

Sacrifice in an Aging Society

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Sacrifice in an Aging Society

Our society is currently suffering from a severely limited supply of health care resources. In his State of the Union address this past January, President Bush announced that he intends to commit an additional 400 billion dollars of the budget over the next decade to reform and strengthen [Medicare](#). Currently, Medicare provides coverage to 40 million elderly; by the year 2031, that number is expected to reach 77 million. [1] As it is, the government allocates 21.6% of its annual budget to meeting health care needs; [2] unbelievably, due to the present nature of the system, even this huge proportion of the budget is not sufficient to meet the requirements of this growing, and aging, population. Today, our society is experiencing an [extreme](#) increase in both the numbers and the proportion of the population over the age of 65; as the number of elderly increases, so does the amount of federal health care funding allocated to them. The demographic realities, along with the fact of the finitude of our financial resources, provoke the question of how to appropriately allocate these resources; however, what initially begins as a material matter quickly expands into a number of other realms.

A host of social and ethical problems and implications are raised by the facts that not only

are our resources limited, they are also unjustly distributed. In his book, *Setting Limits*, Daniel Callahan [deals](#) with this very issue, investigating the moral maturity of a society that bestows six times more in federal health care expenditures upon its elderly than upon its children. [3] Callahan explores the underlying social beliefs and values that have brought us to this point, suggests new perspectives and possibilities...

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...y Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975) x.

[20] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975) 39.

[21] Kubler-Ross 28

[22] Harry R. Moody, *Ethics in an Aging Society* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 29.

[23] Callahan 53

[24] Callahan 80

[25] Callahan 173

[26] Callahan 143

[27] Callahan 146-149

[28] Callahan 215

[29] Callahan 24

[30] Kubler-Ross 37

[31] Callahan 37

[32] Callahan 60

[33] Callahan 43

[34] Callahan 83

[35] Callahan 134

[36] Callahan 137

[37] Callahan 114

[38] Carole Straw, "A Very Special Death': Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context," *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (New York: The American Academy of Religion, 2001) 40-41.

[39] Callahan 82

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