Introduction

Ethics is home to numerous subfields such as procreative ethics, environmental ethics, and 'genethics'. By contrast, there is far less work on ageing and ethics, and there is at present no subfield explicitly devoted to ethical issues related to ageing. This is surprising given that ageing is a fundamental aspect of life; perhaps even more fundamental and ubiquitous than procreation. Moreover, significant ethical questions confront us as ageing persons: How do features of ageing and the lifespan contribute to the overall value of life? How do time, change, and mortality impact on questions of morality? And how ought societies to respond to issues of social justice and the good, balancing the interests of generations and age cohorts? The practical and theoretical importance of these questions, and their inextricable relation to the ageing process, makes it curious that there are few other volumes specifically dedicated to what might be called ageing ethics, or the ethics of ageing.

Whatever the explanation for this relative lack of attention, the full range and content of ageing ethics is yet to be explored. This volume is the first book-length attempt to engage this content and stake the conceptual terrain. As is evident from the chapters that follow this introduction, the area to be covered is philosophically rich in and full of potential new directions. Ageing as an ethical topic should not be conceived of as a drab, dreary, lonely, and perhaps painful period at the end of life. Instead, we are all ageing, and the significance of this process for morality and the good life are areas ripe for sustained ethical reflection.

I do not mean to imply here that there is a dearth of relevant ethical literature about ageing. Ruminations on the topic have been common since ancient times, with Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life* a particularly influential example. Indeed, most great philosophers have had something to say about ageing, particularly when its effects become apparent. For instance Hume, upon becoming mortally ill, explained his 'detached' attitude to his inevitable death: 'I consider ... that a man of sixty-five, by dying, cuts off only a few years of infirmities' (Hume 1985, xl). This substantive ethical and empirical claim unfortunately did not receive the same degree of scrutiny as those made in his other work. If it had, he may have given greater weight to the lines surrounding this quote, in which he points to his later years as those he might 'most choose to pass over again', and in which he acknowledges that his reputation is 'breaking out at last with additional lustre'. If the latter years

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can be so good (a claim revisited in many of the chapters in this book), should Hume not have been more loath to lose them? Certainly, the world might have been better off had Hume more time to dedicate to this and other issues.

So I am not suggesting that there is a lack of work on ageing by great philosophers. For the most part, though, as in Hume's case, philosophical reflections on ageing ethics tend to be addenda in the works of the greats. There are few concentrated efforts to consider the implications of ageing for morality and the good life, or the implications of morality and the good life in understanding and interpreting the (dis)value of ageing. The gap I am pointing to, then, is not in the lack of existing high quality literature and contributors, but in the lack of *focussed* treatments of the topic of ageing in the field of philosophical ethics.

By contrast, there is a tremendous amount of literature on ageing and the elderly in health policy, public health, clinical disciplines, and behavioural sciences. While this work is often valuable, it tends to view ageing as a problem that needs to be solved, and elderly people as problematic objects for treatment or care. Philosophical understandings of age and ageing, by contrast, appreciate ageing as a ubiquitous process that can shed light on questions about how we should structure our societies and live our lives meaningfully or virtuously as ageing subjects.

This volume aims to bring together some of the world's finest moral philosophers and bioethicists to contribute to developing this area. In selecting authors and topics, it was important that there should be breadth of perspective, including more and less senior academics, and a range of traditions, spanning Western analytic and (European) continental traditions, as well as African and Eastern approaches to ethics. There was no intention to prescribe a comprehensive list of topics. Instead, part of the book's aim is to showcase the many existing subjects worthy of further exploration, to generate debates relevant to people at various stages of ageing, to inspire new and fruitful lines of research, and to invigorate ageing as a topic for ethical reflection.

The volume comprises three parts. Contributions in the first part, 'Ageing and the Good Life', consider what makes lives go better or worse at different stages of the lifespan. Chapters in the second part, 'Ageing and Morality', address rights and duties that may change, becoming weaker or stronger as we, and those close to us, age. The final part, 'Ageing and Society', comprises contributions that engage problems of social justice and fair distributions, and how a good society should look, particularly in light of social ageing.

The contributions are outlined below.

Ageing and the Good Life

There are few philosophers who have contributed so valuably to work about the persistence of prudential value across time as Jeff McMahan, so it is fitting that

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the volume begins with his contribution. McMahan considers limitations of the preference towards the future (which Parfit referred to as a 'bias'), according to which we prefer goods to be in the future and harms to be in the past. The preference applies far less forcefully to non-experiential goods, particularly the good of achievement, with significant implications for well-being at different life stages and the overall goodness of life. Amongst other contributions to a good life, connection to a life's achievements can contribute to the psychological unity of a person across time. If so, this should influence how we live earlier in life, in order to create a store of value in old age.

The entwinement of ethics, ageing, and *time* is the focus of Mark Schweda's chapter. He considers this interaction across three levels of temporality: our coordinates in time as finite entities; our passage through different, increasingly indeterminate phases of life; and the trajectory of our life as a narrative whole. Significantly, Schweda's analysis points to the need for an ethics of ageing, not just as an ethics for older people. Instead, understanding the philosophically neglected temporal dimensions of the structure of human life can illuminate understandings of meaning and the good life more generally.

This idea of ageing as a process occurring *across* a life, and not merely the last part when we are older, is reflected in the chapters that succeed it. Anthony Skelton's chapter concerns the prudential goodness of lives for children. Surprisingly, the intuition that children's *lives* have value for children themselves (as ageing subjects) is not well accounted for by dominant strands of thinking about prudential value. Skelton addresses this shortcoming, whilst also dissecting significant questions about the relation between well-being in childhood and its relation to the value of a life as a whole.

Mid-life, too, tends not to be at the forefront of one's mind when considers ageing. However, Christopher Hamilton's discussion of *The Swimmer*, a haunting film based on Cheever's equally haunting short story of the same name, clarifies that middle age is a pivotal phase in ethical development. The surreal and dream-like nature of the protagonist's journey through time conveys significant realities about the experience of ageing and time and our ethical relation to them.

Christine Overall poses and interrogates the 'odd' question of whether ageing, as a life stage, is good. While ageing is typically associated with some negative aspects, there are great goods to be found in ageing, such as renewable pleasures and enriching relationships with younger generations. Although extracting the potential of later life is mediated by material and social conditions, there are strong moral and political justifications for holding that ageing can be good, not least to overturn dominant and damaging ageist stereotypes.

Simon Keller argues that common accounts of mental health fail to capture the diachronic character of ageing. In particular, he critiques functionalist and welfarist definitions of mental health and finds that they fail to cope with human differences at various stages of the lifespan. Assessments of the mental

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health of the elderly should not rest on empirical findings about the 'natural function' of elderly minds. Moreover, identifying mental health with fulfilment of apparently objective criteria for welfare, such as productive work, appears to exclude both the elderly and children, thereby judging mental health by a mid-life standard that neither children nor the old are likely to fulfil. Instead, Keller defends a resourcist view that mental health is a matter of having the right resources to live a good human life. In considering the good life, it is important to take into account the life narrative: that which constitutes a good life changes as one ages and thus so do the resources required for mental health.

David DeGrazia considers whether ageing and death are to be feared. Death is generally thought to be a harm, and ageing inevitably brings us nearer to this end. In this case, what is the correct attitude towards ageing? DeGrazia claims that ageing is not to be feared if a person's life is likely to be achieve a 'normative baseline' of decent quality and length. Such a baseline represents a reasonable standard against which to compare the goodness of our lives (and the disvalue of our deaths). This baseline is important so that we can overcome what DeGrazia refers to as 'cosmic narcissism' – the tendency to view our lives as more important than they actually are and compare the value of life against unachievable standards.

Ageing and Morality

Søren Holm's chapter provides a wonderfully clear exposition of the concept of personhood in bioethics, before applying it specifically to questions about personhood across the lifespan. 'Personhood theory' ties full moral status to the possession of certain cognitive capacities. The loss of these capacities in old age presents problems for ethical theory and moral duties towards the very old, similar to those posed by infants and foetuses. These problems point to potential limitations in personhood theory and perhaps direct us to consider more relational understandings of what it is to be a person.

In this vein, Thaddeus Metz draws attention to relational perspectives on personhood and ageing that tend to be neglected. In a deft handling of two enormous ethical traditions from the global East and global South, he points to significant similarities in the ethical understanding of ageing, and significant differences from Western thought. Confucian and African traditions propose a stronger role for ageing in achieving harmony and virtue than do Western traditions. The increased value of, and esteem for, the elderly has important practical implications for questions regarding filial duties and the allocation of life-saving resources. Such implications may complement or compete with Western approaches in valuable ways.

Diane Jeske discusses the obligations generated by friendship across time. Typically, we become more reliant on others as we near and reach old age, raising questions regarding duties in the care of the elderly. Jeske makes the

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case that long-term, intimate friendships, whilst adding joy to the ageing process, also create especially strong reciprocal obligations. She argues against the idea that having one's friend act from motivations of *obligation* or *duty* is undesirable because this implies burdensome responsibility. Instead, acting from a motivation of duty coincides with reasonable understandings of what it is to care for a friend.

When ought we to forgive offences that occurred long ago, and what is the role of forgiveness in improving our own lives and those of others? Geoffrey Scarre explores the moral duties and needs of victims and offenders with regard to forgiveness. He argues that forgiveness can play a crucial role in bringing about successful closure to narratives of aged victims and offenders.

A controversial issue in applied ethics concerns when it is justified to withhold and withdraw, and to offer and accept, life-extending treatments. In her chapter, Nancy Jecker focusses on the conditions for a life worth extending, making use of 'experience machine' thought experiments. The conditions she generates shed light on questions about when life-extending resources can justifiably be allocated to people with dementia.

L. W. Sumner engages four questions about suicide and medically assisted dying for the elderly: When, if ever, is suicide rational for the elderly? When is it ethical to assist in a rational suicide? Can medical practitioners be reasonably expected to provide assistance? Should being 'tired of life' be accepted as a criterion for providing assistance in dying? Sumner provides detailed and informed answers to these questions, employing real cases to argue that their being 'tired of life' can indeed be justified grounds for providing medical assistance in dying to the elderly.

Ageing and Society

Samantha Brennan provides a thought-provoking overview of ways in which age, gender, justice, and ethics intersect. For instance, she interrogates the idea that women's longer lifespans are unjust, examines the differential role of beauty stereotypes played in the lives of older women, and poses the question of whether the 'front-loading' of responsibility in women's lives may sometimes contribute to a richer and freer experience of being older.

As societies age, questions about the social and economic role of the elderly, and what is owed to them by younger age groups, are thrown into sharp focus. In a piece of great conceptual clarity, Axel Gosseries considers the circumstances under which contributions of 'active' population in ageing societies may be unjust. How can societies avoid the unjust overburdening of younger age groups, whilst securing at least a minimal standard of well-being for all, but particularly the elderly poor? Gosseries makes the case that injustice in ageing societies is not necessarily more pronounced than in non-ageing

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societies, and that, surprisingly, increases in longevity may, to an extent, alleviate this tension.

Questions about when and whether it is justified to require older people to retire, perhaps depriving them of work from which their lives derive meaning, are important issues of intergenerational justice. Daniel Halliday and Tom Parr provide a valuable contribution to these debates, proposing that even the most promising justifications of mandatory retirement support a more modest proposal: that employers might justifiably reduce the number of work hours of older workers.

In my contribution, I discuss a curious phenomenon in studies of population well-being: the upward curve of happiness in advanced years, known as the 'happiness curve'. I point to some interesting ethical implications of the curve for individual well-being, applied ethical questions, and for society as a whole. As an example of the role that this empirical finding can play in ethical arguments, I consider Peter Singer's critique of life extension, and Walker's response to it based on the happiness curve. An empirically justified outlook on later life encourages a sunnier view of the prospect life extension.

Unsurprisingly in a book about ageing, many of the chapters in the volume touch on issues related to the value of longer lives (particularly those of Jecker, Overall, and my own chapter). However, John K. Davis's contribution provides the only sustained discussion of the science and ethics of this. If, as many expect, lifespans continue to rise as interventions aimed at increasing the lifespan become available, what ought the response to be, from the perspectives of societies and the individual? Davis succinctly discusses a myriad of objections to life extension, such as the prospect of overpopulation and the likelihood of unjust distributions of lifespan. He argues that, like other scientific advances, life-extending interventions are unlikely to be all good, or all bad, and that their ethical use will require considerable efforts to ensure fair distribution and prevent overpopulation.

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