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Review of Rethinking Aging: Growing Old and Living Well in an Overtreated Society, by Nortin M. Hadler.

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figure only if fertility partly recovers from its low ebb; Germany, allowing for some net in-migration, is expected to shrink by 12 million. These are illustrations of what the book calls population implosions—rapid declines in numbers without any apparent exogenous causes. The contents are organized in four parts, concerned with what societies with imploding populations look like, policy responses to low fertility, challenges of an aging population, and regional dimensions of population decline. Most of the chapters focus on one or the other of the countries: only a few explicitly compare the two. The policy responses discussed mainly have to do with welfare benefits such as parental leave and childcare, gender equity, and work/life balance. No significant pronatalist effects of these policies seem to be anticipated in either country. Both remain “staunch male-breadwinner countries,” though in recent years each has sought to ease work/life conflicts in home and workplace. Pronatalism is still a sensitive issue in Germany; in Japan, one contributor links the policy weakness in this area to the lack of interest and motivation on the part of elderly male lawmakers in considering initiatives directed at young unmarried persons or young married couples making fertility decisions. A chapter on the phenomenon of health-care migration reports on the recent partial relaxation of Japan’s highly restrictive immigration rules through bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements admitting (female) caregivers from Indonesia and the Philippines as guest-workers—reinforcing “the socialization of care and the feminization of migration.” A companion piece on Germany shows its elderly also benefiting from migrant nurses, mostly from Eastern Europe. The editors are with the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo and Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. Consolidated bibliography, index.—G.McN.

NORTIN M. HADLER

Rethinking Aging: Growing Old and Living Well in an Overtreated Society
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xvi + 250 p. \$20.00.

Although not his intended audience, Nortin Hadler has written a book that demographers studying aging and health care issues will find informative. He is a physician seeking to inform patients, especially older ones, of the facts about their aging bodies and about the utility of the screenings, drugs, and medical interventions they will be offered on their increasingly common journey into their 80s and beyond. His assessments are evidence-based. For example, he carefully examines how one should interpret the scientific evidence of the utility of mammography screening for breast cancer: a reduction in the risk of death from 5.3 to 4.6 for every 1,000 women being screened annually for a ten-year period. He finds this reduction in absolute risk to be “not very impressive,” while noting that it is usually presented as being a more striking relative risk reduction of 13 percent. Looking at the evidence, he questions the utility of screening for type-II diabetes, low bone density, and colon and prostate cancers. He considers the risk/benefit ratio of ingesting statins, beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, vitamin D, and calcium to be unimpressive. He finds little evidence that surgery to reduce pain in shoulders, necks, lower backs, and knees actually works. He finds much evidence that Americans, especially older Americans, are being massively overtreated in ways that often are deleterious to their health.

Many actors share the blame for this overtreatment: the pharmaceutical industry, medical specialists, Americans who bet against the odds in hope of a cure, and a Medicare system that pays for ineffective interventions. Hadler wants individual Americans to “rethink” aging and accept that “decrepitude” and “frailty” are natural processes for humans living into their seventh, eighth, and ninth decades. Acceptance and coping are more realistic individual aging strategies than those the US health care system offers as alternatives. For demographers, Hadler provides a clinician’s insight into the disjuncture between massive American per capita health expenditures and modest life expectancy results.—D.H.

VACLAV SMIL

Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Policy Debate

Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 2010. 232 p. \$34.95.

As the global demand for fossil fuel energy continues to rise, evidence of the unsustainability of the current trajectory is becoming increasingly troublesome. Oil prices are rising, global warming is now widely seen as a serious threat, and the future of nuclear energy, once considered a major alternative to fossil fuels, is in doubt, especially after the recent accidents at reactors in Japan. In response, a wide range of solutions have been proposed in the popular press, academic studies, and policy papers. This volume reviews the most prominent of these proposals and assesses their usefulness. The author, a highly respected analyst of global energy issues, finds little of value in energy policy discussions, which he calls “a vast collection of myths, misplaced hopes and uninformed fervor” (p. 10). The remainder of the book provides evidence in support of this assertion. The first half is devoted to debunking rosy visions from the past that electric cars will become common, that nuclear energy will become too cheap to meter, and that soft power (i.e., renewable, small scale) can become dominant. The second half takes aim at misconceptions that are now in the headlines: that oil production will soon collapse, that carbon sequestration can curb global warming, and that wind and solar energy and biofuels will become major substitutes for fossil fuels. These topics are covered in loosely connected essays, which present scientific and engineering arguments with lots of numbers, yet in a highly accessible form. The author takes a dim view of the various myths, and his scathing critiques are persuasive although occasionally exaggerated. His main conclusion is that nothing proposed today is likely to produce rapid fundamental changes in the current energy system over the next few decades. Change will be gradual and heavy dependence on fossil fuels will continue, although with a growing role for natural gas and non-conventional oil and a leveling off of conventional oil production. Shares of renewable and nuclear energy will rise but not become dominant. Smil’s views are authoritative and well supported, but by devoting most of the text to arguing what will not happen, he leaves little room to describe what is likely to occur and how to improve the path we are on. Aside from occasional calls for sensible regulation (e.g., increasing standards for fuel consumption in motor vehicles in the US) and his assumption that demand for energy will be slowed by increasing efficiencies, there is little sense of urgency about the need to curb greenhouse gas emissions.—J.B.