What sources are available for understanding the experience of physical impairment and disability in the Middle Ages? How do we contextualize those sources and interpret changes in them over time? These are the questions guiding Irina Metzler's second book, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages*, which serves in many ways as a companion to her first monograph, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–c. 1400* (2006). In her first book Metzler established a clear vocabulary and a flexible theoretical model for the historical investigation of impairment and disability in the Middle Ages (defined, respectively, as a biological reality and a cultural construct), and in this second book she brings that model to bear on a set of historical themes in four chapters, titled with bold simplicity as "Law," "Work," "Aging," and "Charity."

Metzler employed scientific, theological, and hagiographic sources in her first book to trace the construction of disability in the Middle Ages. In her second she follows primarily economic, literary, and legal texts to sketch the "lived experience" of disability (p. 1). Metzler admits that this "lived experience" is nearly invisible, for the history of medieval disability suffers from the same lack of sources—or a belief in the lack of sources—that has hindered the study of similarly marginalized historical groups such as women, children, and peasants. Because of the almost total absence of autobiographical sources for medieval disability, Metzler calls her approach a study of mentalities (with frequent reference to Jacques Le Goff [1924-2014], that most famous practitioner of such a method), by applying both synchronic and diachronic approaches to a vast array of sources.

In her brief introduction, Metzler highlights the importance of the structuralist-anthropological theories of liminality and marginality for the study of medieval disability. Permanently physically impaired people in the Middle Ages were "liminal" insofar as they were neither healthy nor sick, and "marginal" insofar as they are found upon, or forced to, the edges of society. She recog-
nizes the shortcomings of liminality theory for disability studies in that the medieval disabled were permanently "liminal" whereas in its classic formulation by Victor Turner (1920-83), liminality was a temporary status in religious and social rites of passage. Nonetheless, she alludes frequently in her four chapters to this modified "liminality" of medieval disability.

Chapter 1 on law is concerned primarily with judicial maiming, which Metzler defines broadly (perhaps too much so) as including not only the corporal punishments of established courts, but also the maiming of noncombatants after battle, the revenge of petty lords upon another's peasants, and the unintended loss of limbs in unsanitary prisons. Most of the chapter is a gruesome catalogue of severed feet, noses, ears, and testicles, drawn from law codes and actual cases. A great deal of this material is drawn from Sean McGlynn's *By Sword and Fire* (2009), which has already provided a thorough study of cruelty and maiming in the context of medieval warfare. Metzler's interpretation of this chapter's material is thin, and we get little sense of how those who were intentionally rendered disabled or impaired spent their lives afterwards, apart from a few examples of maimed individuals turning to a life of crime, or of people impaired by accidents who hoped they would not be mistaken for mutilated criminals.

In chapter 2, on work, Metzler explores the relationship between impairment and one's ability to contribute to society in the later Middle Ages. After a brief review of the impairments and disabled status of military veterans (her examination of osteological evidence of healed war injuries is convincing, and a similar approach would have helped chapter 1), Metzler divides her chapter into three sections: a review of the industrial accidents of workers such as carpenters, miners, and weavers; the social and financial aid provided by craft guilds and religious confraternities to those disabled by such accidents; and a nuanced modification of Jacque Le Goff's and Brendan Gleeson's theories on the changing values of time and work in the later Middle Ages, in light of the evidence of work performed by and provided to the medieval disabled. Metzler ends chapter 2 with an excursus on the well-known, but poorly understood, case of court dwarves, jesters, and fools. Metzler admits that few dwarves appear in court settings before the sixteenth century, but they are too valuable for her study to ignore as the only example of a career that was considered specifically suited to the disabled (here, dwarfism was due probably to hypopituitarism or achondroplasia). Metzler's brief examination of medieval dwarves provides a useful platform to decry, once again, the gross errors about the Middle Ages perpetuated by historians of disability as well as the misleading and excessive influence of the Bakhtinian grotesque body.

Thornier problems of interpretation occur in chapter 3, on ageing. Should the inevitable wearing down of old age be treated as a disability? Are the elderly blind or maimed more or less "disabled" than young people with the same impairments? Because old age shares many biological and cultural aspects with disability, in particular its liminal place between health and disease or life and death, Metzler includes in this chapter all "pathological, because disabling, aspects of old age" (p. 94). This comprehensive scope makes it, by far, the longest and least organized of the chapters. She examines, in turn, the various debilities associated with old age. How many people were "old" in the Middle Ages and how was "old" defined? These questions are followed by an extensive survey of literary, theological, and medical descriptions of old age from Hippocrates to Petrarch, and then an exhausting catalogue of "misogerontism" in the classical and medieval periods. She concludes that old age itself was not a disabling condition in the Middle Ages (as some treat it now), but was obviously attended by disabling conditions. Metzler necessarily engages with the research of Shulamith Shahar (b. 1928), the expert on the changing values of time and work in the later Middle Ages.
on medieval old age for the last two decades, moving beyond Shahar's work by providing numerous examples of the care (or lack thereof) provided for elderly workers, her evidence coming mostly from later medieval, English sources.

While Metzler's first three chapters are dedicated to causes of impairment or disability in the Middle Ages, in her fourth chapter, on charity, she examines the social attitudes and organizations that most often identified and provided assistance to the impaired. In both this chapter and her conclusion, Metzler builds on and challenges the work of Sharon Farmer on medieval charity and poverty. Despite the title, there is very little in this chapter on charity per se, and rather more on poverty and the experience of the disabled poor. Sources related to charitable foundations and guilds, however, provide much of her evidence on the intersections of poverty and disability, on the formal definition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the deserving and undeserving poor, and on the growing distinction of impairment from sickness.

This last chapter has the strongest and clearest argument of the four chapters, namely, that the roles and depictions of the impaired changed in the later Middle Ages, for both better and worse. Urbanization, population growth, and an increasingly mercantile society that valued working ability all influenced a widespread shift from the indiscriminate charity of the early and central Middle Ages to a charity reserved primarily for the deserving and clearly marked poor. Physical impairment, manifested as culturally marked disability, was one of the best legitimations for begging, and thus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the orthopedically impaired beggar (usually blind or lame) became the standardized artistic and literary symbol of the deserving pauper. The physically impaired, and thus deserving, beggar was compared favorably to the able-bodied, undeserving, beggar. Yet the more that disability became recognized as a valuable physical and social marker for legitimate begging, the more that impairment was faked or forced (or was believed to be, according to later medieval legislation and preaching). This led in some cases to a distrust of the disabled poor and a greater focus on the body of the beggar. Both poverty and impairment were tested, marginalized, moved from the streets and churches into hospitals or beyond city gates. Metzler also provides in this chapter some rare and valuable evidence for the actual experience of medieval disability in her discussion of mobility aids for the blind (people, dogs, or staffs), of the meaning of names for crutches in Latin and Romance languages (such as potens), and of the meaning of labor legislation in the post-plague era for the physically impaired and localized charity.

Metzler continues her criticism of Sharon Farmer in her conclusion, taking to task Farmer's interpretation of a healing miracle from the canonization proceedings of King Louis IX of France. The proceedings detailed the life and apparent healing of a deaf and mute boy, also named Louis, from which Metzler gathers valuable evidence of the acceptance of a disabled individual as a productive worker (here, a blacksmith) and the accommodations made to facilitate communication. Metzler rightly recognizes this story as valuable evidence for medieval perceptions of the relative ability, inability, and disability of a physically impaired young man. Metzler closes the volume with brief responses to two common criticisms of her first volume that still apply to this one: first, her neglect of gender in the discussion of medieval disability and, second, her failure to include illness in her treatment of disability. In the first case, Metzler once again rejects an argument by Sharon Farmer (that support for the medieval disabled was gendered), stating that her own, more thorough, study of the sources on disability reveals no clear or consistent gendering of disability. In the second case, concerning the apparent failure to include illness in her study of impairment, Metzler makes a stronger case, aptly reminding us of a fraternal organization for the
blind that distinguished between those who were healthy and blind from those who were sick and blind. Clearly illness and impairment were considered separate categories by one later medieval group of disabled people.

The book's greatest strength is the sheer quantity of data provided, mostly from England and Germany in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, but ranging across all of western Europe from the classical era to the early modern period. The extensive scope of Metzler's research is obvious from her endnotes, totaling over one hundred pages, a full third of the volume. (I agree with other reviewers that the preference of endnotes over footnotes—probably made by Routledge and not Metzler—is unwieldy and hinders a critical and informed reading of the text.) But that strength is also a weakness, for Metzler's arguments are frequently hindered by her passion for lists, lost under a tidal wave of names, dates, and anecdotes. Each chapter, "Ageing" in particular, would benefit by division into marked sections with clear signposting. Dividing the book into four long chapters occasionally leads to material not fitting: the excursus on suicide and acedia makes little sense in "Ageing," while "Law" reads like a lengthy footnote to the following chapter on work. Furthermore, spelling and grammatical errors are frequent, a trend for which I am apt to blame both Metzler and the press: for example, Metzler frequently confuses "less" and "fewer" (e.g., p. 45, 75, 96, 153), a variety of names are misspelled ("Gerald of Cremona" for Gerard; "Troy Vandeven- ter Pearman"; and "Albrecht Classen"; and Bishop Marbod of Rennes lives astonishingly into his "seventieth decade" [p. 104]).

Metzler's dominance in the field of medieval disability studies does create an echo chamber at points: she cites her own work as evidence of the applicability of Turneronian theories of liminality to studying medieval medical notions of impairment, as she does concerning the evaluation of impairments in legal discourse. But Metzler can-

not be blamed too much for this circular reasoning since she is frequently the only scholar to have examined such issues. There are significantly more works on disability in the early modern and industrial eras of Europe, and she engages fruitfully with the works of Anne Borsay, Vic Finkelstein, and other historians of misabilities in those later periods. Given the frequency of Metzler's criticism of Sharon Farmer's work, I would have liked to have seen her indicate the importance and difficulties of Farmer's work in the introduction.

I have chosen to be particularly critical in this review exactly because I consider this book an invaluable resource for historians of disability, medieval economics and culture, and premodern medicine, who I hope will continue to investigate the many and varied sources described by Metzler on an individual basis and in their specific historical contexts. In her desire to examine sources produced throughout western Europe during a period of four centuries or more, Metzler could necessarily provide only the barest outlines of the "lived experience" of disability. But those outlines are convincing and her theoretical approaches toward filling them are worthy of emulation. I am looking forward to a third volume from Metzler on disability in the Middle Ages in which she perfects the methods developed in the first two books, perhaps through a close reading of one episode or one source, or through a careful comparison of the construction of disability in two regions or two eras.
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