

Conference Abstract

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Title: **The Curses of Longevity: Cognitive Decline, Memory Loss and Diminished Agency - a Bioethical Perspective**

Abstract text: Worldwide population of the elderly is on the steep rise and the incidence of dementia is expected to become one of the key issues for health-care. The sciences and the humanities have a variety of practical and ethical issues to solve in the care for the senile. The dream of extending the life in good health has not been realized and there are no reasons to expect this to happen in near future. Philosophers extensively discusses problems of inter-generational distributive justice and the supposed lack of further goals in the old age. Another part of the discussion is the end-of-life care including euthanasia, assisted dying and advance directives. These are I believe exhaustively discussed in the literature.

The remaining part of the issue is the adequate account of the moral problems of age-related decline in agency. This includes descriptive ethics of diminished agency, normative implications for the care-providers and other persons as well as implications for moral and legal practice regarding the cognitively-diminished elderly.

To achieve the objectives analytical methods of philosophy will be applied to the relevant facts. The analysis will consider similarities with children and their achieving agency.

Three groups of issues can be distinguished: problems with diminished capacity in health-care decision making; problems with significant life decisions; and problems with simple life choices. The threshold concept of competence usually applied to medical decision-making is not adequate for some significant life choices, probably some health-care related choices and most simple life choices. More subtle treatment of the issues, similar to one applied in case of children is required. It should be considered if persons shouldn't appoint their future legal guardians, who would act like "parents in reverse".

Current intuitive standards regarding the treatment of the elderly are inadequate when challenged by common senility. Modelling our moral thinking through analogy with our treatment of children is promising. Significant limitation is caused by the implication that some young adults should also be treated as the senile due to insufficient development of agency.

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