



2009

Challenges of an Aging Society; Ethical Dilemmas, Political Issues. Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer, Editors. Reviewed by Erica Yoonkyung Auh.

Erica Yoonkyung Auh
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Auh, Erica Yoonkyung (2009) "*Challenges of an Aging Society; Ethical Dilemmas, Political Issues.* Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer, Editors. Reviewed by Erica Yoonkyung Auh.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol36/iss1/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



vision and the secularization and centralization of welfare.

These activities also created a direct link between welfare and work. Rather than containing institutional provisions or providing cash transfers, needy people were given jobs in publicly run productive workshops. Unfortunately, the author does not examine the implications of this development for the subsequent development of social policy in much detail. Given the current emphasis on active labor market and welfare to work programs, the early French revolutionary experiments are of considerable interest. Nevertheless, the book makes for fascinating reading and provides an extremely detailed and richly documented analysis. Although it is highly specialized, it should be consulted by anyone interested in the way social policy is today being increasingly linked to economic activities.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer (Eds.), *Challenges of an Aging Society; Ethical Dilemmas, Political Issues*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. \$49.95 hardcover.

With our rapidly increasing aging population, much attention has been given to the issues faced by the aging society. However, this book edited by Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer is unique in that it explores issues and challenges at hand with the current aging society through an "ethical" lens, and brings together experts in a wide range of fields covering sociology, social work, economics, public policy, theology, public health, bioethics, nursing and neurology. Their expertise is well tied together under the topic of aging in this volume, extending discussions from two conferences, "The Science and Ethics of Aging Well: End of Life" and "The Science and Ethics of Aging Well: Public Policy and Responsibility across the Generations."

The editors employ the three ethical principles of autonomy, responsibility and distributive justice to explore problems and prospects of aging. These principles allow them

to approach the challenges and decision-making processes faced by different entities—individual, family and society—and important issues such as end of life decision, long term care, intergenerational issues, Social Security, and Medicare drug benefit. In particular, decisions about autonomy at the end of life, both legally and spiritually; responsibility across generations for long term care; and distributive justice with respect to resources between the young and the elderly are discussed in detail. Some policy challenges are also addressed, including issues of Social Security reform and Medicare drug benefit.

The editors' choice of the three ethical principles (autonomy, responsibility and distributive justice) serves as a good instrument with which the essential issues and challenges facing an aging population are well explained. Most readers may have read this volume with some prior awareness or knowledge of aging issues. However, it is with this volume that they will be introduced to a well-organized layout of debates on what an aging population brings to individuals, families and society. As a result, they will have a better and clearer understanding of what is at stake. Policy makers, researchers, practitioners, and students in sociology and social work are all likely to benefit from this book. One aspect that may have been developed in this volume is the infusion of diversity, especially cultural diversity. Individuals and families living in the U.S. with a culturally different background may encounter different (or similar) challenges. In addition to the editors' thoughtful consideration of the health of minority elders in one of the chapters, it would have been helpful if the discussion of cultural diversity was infused as each of the ethical principles mentioned earlier was discussed. With regards to the ethical principle of responsibility, for instance, a family of Asian decent may have different concerns or different intergenerational challenges in caregiving due to their roots in Confucianism. However, perhaps such a detailed discussion may deserve an additional volume geared toward the challenges of a "diverse" aging society.

Erica Yoonkyung Auh, University of California, Berkeley

Julian Le Grand, *The Other Invisible Hand: Delivery Public Services*