

Introduction:

Intergenerational Justice and Its Challenges*

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Issues of intergenerational justice have long fascinated philosophers and political thinkers. Already at the end of the eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson (1789) and Thomas Paine (1791) had a dispute with Edmund Burke (1790) on the intergenerational fairness of having a constitution, focusing on a concern for generational sovereignty. Although the reader will see traces of that old debate in this volume,ⁱ the current philosophical debate focuses less on generational sovereignty than on intergenerational justice. It is informed by a general context comprising concerns for e.g. the long-term consequences of climate change and for the survival of social security schemes as we know them. This debate draws on contributions from major authors in philosophy who seriously began to re-consider these issues in the second half of the last century, including most importantly Rawls (1971: esp. § 44), Barry (1978, 1989), and Gauthier (1986), as well as Jonas (1979), Parfit (1984, part IV) and Heyd (1992). Today there is a highly specialised and ongoing discussion in the journals along with a good number of monographs, including Birnbacher (1988), Weiss (1989), de-Shalit (1995), Auerbach (1995), Visser't Hooft (1999), Arrhenius (2000), Gosseries (2004), Meyer (2005), Mulgan (2006) and Page (2006). There are also a number of edited volumes specifically devoted to issues concerning intergenerational justice, including Sikora & Barry (1978), Partridge (1981), Laslett & Fishkin (1992), Fotion & Heller (1997), Dobson (1999), Meyer (2004), Ryberg & Tännsjö (2004), and Roemer and Suzumara (2007).

The aim of the present volume is to offer a sustained discussion of intergenerational justice as seen by practical philosophers. Our aim here is specific. First, we want to broaden the focus

beyond the mere non-identity problem (to which we come back below). This is not meant to downplay the significance of and the difficulties that arise with this dilemma. Indeed, it is conspicuous in this volume, and the non-identity problem plays a significant role in a number of the arguments presented here. Still, we think that far too little attention has been paid to other issues that strike us as being at least as significant from a strictly philosophical point of view, as well as from a practical perspective. It is this deficiency that led us to structure the volume into two parts. The first part focuses on the way in which various schools of thought in moral and political philosophy approach the domain of intergenerational justice, while the second part focuses on more specific aspects, such as how these theories address the question of motivation, or how they deal with demographic fluctuations, or how they can be applied to real-world issues such as climate change.

In addition, we have also taken great care to emphasize the extent to which intergenerational justice raises issues that are distinct from, for example, international justice, which is often seen as another significant “extension” of standard domestic justice. Whether it follows that *sui generis* principles are required for the intergenerational domain remains an open question. Yet, what is clear is that this question cannot be answered unless and until we first determine what can be made in the intragenerational realm of standard theories of justice as they generally apply to domestic justice issues. To this end, the chapters in Part I of this volume take up and discuss what contribution standard theories can make to our understanding of intergenerational justice.

What’s so special about the intergenerational realm ?

It is often claimed that issues of justice between generations are special. Still, there remains a lot of work to do, namely, in identifying these special features and their normative implications. This is particularly important with respect to the possibility of intergenerational obligations and the content of such obligations. In this Introduction, we will simply adumbrate some of these specific features, inviting attention to some of their implications. The various chapters will then develop several of these points in greater detail.

The unique features that distinguish issues of justice between generations from other issues of justice are often at the heart of key challenges. For example, some of these features potentially threaten the possibility of intergenerational obligations. Consider the harmless enough fact, at first glance, that future people do not exist today. The non-existence challenge implies that obligations can only make sense when they are owed to people who actually exist. People who did exist in the past or who could exist in the future would thus not qualify as rightful recipients of such obligations. Another distinctive and problematic feature is rooted in the fact that the composition of future generations (that is, whether it be Paul or John who comes into existence) depends in many cases on our own actions. This, of course, leads to the famous non-identity challenge. For those committed to a standard notion of harm necessarily involving a comparison between two alternative states of a single person (an actual state and a counterfactual one), the fact of non-identity can threaten the very possibility of harming future people. For those who claim that an obligation can only make sense if its violation can be associated with harming someone, then the fact of non-identity is a major challenge to the idea of obligations owed toward future people, as Meyer and Roser explain in Chapter 8.

Related to the non-identity challenge is the problem of optimal population, addressed in Arrhenius' chapter in this volume. This problem is rooted in the idea that it is not only difficult to tell which of two options is better if different people are actually going to live

under each of the two options, but it is equally difficult to pinpoint the optimal population size when the very answer to the first question will necessarily have an effect on the number of people coming into existence. This difficulty is obvious when we ask, “For whom would it be better to have a larger or a smaller population?”. For someone whose very existence is contingent on the demographic decision at stake, how can we possibly say that a larger population or a smaller one would, *ceteris paribus*, be better?

Moreover, for some theories the absence of *overlap* between generations, that is, the absence of physical co-existence between non-contemporaries, constitutes a further key challenge to the possibility of having obligations of justice to future people. This is especially so in the case of mutual advantage theories, a problem addressed in Gardiner’s chapter. Still, we must be careful to distinguish the idea of an overlap (or its absence) from other closely related features, such as remoteness in time. The fact that one person was born one year after the death of another may be significant. Yet, if their respective existences were separated by a period of 300 years, for example, then the nature of the issues arising would probably differ due to more significant uncertainties. For instance, in deciding what to bequeath to our children, being in a position to engage in a dialogue with them may well matter. And for some, obligations are inconceivable unless mutual enforceability can be guaranteed. Thus, in deciding what to bequeath to our great-grandchildren, additional uncertainties obtain, such as whether their own parents will fulfill their own obligations toward them, how many children our grand-children will have, and how technological evolutions will transform society. Complicating these issues is the fact that both overlap (or the lack thereof) and relative remoteness in time can have different sorts of consequences depending on the theory one adopts.

There are additional factors that will affect either the *possibility* of obligations of justice between generations or the *content* of such obligations, again with different impacts stemming from the application of different theories. Consider, for example, the ability of a theory to come to terms with an indefinite number of generations. Uncertainty regarding the number of generations is especially problematic for aggregative theories, for if one cares about fairly dividing the intergenerational cake of well-being, it is important to know how many guests will be present at the table. Moreover, a non-ideal theory of justice needs to address the problem of non-compliance by both earlier generations and future generations. If earlier generations did not respect their own intergenerational obligations, should this affect the extent to which present generations ought to comply with these obligations? And should the likelihood of future non-compliance have an impact on the content or very existence of our intergenerational obligations? Similarly, the sequentiality of generations not only generates dependence on earlier or later generations' behaviour, but it also entails, for example, asymmetries of knowledge associated with variable time location (that is, someone tends to have more information about facts and events that are contemporaries to her than about those that would be remote in the future or in the past). Finally, time distance (or remoteness) as such (in addition to time location and the absence of overlap per se) also has implications, not only in epistemic terms (greater uncertainty about what is remote), but also in motivational terms. This is exhibited by the fact that we may care more about our close relatives than about our distant relatives.

As noted, these challenges do not affect the various theories in the same way, nor does each of these difficulties affect all types of intergenerational relations (with past or future generations, with overlap or without). For example, some theories depend less than others on the existence of an overlap. And we should not lose sight of the fact that justice between neighbouring

generations is not, as such, a negligible field of investigation, as those insisting on justice between non-overlapping and remote generations may too quickly assume. Some theories are also less demo-sensitive than others, in the sense that they will render the content of our intergenerational obligations less dependent on the size of the next generations. And furthermore, some theories need to refer to obligations toward dead people in order to justify obligations toward future people, whereas others do not.

In short, in studying the normative implications of each of the specific features of intergenerational relations, it is crucial to understand that different theories of intergenerational justice will interpret each of the aforementioned characteristics differently. Moreover, what the particular implications are will also be important in assessing the relative consistency of various theories of justice. If a standard theory fares better than another in accounting for our intuitions of justice in the intergenerational realm, then this can be used as an argument in favor of this theory in general.

Before moving to a presentation of the chapters of this volume, let us also explain what areas of the ongoing debate in intergenerational justice we *do not* cover. To begin with, we will not be looking at our obligations toward dead people, nor will we address issues of historical injustice understood as determining what one community owes another today as a result of what their respective ancestors did to each other in the past. These issues are important when we consider the history of slavery in the United States, the various forms of dispossession forced upon the aboriginal peoples of several continents, the inflicting of countless atrocities on those of Jewish ancestry and on Gypsies during World War Two, and, more recently, the significance of historical emissions of carbon dioxide.ⁱⁱ At the other end of the spectrum, we shall also leave aside the Jonassian issue of possible justifications for guaranteeing that future

generations will continue to exist (as opposed to determining what we owe them *if* we can anticipate that they will exist).

Furthermore, issues of justice between age groups, in so far as they can be separated out from issues of justice between birth cohorts, will not be taken up either. Social sciences tend to use a distinction between cohort effects and age effects. For example, it may be strictly due to age effects that a group of people suffers from deficient audition or poor memory. Whatever the cohort, people at the age of 90 tend not to have auditive capacities or memory abilities as good as those of people aged 20. Yet, it may also be the case that in comparing people at the same age from different birth cohorts (for example, those in their 40s born in 1920 compared to those born in 2000), some proper cohort effects may occur for instance, due to the intensive use of headphones at a young age or to lesser memorization habits. It is often assumed that the difference between cohort effects and age effects may be linked to two distinct realms of justice, though this is far from certain. Yet, at the very least, this age-group/birth-cohort distinction should certainly not be confused with the distinction between overlapping and non-overlapping generations. Cohorts (that is, groups of people born at the same time) can overlap or not. Issues of justice between cohorts do not necessarily need to involve non-overlapping generations only. Conversely, when facing overlapping generations, issues of justice do not necessarily need to be analyzed in terms of justice between age groups. Here, we will limit ourselves to issues of justice between birth cohorts, be they overlapping or not.ⁱⁱⁱ

An additional omission is that among the general theories of justice discussed in this text, none of the chapters of this volume focusses on utilitarianism. Attas, Gardiner, and Heyd, however, discuss Rawls's view on intergenerational justice and his principle of just savings. The latter aims at specifying when and to what extent savings is required. It asks whether we

should be allowed, forced, or prevented from transferring less or more to our immediate descendants. This is important, for Rawls's account is constructed at least in part as a response to the difficulties encountered by utilitarians in proposing a plausible principle of generational savings. Which principle of savings utilitarians would be able to propose once we have taken issues such as descending altruism, diminishing marginal utility, and the like, into serious consideration remains an interesting topic of further investigation.^{iv}

Finally, at the conceptual level, those interested in issues of legal theory will find one chapter devoted to constitutionalism. They will not find here, however, any systematic treatment of the way in which specific challenges to the idea of rights of future people affect different theories of justice.^v Likewise, an examination of the possible use of the legal concepts found in contract and property theories as a way of expressing intergenerational obligations has, regrettably, been left out. For example, there is likely to be very different implications for the content of our obligations depending upon whether we conceptualize such obligations as involving a loan from our children, a gift from our parents, a right of usufruct, or a trusteeship (to name but a few possibilities). At a level of greater application, essays connecting specific views of justice with debates over the funding of pension schemes and over questions of public debt, as well as chapters comparing various indicators to measure intergenerational transfers, would of course have been more than welcome (and would, indeed, have been included if only space had allowed). Still, with the fourteen chapters included in this volume, the reader will come to appreciate how much food for thought is already at hand, even after acknowledging all that we have had to set aside. Let us now turn briefly to the content of each of the chapters.

Part I: Theories

The first chapters of this volume provide alternative interpretations of intergenerational justice from the perspective of the most influential accounts of what we owe to each other: communitarianism, libertarianism, contractualism, contractarianism, marxism, and sufficientarianism.

In arguing for intergenerational obligations from a broadly communitarian perspective, we will want to take into account the interests of people as members of groups that have a past and a future. Indeed, as Thompson argues in Chapter 1, nations are best described as transgenerational polities, and consequently theories of justice, rights, and political responsibility ought to reflect the importance of transgenerational relationships. Thompson contends that liberal theories, in general, fail to do this for reasons related to the non-identity problem, or due to the impossibility of contracting with people who do not exist. In short, she argues that the communitarian perspective can more successfully incorporate intergenerational obligations than can contract theories. Still, this view faces problems, too. A strong communitarian view runs into familiar and persuasive objections, including the idea that citizens in a modern multi-cultural nation state are unlikely to have a common identity of the sort she describes. In contrast, weak communitarianism allows that identities can be complex, and in this way it escapes such criticisms as are levelled against strong communitarianism. Nonetheless, weak communitarianism faces the challenge of explaining why present generations ought to accept obligations with respect to the future or the past.

Thompson argues that weak communitarianism can avoid the aforementioned problem by relying on the idea of lifetime-transcending interests. Lifetime-transcending interests are those

interests that have as their subject matter events, objects, or states of affairs that either existed before the lifetime of the person who has that interest or that will exist after her lifetime (or, at any rate, could exist after her lifetime). This idea is probably best illustrated by considering the concerns we have regarding how our children or grandchildren will fare in the future, our posthumous reputations, the fate of projects we will leave behind upon our death, and the deeds of our ancestors. These special interests that Thompson describes play an important role in the lives of individuals and the formation of their identities for two reasons: they are essential for a meaningful life and required for making a rational plan for one's life. Furthermore, the existence of lifetime-transcending interests makes it likely that those who have such interests will be inclined to make demands on their successors. As a result, Thompson argues, one ought to meet certain morally legitimate demands created by other people's lifetime-transcendent interests. Moreover, members of communities have a moral interest in maintaining practices and institutions that enable legitimate lifetime-transcending demands to be made and fulfilled. This argument can be extended to include transgenerational obligations that people have as members of political societies. Transgenerational obligations arise in this context since members of political societies will have lifetime-transcending interests. As such, they will also have a moral interest in the maintenance of practices and institutions that facilitate the making and fulfilling of lifetime-transcending interests and that provide for the conditions that make the flourishing of these practices possible.

Libertarianism offers a very different account of intergenerational justice. Self-ownership and the moral powers to appropriate unowned external resources are the main components of libertarianism, as explained by Steiner and Vallentyne in Chapter Two. Most important for a libertarian interpretation of intergenerational issues is the applicable account of the appropriation and use of external resources. Steiner and Vallentyne take as a starting point a

Lockean type of libertarianism. They also stress the relevance of the “choice-rights” versus “interest-rights” debate for libertarians, since the possibility of recognizing rights to future people will depend crucially on whether an interest-protecting conception of rights is adopted. The authors also explore what a Lockean proviso – that requires to leave enough and as good to others – would require if applied in the intergenerational context. In doing this, they first distinguish between a mere “decent share” proviso and an “egalitarian” one, considering the former as possibly necessary but not sufficient, and defending the latter. Steiner and Vallentyne argue that one of the implications of the egalitarian proviso (understood as a requirement that no one be “left with less than equally valuable initial [lifetime] opportunities to use natural/external/all resources”) is that an accumulation phase (that is, a phase during which more is produced than is consumed, while, simultaneously, more is transferred to the next generation than was inherited from the previous one), such as the one argued for by Rawlsians, would be indefensible. Another implication of this proviso is that in cases in which a natural degradation of resources can be expected in the future, it would not be enough to merely make sure that the coming generations are no worse off than they would have otherwise been in our absence, as most libertarians may assume. Furthermore, it is not clear how to practically apply the proviso in the presence of generational overlap.

Steiner and Vallentyne conclude their chapter by discussing two intragenerational issues. First, since procreation is a (generally) voluntary act, who ought to have the responsibility for providing children with their fair share? Here, Steiner and Vallentyne argue that parents have a special responsibility while society at large acts at the same time as a default obligee. Second, what ought Lockean libertarians to think (and to do, if anything) about bequests and gifts? Respecting this second issue, the authors provide us with a fine-grained analysis, showing how an additional Lockean proviso on transfers (rather than on appropriation and

use) is to be interpreted depending on whether the proviso applies to the transfer of natural goods, artefacts, and/or internal resources.

The problems of extending contract theories to issues of justice between generations is the subject of the third chapter. Author Gardiner first takes up challenges that both contractarians and contractualists (see also Chapter 9) face when they attempt to extend their approach to intergenerational relations, namely: Is cooperation beyond the overlap possible at all, and if so, will each generation have sufficiently strong reasons to engage in it? (Gardiner dubs this the “rationale challenge”.) Another challenge has to do with what Gardiner defines as the “pure intergenerational problem” (the “structural challenge”). The pure intergenerational problem differs in significant respects from a standard prisoner’s dilemma. First, within the confines of the pure intergenerational problem, the obstacles to cooperation are not contingent as in the case of the standard prisoner’s dilemma. Second, reducing, for example, pollution cannot be in everyone’s interest, in contrast to what can happen in an intragenerational setting with a uniformly mixed pollutant. Gardiner then discusses how contractarians and contractualists can respond to these two challenges and explores whether their responses differ.

So, how are contract theorists to respond to such challenges? Gardiner takes up and assesses three possible strategies of extension. In the first two strategies, he attempts to bring the intergenerational problem closer to standard intragenerational settings by relying on the “chain” idea, understood as a succession of interconnected generations (also discussed in this volume by Birnbacher). The first of these strategies rests on the idea of “local” cooperation at the overlap of and on the succession to such cooperation. Here, Gardiner discusses in detail the limitations of this approach, and to this end he employs the “time bomb” test case, which

involves the hypothetical case of a generation setting up a time bomb that will only explode in the hands of a generation with which it does not overlap. The second approach that Gardiner explores consists of modifying the motivational assumption underlying contractarian approaches. And the third approach turns on introducing knowledge constraints on the reasoning of contractors, as per Rawls's veil of ignorance. Gardiner discusses these strategies in a specific way, focusing, among other things, on two specific issues: the problem of the initial generation and the problem of the generation of extinction. If we are unable to successfully defend any of these three approaches, all of them aiming at extending contract theories where the contractors are assumed to be contemporaries, then, Gardiner submits, we would have no choice but to consider the idea of a properly intergenerational contract involving all generations.

In Chapter Four, Gosseries discusses the ideas of intergenerational and transgenerational reciprocity. Using a narrow definition of reciprocity, namely, one that precludes any of the parties in a reciprocal relationship from being either net contributors or net beneficiaries, Gosseries examines three reciprocity-based accounts of our intergenerational obligations. The first account, the descending model, holds that generation 2 (G2) owes something to generation 3 (G3) because generation 1 (G1) transferred something to G2, and so G2 owes at least as much to G3 as it received from G1. The second account, called the ascending model, holds that G3 owes something to G2 because G2 has transferred something to G1, with the proviso that this something is at least as much as what G2 transferred to G1. Finally, the double model holds that G2 owes something to G1 because G1 transferred something to G2, and G2 owes at least as much as G1 transferred to it.

All these models, however, are confronted with a famous objection stemming from Barry: specifically, why does the mere fact of having received something justify an obligation falling on the receiver to give something back? To get around this objection, Gosseries argues that the scope of the concept of free-riding can be extended towards rival goods, and further, that in the intergenerational context it can rightly be claimed that by destroying (or failing to maintain) goods produced in the past, later generations are guilty of free-riding on the efforts of earlier generations. Understood as such, the obligation to reciprocate is grounded in the obligation to forbear from free-riding to the detriment of earlier generations. The objection from direction is also considered. That is, how is each model to justify the direction of reciprocity it upholds in each case? Gosseries dismisses this objection on the grounds that the alternatives for each model will force someone (person or generation) to be either a net contributor or net beneficiary, thereby violating the narrow reciprocity requirement.

Gosseries likewise considers the influence of the demographic variable (population fluctuations from one generation to the next) and asks whether the size of a population affects the size and nature of the intergenerational obligations toward the population or the obligations that the population has toward other generations. Gosseries argues that none of the three models can adequately deal with this question. If the models are insensitive to the relative size of populations (as the descending and ascending ones are), that leads either to counter-intuitive conclusions or to internal inconsistency. And while the double reciprocity model is indirectly sensitive to the relative size of populations, the incomplete nature of its material scope nonetheless gives rise to problems.

Bertram's aim, in Chapter Five, is to explore how the obligation to avoid exploitation, understood as a distinct type of injustice, can help us understand what we owe to future

generations. The Marxian concept of exploitation turns on a discrepancy between the distribution of contributions requiring effort and the distribution of rewards in a co-operative scheme. Of course, this distinction is linked with discussions in other chapters, such as in the essays outlining the difficulties faced by contract theorists (Gardiner, Heyd, and Attas), and in the discussion exploring our understanding of intergenerational reciprocity-based requirements (Gosseries). Bertram invites the reader to envisage a temporally extended co-operative enterprise – a family-owned manufacturing business. With respect to such an enterprise he analyses three possible cases of exploitation. In the “repair burden” case, maintenance work is not done. Instead, it is left for a later generation that, in some sense, can rightly be said to have been exploited by earlier generations. The same holds for the “debts burden” case in which repayment obligations of credit are left at least in part to later generations, while the money from such credit is used for present consumption. The third case – the “profligate generation” – is different than the first two. In this case, a generation acquires benefits from the hard work of its ancestors and decides not to do all that much itself. Bertram asks whether the conditions for exploitation are actually present in this situation. Specifically, he asks whether this generation, by failing “to conform to the contribution/benefit pattern expected by its predecessors,” can be said to be exploiting earlier generations even though there is no “experiential effect” on the now-dead contributors. He also points out the need to consider the fact that it can be reasonable to disagree with the work expectations of earlier generations. For these reasons Bertram is skeptical about the appropriateness of characterizing the profligate generation case as a case of exploitation. Finally, he enquires into the broader implications of the three specific cases, in particular looking at the questions of when there can be said to be cooperation and when fair reciprocity can be said to have been violated.

Chapter Six and Seven explore the viability of Rawls's contractualist account of intergenerational obligations. Rawls's short discussion of the "savings principle" in *A Theory of Justice* and his later revisions have been highly influential in defining the problems of how we can and should relate to future people. Heyd focuses on Rawls's account of the design of the original position in an intergenerational setting (an aspect of Rawls's argument also examined by Gardiner and Attas in this volume). He contends that three main alternatives need to be considered: "universal conference," "present time of entry" (including a modified "motivational assumption"), and "strict compliance." Each of these alternatives reflects an understanding of why we owe anything to other generations once we take seriously the unidirectionality of time since, for example, we cannot force dead people to have acted differently. As such, each of these three accounts of the contractualist position is likely to lead to different substantive principles.

Heyd shows that each of these attempts at redesigning the original position faces serious problems. He also argues that a contractarian reading of Rawls can only justify limited intergenerational obligations; such a reading will interpret the duty of just savings as not being one of justice, but rather, as he puts it, "as a statement about the value of justice and the duty to maintain or promote it." Heyd further argues that the difference principle applies neither to the international sphere, nor to intergenerational one. In the end, if we consider the lack of mutual vulnerability and a similar lack of solidarity among remote generations, we are left – or so Heyd suggests – with two options: the first option relies on the natural duty to promote fair institutions for future generations and the second points toward a shifting away from contractarianism to impartialism. Just savings, to include more substantial obligations, would need to be interpreted as a moral principle, not as a political one.

In the second chapter dedicated to an analysis and evaluation of Rawls's understanding of intergenerational issues, Attas elects a different starting point. Specifically, he submits an interpretation of the core intergenerational problem as a prisoner's dilemma in which there is a lack of mutuality; that is to say, earlier generations have nothing to gain from cooperating with future ones and future generations cannot benefit from earlier ones or threaten them in a credible manner. For Attas, the challenge consists of designing the original position in such a way that relations of mutuality obtain in that situation despite the lack of mutuality in the real world. In his analysis of the original position for the intergenerational context, Attas distinguishes six variations (usually tracking two variables, that is, "what people know" and "what motivates them"), showing in detail how each either attempts to introduce mutuality or attempts to compensate for the absence of mutuality. In doing so, he draws a distinction between two Rawlsian ways of incorporating universalization in the original position: full compliance and universality.

With respect to the status and content of the just savings principle, Attas provides an interpretation that contrasts with Heyd's. Attas argues that it should be read "as a clause in the full formulation of the difference principle." Still, he also makes a case for a two-stage interpretation of the principle. At stage one, savings is required up to the point where we have enough to establish and maintain institutions of justice. At stage two, Attas argues – contrary to others – that no further savings is required. He then focuses on two key issues. The first issue addresses the question of how such a principle is to be derived from the original position as designed. Here Attas argues that it is actually possible to derive a two-stage principle of intergenerational justice from the original position without having to rely on a special motivational assumption. The second issue addresses the problem of reconciling the conflict between the accumulation requirement that obtains during the first stage and the difference

principle. According to Attas, the savings requirement does not actually conflict with the difference principle, properly understood. Interestingly enough, he even argues that rather than being justified, for example, by the priority of liberty over the difference principle, it is actually the difference principle itself that would justify the accumulation phase. As he puts it: “at least with respect to the intra-generational aspect of the difference principle, maximizing the position of the least advantaged is obligatory until a threshold of adequacy is reached.” Beyond the point that is sufficient to cover “everyone's basic and urgent needs,” we enter the steady-state stage. At this time, further savings can be authorized but is neither compulsory nor prohibited. Furthermore, Attas adds an extra proviso to the savings principle such that “inequality and saving at both stages are prohibited beyond the rates that would maximize the position of the trans-generational least advantaged.”

In the last chapter of the first part of this volume, Meyer and Roser offer a specific defense of intergenerational sufficientarianism. Towards this end, they provide a detailed account of various “broadly egalitarian” views. Strict egalitarianism (which focuses on the gap between more advantaged and less advantaged people) is contrasted with prioritarianism and maximin egalitarianism (which focus on the level of the badly off or least advantaged people in absolute terms). Two versions of sufficientarianism – weak and strong – are shown to be threshold-based views connected with prioritarianism and maximin, respectively. Next, Meyer and Roser identify specific reasons for adopting (strong) sufficientarianism in the intergenerational realm, even in those cases in which a sufficientarian conception of justice in the intragenerational context would not be adopted. These reasons are broadly of two types.

The first reasons concern the non-identity problem. As already mentioned, some rely on the non-identity problem to argue that we do not have obligations of justice to future generations.

Others have relied on it to argue for the superiority of specific theories (for example, communitarianism in the case of Page). Here, the idea is of the latter type. Meyer and Roser argue that along with reliance on a standard conception of harm, we additionally ought to rely on the threshold conception of harm at least (but not exclusively) in contexts where the non-identity problem arises. The non-identity challenge would thus be circumvented by relying on a normative baseline to determine whether harm is taking place. The key step in their argument turns on an attempt to show that the idea of sufficiency, at the heart of sufficientarianism, actually provides us with the contents we need to specify this threshold of harm. If their argument succeeds, it shows that sufficientarianism makes it possible for us to defend obligations of justice in a non-identity context.

The second set of reasons for adopting a sufficientarian conception of justice in the intergenerational realm relies upon an interpretation of the normative significance of issues of various types, some of them also arising in the international realm. Here, Meyer and Roser discuss special features of intergenerational relations such as the asymmetry of power between generations, problems of measuring relative differences in well-being, uncertainties not only about the future effects of our present actions, but also about future people's way of life, and the impossibility of interacting beyond the overlap. Of course, some reasons for equalization (such as a concern for envy) do not plausibly arise in the intergenerational context, nor at any rate beyond the overlap. What is of special interest here is that since these reasons for adopting an intergenerational sufficientarianism reflect special features of intergenerational relations, they do not necessarily speak in favour of sufficientarianism outside the intergenerational context.

Part II: Specific Issues

The second part of this volume addresses important issues of applied intergenerational justice. It begins with a chapter by Kumar suggesting a way in which we can plausibly frame substantive questions concerning intergenerational obligations in interpersonal terms, a characterisation that is at odds with an impersonal approach in this area. Kumar relies on and further develops a Scanlonian contractualist understanding of what it is for one person to have wronged another. Scanlonian contractualism offers an explanation of the interpersonal sense of “morally wrong” in the following way: A wrongs B by culpably failing to regulate her practical deliberations in the way that B was legitimately entitled to demand of A. This account of wrongdoing allows one to claim that one person has wronged another, but without requiring that something has to have happened to a person in order for her to have been wronged. Furthermore, Kumar suggests that what we owe to others to whom we stand in a particular type of relationship (that is, how we ought to regulate our practical deliberations) is determined not by the specific token identity of the other, but rather by a relevant type description; mothers, for example, might be said to owe to their unborn children certain sorts of consideration quite apart from the token identity of that child.

This understanding, it is argued, diffuses the non-identity problem, for this account allows for the possibility of committing wrongs against future people without harming them. It also raises the issue, however, of how we ought to understand our relation to those who will live in the distant future. In the context of contractualism, valid principles for the regulation of behaviour must be justifiable to anyone on grounds that she cannot reasonably reject whether or not she currently exists. This means that even if we do not stand in any concretely characterisable relation toward future human beings, we do stand in a morally relevant

relation to them, for those decisions that we make now, decisions that have implications for the quality of life likely to be available to them, must be justifiable to them by means of a principle that no one can reasonably reject. Finally, it is noted that the contractualist account developed here is identical to the one used in understanding interpersonal obligations that those living now owe one another. To the extent that this account is convincing, it implies that most of the interesting questions concerning obligations to future generations are not foundational in the sense that their justification is *sui generis*. Rather, the interesting questions are substantive. We need to enquire further into how best to specify our obligations to future people, given the special features of intergenerational relations,.

In Chapter Ten, Birnbacher addresses several of these special features in his discussion of the problem of the motivational force of considerations of intergenerational justice. He explores how best to articulate our theories of justice given the need to ensure that people will be motivated to act in a fair way toward future generations. Birnbacher argues that even for those who see in moral principles sources of the motivation to act morally, the problems associated with the intergenerational context remain serious. Admittedly, the moral reasons to act can remain unaffected by such a context. As Birnbacher shows, this does not hold, however, for what he refers to as quasi-moral and non-moral reasons to act. Quasi-moral reasons to act (love, generosity, compassion, and the like) are rendered fragile by the anonymity and facelessness of future generations. Similarly, non-moral reasons to act (including self-centered ones) are weakened, not by the facelessness, but by the voicelessness of remote future generations and the near absence of possible backward benefits or sanctions. Still, Birnbacher shows that indirect sources of motivation can lead us – as a side-effect – to act in an intergenerationally fair way. These sources include the idea of a chain of love, the ability to value goods for their own sake, the concern for the well-being of the group to which one

belongs, and the idea of seeking meaning in one's life. Birnbacher ends by offering a set of self-binding strategies.

Bykvist, in Chapter Eleven, discusses the significance of the indeterminacy of future preferences for desire-based theories of well-being in the intergenerational context. He suggests that future preferences are uncertain, but we can nonetheless influence their content. Assuming that the identity of future people is fixed (contrary to the non-identity problem), same-people choices are not always same-desire choices, since the desires of future people might be contingent on our present decisions. The influence of educational policies on preference formation is a clear illustration of this. This contingency means that which outcome people will prefer may well be indeterminate. However, one strategy for avoiding this indeterminacy is to take into account the preferences in each possible outcome and satisfy the strongest ones.

Bykvist argues, however, that while such moves eliminate indeterminacy, they do not save the theory from inconsistency, for such an account fails to take into consideration the fact that to prefer one's life is compatible with taking very different absolute attitudes in comparing this life and an alternative life of another person. Given this possibility, Bykvist argues that a strict preference-based theory implies that it is sometimes better to bring about an outcome in which all people would hate their lives than to bring about an outcome in which all people would love their lives, thereby generating the contradiction that a bad life can be better than a good life. Due to this potential inconsistency, Bykvist suggests that the strictly preference-based approach ought to be abandoned in favour of a polarity-based desire theory. This kind of theory takes the polarity or valence of absolute attitudes into account; it states, roughly, that an outcome *A* is better for a person than an outcome *B* just in case her *A*-self favours (in the

sense of absolute attitudes, and not preferences) her life in *A* more than her *B*-self favours her life in *B*. This theory eliminates indeterminacy, for in order to decide what is better for each person we simply have to consider each outcome and see how she would feel about her life given that outcome. It also eliminates inconsistency, for according to the polarity-based theory, the fact that one prefers *x* does not mean that *x* is better for one. There is, however, a remaining challenge, namely that of desire adjustment. This challenge is general to all desire-based theories, not just the polarity-based theory, and it is grounded on the idea that if all that is important is desire satisfaction, then whether you change the world to match your desires or your desires to match the world is irrelevant. It is argued that the real problem is not determining the easiest way to satisfy desires, but rather that the desires do not seem to be about things that are worthy of concern. In response, the polarity-based theory is refined, so that what makes a person better off is not simply that she acquires what she would favour more, but also that her favourings are about things that merit concern.

Continuing, in Chapter Twelve, Arrhenius explores whether egalitarian concerns ought to be used to solve the paradoxes that bedevil the field of population ethics. To this end, he discusses the role of equality (referring to equality of welfare among people) in the evaluation of populations differing in size with respect to their goodness (in welfare terms). At the outset, Arrhenius considers Parfit's famous Mere Addition Paradox. Arrhenius argues that there is a *prima facie* case that illustrates how egalitarian concerns can solve this paradox. Generally speaking, a plausible egalitarian view might hold that the addition of a certain number of lives with very low positive welfare to a population with very high welfare will have negative contributive value, and the greater the number of added lives the greater the negative contributive value, understood as a function of the negative value of the increasing inequality. Another paradox constructed with weaker and intuitively appealing conditions,

can, however, also be constructed. The initial condition here is the Weak Quality Addition Condition, which holds that for any population X , there is at least one perfectly equal population with very high positive welfare such that its addition to X is at least as good as an addition of any population with very low positive welfare to X , other things being equal. The second condition is the Weak Non-Sadism condition, which holds that there is a negative level of welfare and a number of lives at this level such that an addition of any number of people with positive welfare is at least as good as an addition of the lives with negative welfare, other things being equal. Arrhenius argues that this paradox cannot be resolved by appeal to egalitarian considerations, and, more generally, he suggests that the paradoxes of population ethics cannot be solved by an appeal to welfare egalitarianism.

A central moral and political issue of intergenerational justice concerns how we ought to respond to the long-term consequences of climate change. In his chapter, Wolf first develops a sufficientarian conception of intergenerational justice (similar to, but interestingly different in its justification from the versions of intergenerational sufficientarianism defended by Attas, Heyd, and Meyer and Roser). Next, Wolf applies his interpretation to the problem of climate change. His sufficientarian conception relies on an unusual interpretation of Rawls's theory of justice. On Wolf's interpretation, Rawls's two principles of justice are to be supplemented by a sufficientarian principle requiring the minimization of deprivation with respect to basic needs. He shows how such a basic needs-oriented view could be derived from the original position and fleshes out to the content of such a view, in particular, by specifying which needs ought to be regarded as basic. Wolf then extends the revised theory to the intergenerational sphere. He suggests that Rawls rejected the difference principle as a principle of justice between generations on the grounds that he believed it to be inconsistent with economic growth. Wolf argues that this was precipitous on Rawls's part, for there are

contexts where capital accumulation will be fully consistent with the provision of maximal benefits for the worst off members of an intergenerational society. Instead of justifying an accumulation phase on, for example, the basis of the priority of equal liberty, Wolf does so on the basis of the priority of his needs principle. Moreover, since economic growth will sometimes be required by the priority of the needs principle included in this revised Rawlsian view, Wolf's view would in any case not be subject to the problems that led Rawls to reject the difference principle in the intergenerational case.

Wolf's account has interesting implications for the question of how to respond to climate change. He proposes a two-stage model for climate policy, echoing Rawls's own two-stage theory of savings. During the "austerity" stage, in response to the unsustainable nature of our past and present anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, we would gradually have to accept net emissions targets below the sustainability level, gradually enabling us to reach a sustainable level of emissions. Once this point is reached, we would move to the "sustainability" stage in which emissions levels would be held at the sustainable level.

In the last chapter of this volume, Muniz-Fraticelli addresses whether or not a perpetual constitution can be defended, an issue that gave rise at the end of the eighteenth century to the first serious philosophical debate about intergenerational justice. Constitutions are particularly rigid, imposing themselves to some degree on generations that were never asked to consent. Muniz-Fraticelli critically assesses two approaches related to the idea of a perpetual constitution. The first is represented by Jefferson and the second by Otsuka. For Jefferson, constitutions automatically ought to expire after a given lapse of time, this in the name of a typically democratic concern for not subjecting people to a constitution that they have not been asked to consent to. Two responses to Jefferson are presented. First, Jefferson's

proposal to pass and ratify a new constitution periodically would still leave the young people who are enfranchised between each of these enactments subject to laws to which they have not consented. Second, the price to pay for self-expiring constitutions is too great. The constant need to renegotiate the conditions of civil association would be paralyzing and might even lead to anarchy. The guarantees in a constitution that are offered to protect one against the power of the majority would constantly be called into question. Long-term projects, both at the collective and individual levels, would have little prospect of success in such a context.

Muniz-Fraticelli also discusses the position of Otsuka, who relies on a thick idea of tacit consent in place of the Jeffersonian assumption of actual consent. Here the problem is that the conditions required by Otsuka for the sake of tacit consent are such that we are moved very closely to the idea of hypothetical consent. While sympathetic to the idea of hypothetical consent, Muniz-Fraticelli, rather than merely focusing on actual, tacit, or hypothetical consent, proposes that the issue ought to be approached on an ontological level as well. Drawing on the history of political thought, he argues along Rubenfeldian lines to the effect that it is constitutions themselves that bring about the existence of a collective self. In the end, Muniz-Fraticelli is arguing that the idea of a constitution set for an indefinite period of time rather than being self-expiring can be defended by means of a combination of arguments that rely on the instrumental value of a constitution (for stability, enabling long-term projects, embodying anti-majoritarian guarantees, and the like), on the possibility of a justification through hypothetical consent, and on the ontological function of a constitution. This is not meant to preclude the possibility of a re-interpretation or amendment of a constitution. Muniz-Fraticelli is even ready to accept, in certain extreme cases (such as Germany after World War II) that an entirely new constitution be passed, thereby re-constituting a political society.

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See in this volume, the chapters by Thompson and by Muniz-Fraticelli.

ⁱⁱ For more on historical injustice see, e.g. Meyer (2004) and Gosseries (2004a)

ⁱⁱⁱ Those interested in whether a separate realm of issues of justice between age-groups arises should read authors such as Daniels (1988) or McKerlie (1989). This involves e.g. a discussion of the complete-life view, i.e. whether the relevant units of normative assessment should be people's complete lives or shorter segments of their lives. This has implications e.g. for the assessment of age-based discriminatory practices. Connected to that are also issues of age-specific obligations, such as what parents owe their children in terms of education and what children owe their parents in terms of care at old age.

^{iv} See Roemer & Suzumura (2007).

^v On these challenges, see e.g. Gosseries (2008)