

Aging, Values, and Decision-making

Instructor: Martha Holstein, Ph.D.

(773) 325-9821

mholstein360@yahoo.com

Office hours: TBA and by appointment

The course will start with a basic overview of ethics and aging. Following this introductory section, we will address ethics and aging on the clinical, social/cultural, policy, and individual levels. We'll look at clinical encounters in the community and in institutions where decision-making is apt to be a primary issue. To do so, we'll use exercises, case analyses and discussion. These will make familiar the central value issues that infuse thinking about ethics and aging while also permitting knowledge and skill development in resolving what these familiar but thorny issues. We will next turn to the ethical issues that arise in the policy arena and culture. And, lastly, we will turn to the ethical issues of simply being and looking old in an ageist culture.

I do not expect you to have prior knowledge of philosophy—only an open mind that will let you think thoughtfully about the issues and problems that arise. “Doing” ethics is done best, I believe, in dialogue; hence, I look to each of you to work collaboratively and respectfully. You may be surprised to learn about your differences. There is not usually a “right” answer, only a better or worse one in most of the situations that we will be addressing.

Course Description and Objectives:

This course will move from the general to the specific, that is, from an overview of philosophical understandings of old age and general notions about ethics to more specific case-based analysis of everyday and urgent ethical problems. It will be important for students to see how their own values interact with professional and societal values to shape their moral perceptions and their analysis of situations they face. We will have the chance to test different ways of engaging in moral analysis.

1. **Understand** fundamental concepts in ethics and the core values that inform work with older people.
2. **Examine** how different ways of thinking about ethics influence what we take into account when addressing ethical problems;
3. **Debate** the ethical implications of societal and cultural norms about aging and old age;
4. **Identify and discover** how to address the ethical problems that arise in different sites of care;
5. **Discuss** the special ethical problems that arise in connection with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias;
6. **Determine and discuss** ways in which ethics and public policy intersect.
7. **Examine** the impact of ageism as an ethical concern.

Readings: There is no text that will work for this course and those that would work for part of it, including one that I edited are special order, and thus apt to be costly. I will therefore use

readings from a variety of sources. My task will be to link them so that they create a coordinated whole. I regret having to do it this way. In a year or so when the book that I am now working on with a colleague from Loyola is complete, I hope we won't have this problem. I will be using some chapters of that work in progress for this class.

Of the books listed below, you might see if you can search the internet and get used copies at a reasonable price although I will be getting key chapters to you.

Useful Texts

1. Holstein and M. Mitzen, eds. 2001. *Ethics and Community-Based Elder Care*, Springer Pub. Co.
2. H. R. Moody. 1992. *Ethics in an Aging Society*, Oxford University Press
3. L. McCullough and N. Wilson. 1995. *Conceptual and Ethical Dimensions of Long-Term Care*. Johns Hopkins University Press

Student Responsibilities:

1. Complete all required reading.
2. Complete and turn in all assignments on time.
3. Participate in discussions.
4. Check Blackboard for posted articles and other messages

Instructor Responsibilities:

1. Provide timely response to email inquiries.
2. Read assignments with care and provide ample and timely feedback.
3. Provide clear grading criteria through use of grade sheets for each assignment.
4. Be available to meet with students per arrangements or during office hours.

Assignments

Assignments:

1. Review the topics in the syllabus that have debate/discussion attached to them. You will divide into groups to either debate the topic if appropriate or lead the class in a discussion of it. Class presentations will be assessed for the completeness of the argument, the appropriate use of source material, and the organization of the material. **(30 points)**.
2. Choose one of the topics below, and write a paper of approximately 5-7 pages that addresses the question that you have chosen. You may take a position and defend it or look at it from different points of view. **(30 points)**. **Papers will be due on March 12**
 - a. Our bodies and appearance are morally significant.
 - b. Dementia ought not be a reason to limit medical treatment

- c. A “good old age” means being productive and engaged in one’s community
- d. Families should bear the primary responsibility for taking care of older family members who need help with the activities of daily living?
- e. Another topic that interests you—please clear with me

4. Take home (30 points)

Class Participation (10 points)

Assignment Format

All written assignments must be double-spaced. Each page should be numbered and include the student name and project name in the header or footer. Papers with grammatical, spelling and/or typographical errors are unacceptable.

Grading

Any late assignments, in the absence of overwhelming exigencies, will be downgraded by 5 points for each day the assignment is late.

Class 1: January 9, 2008

Professional Ethics: Moral Responsibilities of Being a Professional in Aging

To think about:

- What does it mean to be a professional?
- Do professionals have moral responsibilities beyond what is called the common morality?
- What is the purpose of codes of ethics?
- How do I think ethically?

Readings:

1. W. Sullivan. 2004, Can professionalism still be a viable ethic? *The good society*, 13 (1).

Class 2: January 16

Ethics and Aging: An overview

History and background of practical ethics; key topics and ways of thinking about ethics.

To think about:

- Does aging and old age raise unique ethical problems? If so, what are they? Why are they important?
- What are your core values as you think about (or already have) a career in gerontology?
- What is the “subject matter” of ethics and aging”?

Readings:

1. T. R. Cole & M. Holstein. Ethics and Aging. 1996. In R. Binstock and L. George, eds. *Handbook of Aging and the Social Science*, pp. 481-497. San Diego, CA: Academic Press
2. L. McCullough. 2000. Bioethics and Aging. In T. Cole & R. Ray, eds. *Handbook of Aging and the Humanities*, 2nd. Ed., pp. 93-113. New York: Springer Pub. Co.
3. M Holstein. 2007 (draft): Ethics and Aging: The Second Generation (to be published in the *International Handbook of Social Gerontology*, ed. By D. Dannefer and C. Phillipson.

Class 3: January 23

Practical Ethics: Theories, Principles, Rules and/or ???

To think about:

- What have been you own experiences or training in ethics?
- How have you learned to think about ethical questions?
- How might we think about ethical problems that are not theory or rule-based?

Readings:

1. J. Rachels. *Theories of Moral Philosophy*, Chap. 1
2. M. Abramson 1996. Toward a more holistic understanding of ethics in social work. *Social work in health care*, 23 (2).

Handouts: Morality/Ethics/Law; A Brief Overview and a Method for Analyzing Cases

Class 4: Jan. 30

Ethics and Long-Term Care: Overview and Discussion

To think about:

- What makes LTC so different from acute care?
- How might these differences shift our ethical obligations?
- What are some key ethical concerns in LTC?
- What, if anything, is often missing in how we have been taught to think about ethics and LTC?

Readings:

1. M. Kuczewski. 1999. Ethics in Long-Term Care: Are the Principles Different?. *Theoretical Medicine*, 20.
2. L. Eckenwiler. 2007. *Caring about long-term care: An ethical framework for caregiving*. Download from the web site of Center for American Progress (just put long-term care in the search box).
3. M.Holstein. 2001. Bringing Ethics Home: A New Look at Ethics in the Home and in the Community. In Holstein and Mitzen, *Ethics in community-based elder care*.
4. L. McCullough and N. Wilson. 1995. Rethinking the conceptual and ethical dimensions of long-term care decision-making. In McCullough and Wilson, *Long-term care decisions: Ethical and conceptual dimensions*
5. J. Wah, Chan, and Fan. 2007. Exploring the bioethics of long-term care. *Journal of medicine and philosophy*.

Class 5: Feb. 6

Ethics in the Nursing Home

To think about:

- How does the setting/context help to shape nursing home life?
- What boundaries does this context establish?
- What are some core values and ethical dilemmas that arise in NH life?
- Consider the strengths and limitations of autonomy as a central value?

Readings:

1. B. Collopy, P.Boyle, 1991. New directions in nursing home ethics. *Hastings Center Report*
2. Agich, G. 1990. Reassessing Autonomy in Long-Term Care, *Hastings Center Report*, 20 (6).
3. B. Hoffmaster. 2006. What does vulnerability mean? *Hastings Center Report*.36 (2)

Class 6: Feb. 13

Home and Community-based Care: Part I

Making Decisions

To think about:

- Why are the particular ethical issues that stand out for you for the person who is cared for at home?
- What makes home care both important and difficult?
- What are some different approaches to making decisions about ethical issues?

Readings:

1. M. Holstein. 2003. In Holstein and Mitzen. *Ethics in Community-based elder care*
2. H.R. Moody. 1992. From Informed Consent to Negotiated Consent.
3. C. Collopy, N. Dubler, et al. 1990. The Ethics of Home Care: Autonomy and Accommodation. *Hastings Center Report*, 20 (2): 10-16.
4. M.U. Walker. 2003. Moral understandings: An alternative “epistemology” for feminist ethics. In Walker *Moral contexts*.
5. McCullough, L., Wilson, N., Rhymes, J., and Teasdale, T. 1999. Ethical Issues in Long-Term Care. In Johnson, T.F., ed. *Handbook on Ethical Issues in Aging*, pp. 305-325. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Class 7: Feb. 20

Home and Community-Based Care: Part II

Autonomy and its Limits: Risk and Safety; Abuse and Neglect; “Self-neglect”

To think about:

- What are the multiple ways that we can think about safety and long-term care?
- What constitutes “self-neglect” and what actions may be morally justifiable? How does it differ from abuse and neglect?
- Do we offer a fair option to individuals who are considered victims of abuse and neglect?

Readings:

1. B. Collopy. 1995. Safety and independence: Rethinking some basic concepts in long-term care. In McCullough and Wilson, *Long-Term Care Decisions: Ethical and Conceptual Dimensions*
2. B. Payne. 2002. An integrated understanding of self-neglect. *Journal of criminal justice*, 30
3. D. Fireman et al. 2003. In M. Holstein and P. Mitzen, *Ethics in community-based elder care*.
4. When You Can’t Protect Yourself, Who Will? (from TX)

Class 8: Feb. 27 (out of sequence because of our guest speaker’s schedule)

Dying, Death, and End-of-Life Care

Readings:

1. Winzelberg, et al. Beyond autonomy. 2005. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*
2. Hastings Center Report on end-of-life care. 2005
3. S. Ellingson & J. Fuller. 2003. In Holstein and Mitzen, *Ethics in Community-based elder care*

Guest Speaker: Meg McClaskey, Principal, Diverse Perspectives

Class 9: Mar. 5

Home and Community-Based Care: Part III

Caregiving; Families; Justice-Based issues (4 people will discuss the questions as identified below—and any others that they think are important to the issue of families and justice—and lead the class in discussion)

To think about:

- How ought we balance responsibilities among patient/client/community/family?
- Do families have legitimate interests of their own? If so, why?
- What issues of justice does home care raise?
- How can caregiving be made fairer?
- How might we reform the long-term care system to to address gender injustice?

Readings:

1. Holstein. Long-Term Care, Feminism, and an Ethics of Solidarity (typescript of a book chapter, published in Pruchno & Smyer, 2007. *Challenges of an Aging Society*)
2. The President's Commission on Biomedical Ethics Report on Caregiving: *Taking Care* (Executive Summary)
3. Arras, J. 1995. Conflicting interests in long-term care decisionmaking: Acknowledging, dissolving, and resolving conflicts. In McCullough, L. and Wilson, N. (eds.) *Long-term care decisions: Ethical and conceptual dimensions*, pp. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
4. Nelson, J. 1992. Taking families seriously. *Hastings Center Report*. 22: 6-12.
5. Kuhn, D. In Holstein and Mitzen

Case: Shouldering the Burdens of Care, *Hastings Center Report*

Class 10: Mar. 12

Cognitive Impairment and Alzheimer's Disease

To think about:

- What makes the issue of cognitive impairment ethically significant?
- What ethical issues are particularly important in thinking about people with Alzheimer's?
- How do philosophical ideas about personhood enter into thinking about AD?

Readings:

1. T. Healy. Ethical Decision-making
2. D.Smith. 1992. Seeing and Knowing Dementia. In Binstock, Post, Whitehouse. *Dementia and Aging: Ethics, Values, and Policy Choices*.

Spring Break: March 19

Class 11: Mar. 26

Catching Up: Safety/Risk/Self-Neglect/ Alzheimer's

Readings:

Review the readings for Feb. 20 and March 12

Class 12: April 2

Immortality and Anti-Aging Medicine (Class Debate—2 on each side of the discussion)
Stefani, Steve, Tresha, Paul

To think about:

- What does it mean to talk about “anti-aging “medicine?
- What makes this issue ethically interesting?

Readings:

1. J. Vincent. 2007. Science, Imagery, and the War Against Aging
2. C.E. Mykytn. Anti-aging medicine
3. R. Binstock. 2003. The war on anti-aging medicine. *The Gerontologist*, 43: 4-14
4. President's Council on Bioethics. 2003. Age-retardation: Scientific possibilities and moral challenges. Staff background paper.
http://www.bioethics.gov/background/age_retardation.html.
5. L. Kass. 2001. L'Chaim and its Limits: Why Not Immortality? *First things*. # 113: 17-24

Class 13: Apr. 9

Ethics and Public Policy

Overview and Health Care: Rationing, Managed Care; (Debate: 4 people—Should health care be rationed on the basis of age?) *Jane, Atika, Jon, Kate*

To think about:

- What ought to be society's moral obligations in regard to health care for older people?
- Should health care be rationed on the basis of age?
- Are there ethical problems associated with managed care? If so, what are they?
- Should Medicare be a universal age-based program or a means-tested program?

Readings:

1. Section on managed care in McCullough, 2000. *Ethics and Aging*
2. D. Callahan. Chap. 1. *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in an Aging Society*
3. N. Daniels. 2006. *Equity and Population Health*
4. M. Holstein. 2005. In R. Hudson, ed. 2005. *The New Politics of Old Age*

Class 14: Apr. 16

Meaning and Purposes of Old Age: Cultural Norms (4 person debate: Should there be established cultural norms for old age as there are for all other stages of life?) *Soo Lee, Soo Kim, Cheryl, Becca*

To think about:

- Is old age a unique time in human life? If so, why?
- How do different cultural images of old age have different meanings and possibilities for people depending on gender, race, and class?
- If we were to develop some notion of what it means to have a "good old age" how ought we go about making such a determination?

Readings:

1. M. Holstein & M. Minkler. 2003. Self, society, and the "new gerontology." *The Gerontologist*, 43 (6): 787-796.
2. E. Cohen. 2001. Complex nature of ageism. *The gerontologist*. 41 (5)

Class 15: April 23

"Our Bodies, Ourselves": Ethical Implications of Bodily Changes

1. K. Scannell, An Aging Un-American
2. M. Holstein. 2006. On Being an Aging Woman. In T. Calasanti & K. Slevin. *Age Matters: Realigning feminist thinking*. Lanham, CO: Rowman and Littlefield.
3. F. Furman. 1999. There are no aging Venuses. In M.U. Walker, *Mother Time: women, ethics and aging*

Video: *Let's Face It*

Take Home: This will consist of several cases for you to discuss using the readings as source material.

