Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in insights into the perspectives of patients affected by dementia, in their consciousness as well as in their needs and wants. In this context the plea for an ethics of dementia is also emerging. The current discourse is chiefly governed by socio-ethical questions of medical gerontology and caregiving, its normative standards as well as its consequences for patients, their relatives and caregivers. Moreover, there is a multitude of literary or cinematic representations of dementia, which address the subjective nature of experiencing the disease, for example in (autobiographical) novels and narratives by John Bayley, Alice Munro, Ian McEwan, Arno Geiger, Martin Suter, Peter Stamm, Judith Kuckart, Ulrike Draesner and others. Beyond socio-ethical discourses, philosophers seek analytical approaches towards dementia, which are most of all evident in Anglophone research, yet also increasingly flourish in Germany. They consider issues concerning the patients’ personal identity, contemplate opportunities and restraints with regard to advance directives and the patients’ autonomy, as much as they question the legitimacy of paternalistic decisions.

From a literary studies point of view, narratological questions arise that put forward for discussion the limitations of language and linguistic expression to represent subjective experience. Fiction frequently seeks to achieve a mimetic perspective through which a voice can be given to people affected by the disease. In order to imitate the inner sensibility of patients suffering from dementia, writers, for example, engage in aesthetic experimentation and try to visualise dementia by means of narrative fragmentation, syntactic transgressions etc. As a matter of fact, fictional narratives of dementia recurrently echo avant-gardist literary traditions and their critique of the restrictions of language; at times they even recall Romanticism and its inclination towards irrationality. In this way alternative modes of experience, which question the authority of solely rationally determined worldviews and the legitimacy of hierarchical value systems, are put forward for discussion.

Philosophical approaches address the status of the patients’ subjectivity with regard to theories of personal identity. They particularly address difficulties that evolve in the course of losing the diachronic unity of consciousness and the individual’s access to his or her own self. Beyond the complex question whether – and to which degree – people affected by dementia are considered as persons according to the traditional or extended meaning of the term, drawing conclusions from the aforementioned discourses on identity raises multiple ethical challenges. Hence, analyses putting into relation prior declarations of intent and subsequent patient decisions that are made in the course of a patient’s fading cognitive faculties gain considerable significance. Considering the relation between advance directives and the patients’ autonomy opens the field to in-depth discourses on dementia and autonomy. These
Discourses may address patients’ different ways of self-determination and the preservation of their self-respect.

The conference aims at contributing to an interdisciplinary exchange of diverse views on dementia and subjectivity. It is, among others, specifically interested in perspectives from the disciplines of philosophy as well as literary and cultural studies. What is in focus is an examination of the subjective condition of persons affected by dementia: Which means of conveying subjective experience exist and in which way are they seized upon by literature and the arts? Which narrative, dramatic, poetic or formal strategies do literary texts, movies, paintings, photographs and other works of art apply in order to represent the subjective experience of dementia? How can philosophers analyse the cognitive conditions of dementia patients, and which ethical implications could arise as a consequence? With regard to the increasing prevalence of dementia, what significance is given to the act of remembering an individual’s past as well as to preserving the collective memory and cultural identity of communities?

We invite papers which respond to these and related questions. Papers may address topics including, but not limited to:

- Dementia and person
- Dementia, identity and autonomy
- Language, aphasia and literary modes of representing dementia
- Media-specific modes of representing dementia
- Dementia and narrativity
- Memory and forgetting
- Subjective experiences of patients, relatives and caregivers
- Intergenerational conflicts and emotions
- Respect towards patients and caregivers
- Spatial aspects and subjective perceptions of nursing homes

The official conference languages are English and German. Please send abstracts of 300-400 words for 20-30 minute presentations, along with a brief bio-note, in a Word document or PDF file to the three conference organisers by 10th March 2015.

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Please note that the organisers are applying for external funding of conference and travel expenses but cannot guarantee that this will be granted.

For more information, please visit the conference website: www.kw.uni-paderborn.de/dementia-and-subjectivity