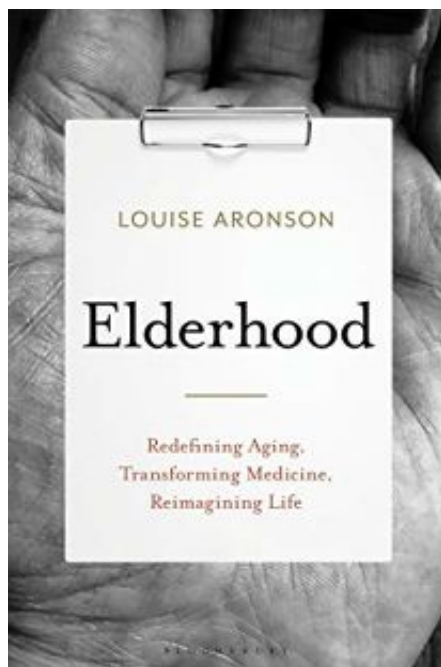


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★ Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life

Louise Aronson. Bloomsbury, \$30 (464p) ISBN 978-1-62040-546-8

Growing old could be much more graceful if doctors would give it some attention, according to this penetrating meditation on geriatrics. UC San Francisco medical professor Aronson (*A History of the Present Illness*) mines her experience as a geriatrician for insights into the ways society excludes and fails old people. The book's heart is her gripping insider's critique of modern medicine and the invasive, agonizing, and often "futile or harmful" treatments with which it battles disease while ignoring overall well-being. Drawing on intimate, often harrowing case studies of patients and the mistakes made by their doctors (including, painfully, her own missteps), Aronson sleuths out how a callous, clueless medical-industrial complex makes things harder for oldsters in ways small—pill bottles that can't be opened by arthritic hands—and large. (Aronson discovered that a patient seemingly dying of Parkinson's disease was actually suffering from a "drug cascade" of medications prescribed to treat the side effects of other medications.) Less cogent in the sprawling text are her musings on the consolations of "elderhood," which don't convince when placed against the generally grim picture

she paints. Still, Aronson's deep empathy, hard-won knowledge, and vivid reportage makes for one of the best accounts around of the medical mistreatment of the old. (*June*)

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