective of practical philosophy. It inspires the inclusion of an even bigger variety of philosophical traditions about their contributions to Aging Studies and ultimately demonstrates how Aging Studies can benefit from the discussion of different scientific traditions.