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Enough for the Future

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1. Introduction

What do we owe to future people as a matter of social justice? We follow a broad understanding of intergenerational justice: justice considerations are relevant to decisions that are likely to affect the existence, number and identity of future people if—with respect to these decisions—future generations can be viewed as holding legitimate claims or rights against present generations, who in turn stand under correlative duties to future generations. This chapter proposes a framework for the normative interpretation and assessment of intergenerational relations: we will delineate how to understand the welfare rights and distributive justice claims of future people vis-à-vis currently living people. We argue that we have strong and particular reasons for interpreting intergenerational justice in terms of a sufficientarian conception of justice. The sufficientarian interpretation of currently living people's duties of intergenerational justice (and future people's correlative rights) can guide our decision-making with respect to decisions that will have an impact on both the well-being of future people as well as the composition of future people, that is, on the number, existence, and identity of future people.

We will begin our discussion of intergenerational justice by distinguishing between sufficientarian and egalitarian conceptions of justice. We will then (in sections 3 and 4) argue in favour of a sufficientarian understanding of intergenerational justice in response to the so-called non-identity problem. Our argument here has two stages. First, we argue that by relying on a threshold conception of harm we can respond to the non-identity problem. Second, we argue that we have reasons to specify the threshold in terms of a sufficientarian understanding of justice. Finally, in section 5, we submit further reasons for intergenerational sufficientarianism.

2. Egalitarian and Sufficientarian Conceptions of Justice

According to Thomas W. Scanlon, egalitarian (or ‘strictly egalitarian’—as we will call them) reasons are ‘unspecific in not being concerned with the absolute level of benefits that individuals enjoy’. Rather, on the basis of these reasons inequalities are to be objected because relative differences between the states of persons are seen as something ‘which is itself to be eliminated or reduced.’¹ Proponents of sufficientarianism, in contrast, hold the view that what primarily matters is that everybody is well off, i.e. has well-being above a certain given threshold which is considered ‘sufficient’ (this may or may not be a ‘minimal’ threshold). They also hold that one person being worse off than another is irrelevant if those persons are both well off. They reject the egalitarian understanding, at least for those people who are well off. Of course, equality and sufficiency are not the only promising distributive principles but, together with priority, they are deemed the most worthy of discussion in the contemporary debate. And so we will focus on these principles.

A strictly egalitarian position by which we understand a position that holds equality to be of intrinsic value is open to the so-called levelling-down-objection.² This objection is based on the fact that such an egalitarian understanding can recommend that the state of the better-off persons be worsened for the sake of equality even if this is not good for anyone. Indeed, most such strict egalitarians believe that a state of affairs in which nobody is well off but they are equally so, is better, in one respect, than a state in which some people are not well off and others are well off. For this such egalitarians assume that equality has intrinsic value. They will quickly want to add that, of course, equality at a low level of well-being is only better than inequality at a high level of well-being *in one respect*. In an all-things-considered view the other respects—such as the total sum of well-being—might easily outweigh the importance of equality. Thus also such a value-pluralist egalitarian might, when considering all things, prefer not to level down. But adding such value-pluralism to egalitarianism does not pull the sting out of the levelling-down-objection. For the objection already concerns the judgement that a state with equal but low well-being is better than a state with high but unequal well-being *in one respect*: the value-pluralist egalitarian, too, is committed

¹ Scanlon (2005: 6).

² If we follow Parfit (1997, 2000) deontological egalitarianism is not open to this objection. For a critical discussion of this claim, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2007).

to the view that in at least one respect the former state of affairs is better even though it is better for no one and worse for some. By claiming that a state of affairs can be better in some respect, even though it is better for no one, such a strictly egalitarian position must give up a person-affecting view, i.e. the view that the moral quality of a state of affairs must crucially depend on how the interests of (particular and actual) persons are being affected.³

The levelling-down-objection may seem to speak generally against egalitarian intuitions or, put more carefully, one may attempt to suggest a reformulation of these intuitions and without relying on the notion that what matters is equality as such. Derek Parfit's priority view is such a reformulation.⁴ One plausible version of his priority view is:

Priority View: To benefit persons matters more the worse off the person is to whom the benefits accrue, the more people are being benefited and the greater the benefits in question.

According to the priority view equality, as such, does not matter. The view is thus not open to the levelling-down-objection. At the same time the priority

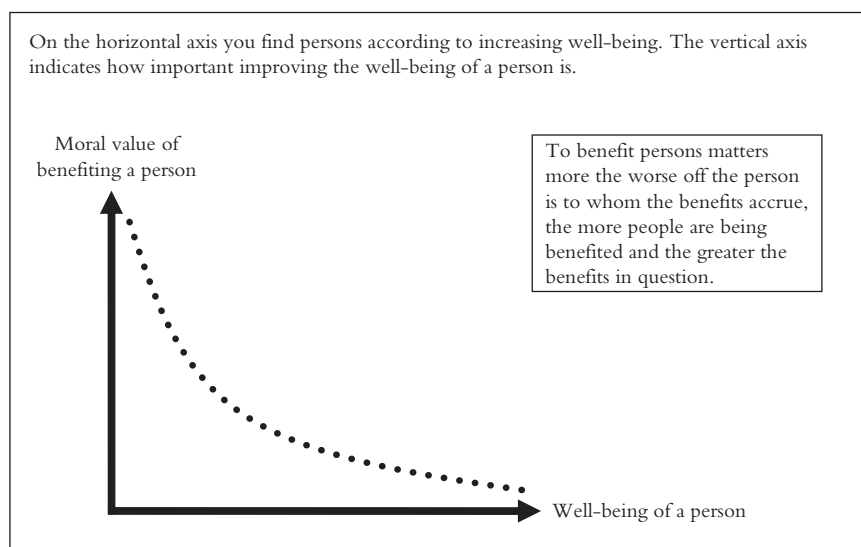


Figure 8.1. The priority view

³ See also n. 14 below. The term 'crucially' is of course less than precise and the reader is referred to Holtug (2007: 139–46) who carefully spells out how egalitarianism (and possibly prioritarianism) conflict with different versions of person-affecting views.

⁴ See Parfit (1997: 213).

view clearly has a built-in tendency towards equality. To this extent it is correctly described as non-relational egalitarianism. The reason for this built-in tendency towards equality is found in the fact that the priority view accepts the following egalitarian condition: if X is worse off than Y, we have at least a *prima facie* reason for promoting the well-being of X rather than of Y. Even if prioritarians do not see anything intrinsically bad in social, economic, and other differences, their priority view is a derivatively egalitarian view. In the following, we will understand egalitarian conceptions of justice to include those that are based on strictly egalitarian reasons (reflecting the notion of the intrinsic value of equality) as well as those that give greater weight to benefiting less well-off persons, where these reasons apply quite apart from how well off these persons are.

The position of weak sufficientarianism qualifies the priority view. We can distinguish between weak and strong interpretations of sufficientarianism.⁵ While, as we will explain below, the position of strong sufficientarianism qualifies the maximin view (i.e. lexical priority ought to be given to the worst off), the position of weak sufficientarianism can be understood as a qualified priority view: the latter claims that the priority to be given to the position of the not well off decreases to zero at a certain threshold of well-being, at which people are sufficiently well off, whereas the priority view claims that this is only the case if people's well-being is perfect, that is, when it simply cannot be improved further. Accordingly we can summarize the position of weak sufficientarianism as follows:

Weak Sufficientarianism: To benefit persons below the threshold matters more the worse off they are. Above the threshold there are no priorities. The priority to be given to the position of the not well off decreases to zero at the threshold and above the threshold there are no priorities. To benefit persons matters more the more people are being benefited and the greater the benefits in question.

As with the priority view, the position of sufficientarianism also holds that equality as such does not matter. And, likewise, sufficientarianism has a built-in tendency towards equality. However, this tendency is restricted in the following way: To benefit person X is more important than to benefit person Y, if X is below the threshold and if Y is better off than X. On a low level of well-being, equality is of derivative value. So, concerning the improvement of the position of those who are less well off than others, sufficientarianism holds both a positive and a negative thesis: it is more important to benefit people below the threshold than above the threshold (this being the positive thesis;

⁵ So far the discussion has not led to a consensus on the concept of sufficientarianism. See, generally, Frankfurt (1987); Crisp (2003); Casal (2007).

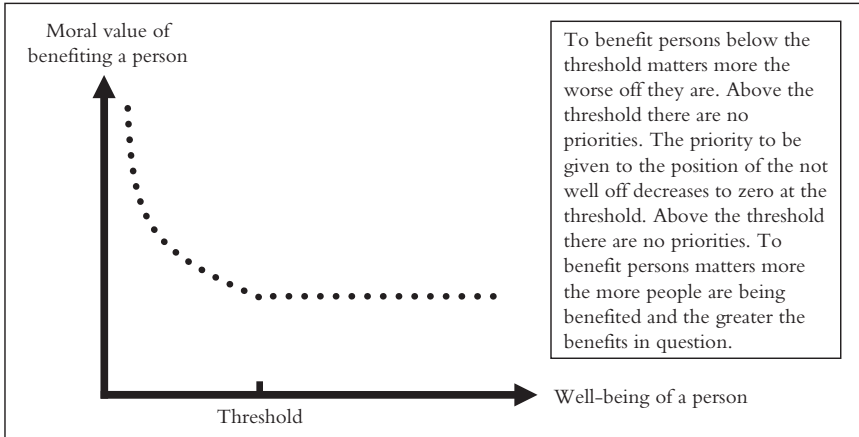


Figure 8.2. Weak sufficientarianism

in our versions of sufficientarianism people below the threshold get treated according to the priority view), and above the threshold the improvement of the position of the less well off is of no particular concern (this being the negative thesis).⁶

As explained, the position of weak sufficientarianism can be understood as a qualified priority view. The position of strong sufficientarianism, however, can be understood as a qualified maximin view. Strong sufficientarianism differs from weak sufficientarianism in how it interprets the priority of persons below the threshold. Strong sufficientarianism attributes much stronger priority, namely lexical priority, to those whose well-being is below the threshold (while according to weak sufficientarianism the priority decreases to zero at the threshold). This amounts to giving a person just below the threshold absolute priority over a person just above the threshold. Versions of sufficientarianism are stronger the greater the priority they attribute to those below the threshold. With a lexically prioritarian threshold strong sufficientarianism also rejects the view that it always matters more to benefit persons the more people are being benefited and the greater the benefits in question.

According to both weak sufficientarianism and the priority view, we ought to benefit those who are already well off if it is the case that, given the number of those benefited by our action and the extent of benefits accruing to them, we will do more good even if we take into account that benefiting

⁶ For a general distinction between a positive and negative thesis for characterising sufficientarianism see Casal (2007: 297f): 'The positive thesis stresses the importance of people living above a certain threshold, free from deprivation. The negative thesis denies the relevance of certain additional distributive requirements.'

people below the threshold has particular weight. This is what proponents of strong sufficientarianism reject and also those who defend the maximin principle.⁷ In contrast to maximin strong sufficientarianism does not propose that the smallest improvement of the smallest number of the worst off ought to be given absolute priority over any improvement of people in the next worst off group. Strong sufficientarianism qualifies this view by making two assumptions:

Strong Sufficientarianism: First, the improvement in well-being of those whose level of well-being is below the threshold has absolute or lexical priority; and to benefit persons below the threshold matters more the worse off they are. Second, both below and above the threshold it matters more to benefit persons the more persons are being benefited and the greater the benefits in question. But: Trade-offs between persons above and below the threshold are precluded.

The position of strong sufficientarianism is absolutist in the sense that it attributes absolute or lexical priority to the improvement of the not well off. The position is single-level in so far as it attributes special moral significance to only one level of well-being.⁸ As the position is single-level, it can be

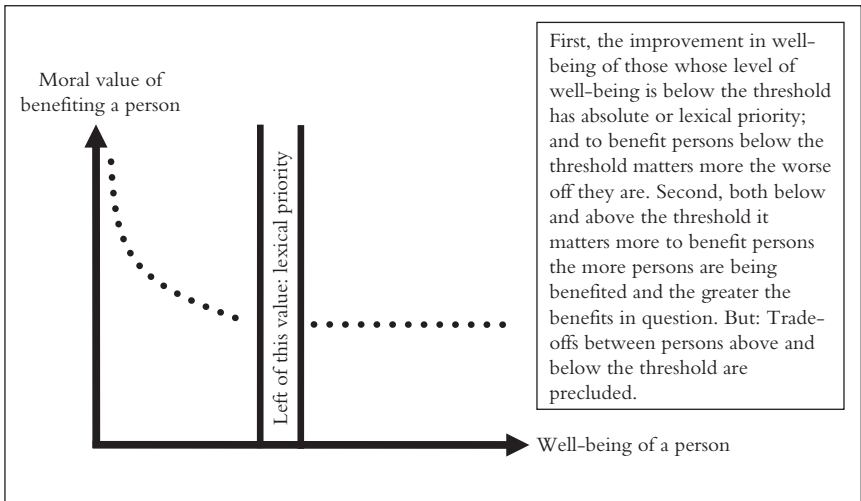


Figure 8.3. Strong sufficientarianism

⁷ However, the maximin principle does not specify an absolute level of well-being for determining who ought to be given priority but rather demands that whoever is the worst-off be given lexical priority. Thus, maximin can demand the prioritarian treatment of people who are well off or very well off.

⁸ Sufficientarian conceptions can be distinguished according to whether they specify one or more threshold values. For this and further differentiations see Meyer and Roser (2006: 235f.).

heterogeneous by specifying different principles of distribution below and above the threshold.⁹

To thresholds and especially such ones that designate an absolute priority—as is characteristic of the position of strong sufficientarianism—Richard Arneson¹⁰ and others have objected that we cannot avoid an arbitrary specification of such priority thresholds. It can further be criticized, that such thresholds are incompatible with our distributive convictions' being non-heterogeneous—that is, that they all can be accounted for by means of one principle of distribution. The existence of thresholds where a tiny change (such as enhancing the well-being of an individual just below the threshold so as to place her just above the threshold) dramatically changes our evaluation of the total outcome, can be claimed to be alien to our moral intuitions.

So, if we cannot specify such a privileged level of well-being, as Arneson and others contend, the priority view seems to provide the best account of our basic intuition that we ought to give some priority to benefiting people who are not well off. According to the priority view a bad life in terms of well-being is rightly considered a morally bad state of affairs. At the same time we do not draw a categorical (qualitative) difference between a good and a bad life. Rather, formulations such as 'he fares badly' or 'she is doing well' are imprecise formulations that each refer (usually in a context-dependent manner) to a whole range of differing levels of well-being and where the border between the different levels does not have any special moral significance.

We therefore assume that the priority view is a plausible candidate for an adequate principle of distribution among contemporaries. However, in the following subsections 3 to 5 we show that we have special and strong reasons for a sufficientarian conception of intergenerational justice. We assume that one can justify a threshold, namely as specified by strong sufficientarianism, for intergenerational relations.¹¹

⁹ And any multi-level sufficientarianism can, of course, be even more heterogeneous by specifying a different distributional principle above every relevant threshold.

¹⁰ See esp. Arneson (1999), (2000).

¹¹ The most promising approach for justifying a priority threshold relies upon the distinction between needs and (mere) wishes. Here, a short sketch of the argument may suffice: If person X has a need for something (needs something) that person Y wishes to have but does not need, then, *prima facie*, we ought to fulfil the needs of person X. But how do we distinguish between needs and mere wishes? Whether a need deserves the moral priority as indicated entirely depends upon whether the needy person would be badly off if the need in question is not fulfilled. Thus, an interpretation of the moral significance of needs suggests the commitment to a morally privileged priority line of well-being. If person X has the need for something that person Y wishes to have but does not need—in the sense that person X would not be well off if his need is not fulfilled, but person Y would still be well off if his wish is not fulfilled—then fulfilling the need of person X is *prima facie* more important than fulfilling the wish of Y. Of course, we would have to defend the argument as sketched against a good number of

Our discussion so far in section 2 enables us to specify what we will understand by egalitarian and sufficientarian conceptions of justice: Egalitarian conceptions comprise first those that include strictly egalitarian reasons for action as Scanlon understands them—reflecting the notion of equality as having intrinsic value—and, secondly, those conceptions that have a continuous tendency to lead to equality, and in particular the priority view. Conceptions of weak and strong sufficientarianism differ from both egalitarian understandings. Sufficientarian conceptions have a tendency to lead to equality only below the threshold. Above the threshold neither improving the position of the worse off nor even promoting equality as such are of concern. To simplify matters, we will identify sufficientarian justice with strong sufficientarianism. The conception of strong sufficientarianism differs most clearly from both egalitarian understandings. Furthermore, strong sufficientarianism differs from both weak sufficientarianism and the priority view in precluding trade offs between persons above and below the threshold.

We start our discussion by inquiring into particular reasons for holding that a sufficientarian understanding of justice is appropriate for the relations between currently living people and future non-contemporaries. We will then take up the question of the relevance of certain reasons often cited in favour of international sufficientarianism. These reasons, we hope to show, speak more strongly in favour of intergenerational than international sufficientarianism. We shall invite attention, too, to the fact that some of the more common instrumental reasons in favour of an egalitarian conception of justice are irrelevant in the intergenerational realm.

3. A Specific Case for Sufficientarianism (I): Responding to the Non-Identity Problem

A particular reason for holding a sufficientarian understanding of intergenerational justice relies upon a certain response to the so-called non-identity problem.¹² The non-identity problem rests upon the contingency of future people upon currently living people's decisions and actions. We know, of course, that when we harm future people's interests and violate their rights, specific persons are harmed. But the decision we make often counts as a

objections. Additionally, we would have to show that the argument will justify a substantial threshold that has absolute priority. For that we would also have to specify what activities or capabilities (or secure access to what goods) are necessary for a sufficiently good life.

¹² See Schwartz (1978); Kavka (1982); and esp. Parfit (1984), part IV.

necessary condition of the very existence of this genetically and numerically specific set of people at some future point in time. Consider a policy of making intensive and extensive use of exhaustible resources for the aim of increasing the welfare of currently living people. If the policy is criticized for harming future people on the ground that this policy will predictably worsen their conditions of life and, thus, is likely to violate their welfare rights, a defender of the policy could reply by saying: many, if not all of our actions have (indirect) effects not only on the conditions of life, but also on the composition of future persons, that is, on the number, existence, and identity of future persons. This is also true for actions that allegedly harm future persons. If the omission of the allegedly harmed action meant that the allegedly harmed person did not come into existence, then that person cannot be said to have been harmed by this action—or, at any rate, not according to the normal understanding of harm.¹³ With respect to persons whose existence is dependent upon the allegedly harming action, they cannot be worse off owing to this action than they would have been had this action not been carried out, for in that case they would not have existed.

In responding to the non-identity problem and the skepticism linked to it with respect to the very possibility of future people having welfare rights vis-à-vis those currently living, we develop a two-stage argument. First, we introduce and defend a threshold notion of harm. Second, we argue that a (strongly) sufficientarian interpretation of the threshold is to be preferred.

A threshold understanding of harm (as an element of what we call the combined view of harm) allows us to justify the following propositions: The dependency (or contingency) of the number and specific identity of future people upon our decisions does not matter where the question is our potentially harming future people's interests and violating their rights. Considerations of justice, namely the welfare rights claims of future people vis-à-vis currently living people can guide us in choosing among long-term policies. Finally, such considerations can also guide prospective parents in deciding whether they ought to revise their decision to conceive out of regard for the children they would thereby beget.

These widely held convictions can be supported by an interpretation of harm that requires a subjunctive comparison with a threshold as its baseline (hereinafter: subjunctive-threshold interpretation). We presuppose a person-affecting view of ethics, which holds that the moral quality of an action has

¹³ The common understanding is the subjunctive-historical interpretation of harm: An action (or inaction) at time t_1 harms someone only if the agent causes (allows) this person to be worse off at some later time t_2 than the person would have been at t_2 had the agent not interacted with (or acted with respect to) this person at all. For a detailed discussion see Meyer (2003: 147–49 and 155–58).

to be assessed on the basis of how it affects the interests of particular and actual persons. In the context of intergenerational justice, the person-affecting view has the implication that only the rights and interests of those persons whose identity is beyond manipulation by the acts (or social policies) under evaluation are to be regarded as morally relevant.¹⁴ The person-affecting view stands in contrast to an impersonal view according to which the value of states of affairs is not reducible to their effects on the interests of actual people.

Some philosophers hold the view that future people whose existence depends upon currently living people's actions cannot have rights vis-à-vis the latter people's actions. Others argue that currently living people can violate the rights of future people even if the former cannot harm the latter.¹⁵ If currently living people cannot affect the welfare of future people, future people cannot have welfare rights vis-à-vis currently living people. Or we can attempt to limit the practical significance of the non-identity problem. Some have suggested limiting the relevant actions to those that are not only likely but indeed necessary conditions of the existence of the concerned person.¹⁶ Or, and this is the response we argue for, we may delineate an alternative understanding of harm, the so-called threshold conception of harm,¹⁷ according to which future people can be said to be harmed by currently living people's actions even if these actions are among the necessary conditions of the existence, identity or number of future people. According to a threshold understanding of harm an action harms a person if as a consequence of that action the person falls under a normatively defined threshold—this is to be understood as a sufficient condition of harming a person.¹⁸ The threshold understanding is unaffected by the non-identity problem, for here the finding of harm does not require a hypothetical comparison with the situation that would have occurred in the absence of the harming action. Such a notion of harm limits the practical significance of the non-identity problem to different degrees depending upon how the threshold is substantially defined.¹⁹

¹⁴ For the person-affecting view see esp. Heyd (1992: 80–90 and *passim*). As Heyd we do not believe in a knock-down argument for the person-affecting and against the impersonal. Rather, by relying upon the method of wide reflective equilibrium the person-affecting view is to be assessed in comparison to an impersonal view, namely as an element of a philosophical account of, *inter alia*, intergenerational justice—taking into account their respective implications in dependence upon other assumptions (see Daniels (1979)).

¹⁵ Kumar (2003).

¹⁶ Roberts (1998).

¹⁷ This understanding can be expressed in the formula: an action (or inaction) at time t_1 harms someone only if the agent thereby causes (allows) this person's life to fall below some specified threshold. See also Shiffrin (1999).

¹⁸ Meyer (2003: 152–8).

¹⁹ Meyer (2008: section 4).

The threshold interpretation of harm relies on the idea that we have a general duty to people not to cause them to be worse off than they ought to be. By our actions and omissions we can cause a person to be worse off than *that* person is entitled to be. The threshold interpretation of harm relies, *inter alia*, on our being able to specify a standard of well-being that enables us to assess the likely consequences of a long-term policy as harming future people. The threshold conception presupposes our being able to describe positively a level of well-being in such a way that a person's right is violated if we do not fulfill our negative duty to refrain from carrying out actions that would cause this person to fall below the specified standard. In addition, and in accordance with this understanding of harm, we can stand under the positive duty of seeing to it that persons reach a level of well-being at or above the threshold level of well-being. In so far as our specifying the relevant level of well-being reflects the idea of people *qua* people having rights vis-à-vis currently living people, our correlative duties set a normative framework that describes the level of protection owed to future people as bearers of general (human) rights.

In the following we will argue that a (strongly) sufficientarian interpretation of the threshold is to be preferred. While the threshold standard can substantively be defined in numerous ways we will argue that neither of the egalitarian conceptions of justice, by itself, can plausibly define the standard. But before we turn to this second stage of our argument for intergenerational sufficientarianism we would like to point out that the proposed solution to the non-identity problem also provides plausible guidance in the contexts of both procreational decision-making and population policies and with respect to the question whether we ought to bring into existence those people who are best off. Joined with the person-affecting view the threshold conception does not support the claim that if a possible person were to have a good enough life, but a different person could instead be brought into existence who would have an even better life, there is then an obligation to bring into existence the second child, rather than the first.²⁰ This is true for individual decisions about procreation as well as for collective policy decisions. Under the named conditions present generations have no obligation to bring into

²⁰ The priority view does not specify a threshold. Joined with the person-affecting approach the priority view will require that actual persons are to be taken into account according to how well off or less than well off they are—and likewise for future people from the time of their conception. This is also how we can interpret a strictly egalitarian understanding that takes equality to be intrinsically valuable: in conjunction with a person-affecting approach such an understanding will require that we diminish the relative differences among actual (future) people. However, such an egalitarian understanding that takes relative differences seriously can also be understood to specify a threshold such that future people have a claim to be not much worse off than either their contemporaries or the currently living people. For a discussion see below, section 4.

existence only those whose lives, among possible future persons, would be optimal, or even the obligation to bring into existence those whose lives would be comparatively better.

The following example illustrates this:²¹ A woman knows that she is suffering from a particular disease which means that if she conceives a child now, that child will have a certain slight handicap, but will enjoy a life above the threshold, however specified. Fortunately, there is a treatment for this disease assuring that afterwards the woman will be able to conceive a perfectly healthy child. The treatment lasts three months. There is, thus, no way that this *particular* child can be born without the handicap. Can the woman be said to owe it to her child to postpone conception until after she has been treated for the disease? According to the threshold conception of harm, she cannot be said to owe this to her child.²² She might, however, have good reasons to decide to receive the medical treatment and conceive later. These reasons will reflect her interests and those of her partner as well as the interests of other present and future people.²³ Such interests may well be important enough to give rise to an obligation on the part of the parents, namely, to postpone conception until after the treatment. We can then have obligations not to bring into existence persons whose lives, though still (far) above the threshold, are less worth living than the lives of others whom we might bring into existence in different circumstances, but these obligations are not grounded on considerations of harm to the future children in question.

To support the claim that parents *do* owe it to their prospective child to bring into existence the possible child who, among the options available to them, enjoys the highest level of well-being, we will have to rely on a different notion of harm—namely a notion of harm based upon the comparison of the state of a person to the counterfactual state of another person who could have been brought into existence instead.²⁴ Analogously, decisions concerning long-term policies are likely to have an impact on the size of the future population. Thus, if we wish to support a claim analogous to that just made with respect to the parents at the collective level, namely, that we owe it to

²¹ This is a variation of Parfit's example of 'The 14-Year-Old Girl'. See Parfit (1984: 358, 364).

²² See Meyer (1997a: 203–7); Woodward (1986: 815, n. 12); Woodward (1987: 808f.).

²³ According to the priority view people's claims to improvements in their well-being are the stronger, the worse off they are. If a person comes to existence and that person is not well off, others will stand under the corresponding duties. Conceiving a person who is likely not to be well off (due to genetic or other medical causes) will give rise to especially high demands on that person's future contemporaries. Analogously, a strictly egalitarian understanding requiring that relative differences be diminished will justify strong claims when a person comes into existence who is much worse off than most of his contemporaries.

²⁴ See Parfit's 'same number quality claim' (principle Q) in Parfit (1984: 360); Kavka (1982: 98f.).

possible future people to bring into existence those who will enjoy the highest level of well-being, we will also have to allow for different numbers.²⁵ The relevant understanding of harm can be expressed in the following formula: Having brought about a person's existence at time t_1 , the agent thereby harms someone only if the agent causes this person to be worse off at some later time t_2 than other persons—whose existence the agent could have brought about instead—would have been at t_2 had the agent acted differently.²⁶

If we follow this understanding of harm, a person whose quality of life is above the threshold will be considered harmed if there is a possible state of affairs in which, although this person would not have existed, another person or other persons would have existed and would have realized an even higher quality of life. According to the person-affecting approach and from the perspective of the allegedly harmed person, however, such a comparison makes no sense. We cannot simply proceed by drawing plausible intrapersonal comparisons of the life of this person and the counterfactual state of affairs in which, although this person would never have existed, another person or other persons would have existed.

The value of non-existence in the sense of never existing at all²⁷ cannot be compared with the value of the life of an actually existing person. As David Heyd argues: 'the comparison between life and nonexistence is blocked by two considerations: the valuelessness of nonexistence as such and the unattributability of its alleged value to individual subjects. The two considerations are intimately connected: one of the reasons for denying value to nonexistence of people is the very fact that it cannot be attached to people.'²⁸ A person can retrospectively prefer not to have been brought into existence, but it does not follow that this person would have been better off had he never been brought into existence.²⁹ To be sure, we can attribute to an existing person the state of 'nonexistence before conception' just as we can attribute to this person the state of 'having ceased to exist'.³⁰ This does not mean, however, that never existing at all can be understood as a (dis-)value vis-à-vis that person.

Those who claim, contrariwise, that we can meaningfully compare future states of affairs with different people (and different numbers of people)

²⁵ This can be true for procreative decisions also: Prospective parents might bring about more or less people (one child, twins, triplets etc.) depending upon their decisions.

²⁶ Compare the formulae in nn 13 and 17 above.

²⁷ Here we assume that comparing the state of an existing person with the state of the person had the person not been conceived amounts to comparing the state of an existing person with the state of the person had the person never existed at all.

²⁸ Heyd (1992: 37 and see 113).

²⁹ But see Roberts (1998: 151) (assigning zero-value to never having existed).

³⁰ See Meyer (1997a: 205); Meyer (2005: 95–99).

presuppose an impersonal approach: the value of states of affairs is not reducible to their effects on the interests of actual people; instead we can and have to compare possible future states of affairs with different people. Joined with an impersonal approach, the priority view (just like classical utilitarianism) leads to a repugnant conclusion, namely:³¹ According to the priority view we aggregate the value realized for each possible world whereby the sum depends *inter alia* upon the number of persons who contribute to the realization of the value; thus, a possible world populated by persons all of whose lives are sufficiently good (according to a plausible threshold) or even better and very good, is to be judged worse than an alternative possible world populated by a large enough number of people whose lives are not sufficiently good but better than not-worth-living, even if only barely so. Principles with such features as these will recommend the creation of a large population whose people have lives worth living—and most theorists agree, this implication is repugnant and ought to be avoided.³² A sufficiency principle specifying a minimal threshold for all people clearly does not imply the repugnant conclusion adumbrated here.³³

We should also note that our argument for a threshold notion of harm is not meant to replace the more common notion of harm that requires a subjunctive comparison with a historical baseline.³⁴ Rather, we hold the view that the threshold notion of harm and the subjunctive–historical notion of harm can and are to be combined. According to the combined view the necessary condition for harming is the disjunction of the conditions of harming as set out by the threshold and the subjunctive–historical notion of harm.³⁵ The combined view is compatible with the response to the non-identity problem we argue for in this chapter: in assessing what we owe to future people we can employ the threshold interpretation of harm where the common understanding of harm does not apply. At the same time, the combined view allows us to rely on the common subjunctive–historical interpretation of harm whenever it is applicable, that is, when we will harm an actual person. In these cases the common notion provides us with a straightforward interpretation of the harm caused.³⁶

³¹ Parfit (1976); (1982); (1984), ch. 17.

³² See Parfit (as in n. 31); Heyd (1992), ch. 2; and see the contributions in Ryberg und Tännsjö (2004).

³³ See also Blackorby et al. (2003: 354–60).

³⁴ See nn. 13 and 17, above, for the formulae of these notions of harm.

³⁵ The combined view can be expressed in the following formula: An action (or inaction) at time t_1 harms someone only if either the agent thereby causes (allows) this person's life to fall below some specified threshold; or the agent causes (allows) this person to be worse off at some later time t_2 than the person would have been at t_2 had the agent not interacted with (or acted with respect to) this person at all.

³⁶ For a detailed interpretation and defence of the combined view, see Meyer (2003: 152–8).

4. A Specific Case for Sufficiencyarianism (2): Specifying the Threshold of Harm

Responding to the non-identity problem as outlined in section 3—namely, by relying on a threshold notion of harm—does not by itself support a conception of intergenerational sufficiencyarianism. To be sure, the above-mentioned considerations as well as the interpretations of examples we submitted do suggest a specification of the relevant threshold as a *sufficiencyarian* standard. But for this substantive claim we need to provide further arguments.

Some have suggested defining the relevant sufficiencyarian standard in terms of absolute, noncomparative conditions.³⁷ One could hold a unitary view of the threshold according to which one and the same threshold would be applicable to all decisions. Even if we held that the same list of rights were attributable to all people (wherever and whenever they live), for example, those which are meant to protect basic capabilities of human beings, what these rights amount to will reflect contemporary social, economic, and cultural conditions.³⁸

Specifying the standard by attributing equal minimal rights to people is only one possible interpretation of the threshold. We might, instead, want to define the threshold in accordance with either of the egalitarian conceptions introduced in section 2. First, strictly egalitarian considerations that address relative differences between people can help to specify the standard—and in at least two ways. We might hold that the standing of people relative to their contemporaries is important³⁹ and that the threshold notion of harm ought to reflect, say, the average level of well-being that people realize, or that future people will realize: the higher the average level of well-being the higher the threshold level of harm should be set. According to one interpretation of such an egalitarian reading, presently existing people harm future people by causing them to realize a (much) lower level of well-being than their own contemporaries.⁴⁰ In addition or alternatively, we might hold that the threshold level ought to reflect, say, the average level of well-being of the present generations upon whose decisions the existence, identity, and well-being of future people depend. According to such an interpretation,

³⁷ See Shiffrin (1999: 123f.); McMahan (1998: 223f.); and Meyer (1997a).

³⁸ See, e.g., Sen (1984); Nussbaum (2000b: 132f.).

³⁹ This would be the case since equality is of intrinsic value. See section 2 above, and see Marmor (2003); Steiner (2003). Responding to Marmor and Steiner, Raz (2003, 264f.) points out that what counts as sufficient might depend on how many people reach what levels of well-being and that this can be the case without our presupposing that equality is of intrinsic value. See also Gosepath (2004: 454–63); Brighouse and Swift (2006); Holtug and Lippert-Rasmussen (2007).

⁴⁰ Sher (1979: 389).

presently existing people harm future people by causing them to realize a (much) lower level of well-being than they enjoy themselves.⁴¹ Still, even if egalitarian considerations that reflect a concern with the relative differences between people can contribute to the specification of the threshold, a plausible threshold is not going to be based on that concern, but will reflect primarily a concern with the absolute level of well-being of persons. Otherwise—this is an implication of the first interpretation—any level of well-being would be considered justified as long as all future people fare equally badly. This presupposes attributing intrinsic value exclusively to equality—an implausible view.⁴² Moreover, to define the threshold standard of well-being of future people as the level of well-being achieved by currently living people (whatever it may be) is less than plausible, unless we were to attribute intrinsic value exclusively to intergenerational equality, so understood.⁴³ This view would deny that currently living people may stand under a duty of justice positively to save for future people so that they will achieve a sufficientarian level of well-being.⁴⁴

The second way in which egalitarian considerations can help to identify the standard is to rely on the priority view for specifying the threshold. On this interpretation, future people fall under the threshold unless they are as well off as the priority view requires. However, this understanding is likely to be unreasonably demanding on the currently living. In the intergenerational context the priority view has most misleading implications even if it is coupled with the person-affecting approach. For, given the large number of future people whose level of well-being can be affected by the decisions and actions of currently living people, the priority view will make unreasonable demands on the currently living. In assessing alternative options we would have to weigh the claims to improvements as well as to take into account both the size of the benefit and the number of beneficiaries; if the number of future people is sufficiently large, we would then have to choose the option that improves their well-being even if both their claims to improvements in well-being are weak and the benefits they receive are small. If the number of future people

⁴¹ See Barry (1999: 109). See also our remarks on the irrelevance of common instrumental justifications for more equality in section 5 below.

⁴² See the above discussion regarding the levelling-down-objection. A monistic value egalitarianism will also have unacceptable implications when applied to contemporaries: the state of affairs in which all have lives barely worth living is to be preferred to a state in which all have good or very good lives but some are better off than others.

⁴³ See literature referred to in n. 39 above.

⁴⁴ Rawls (2001: 159) proposes a duty to save positively 'to make possible the conditions needed to establish and to preserve a just basic structure over time.' For discussion of the role of a principle of sufficiency in justifying this duty see Gaspard and Gosseries (2007: 200).

is sufficiently large, currently living people will stand under an obligation to improve the well-being of those future people even if in fulfilling that obligation the currently living people will lose (very) much in well-being and the improvements in well-being of future people will be small or even trivial.⁴⁵

The objections to specifying the threshold in terms of the egalitarian conceptions as distinguished here present a particular reason for holding that the specification of the threshold ought to be informed by a sufficientarian understanding of justice, at least for intergenerational relations. In defining the relevant threshold we may also rely on considerations that reflect the significance of relative differences among future people or people who belong to different generations including the currently living. Considerations characteristic of the priority view may, also, be considered relevant for the specification of the threshold. It is implausible, however, to hold the view that we might define the relevant standard as reflecting solely egalitarian reasons of the two types distinguished: reasons for diminishing relative differences among people and those for the prioritarian weighting of claims to improvements in well-being. By defining a threshold of well-being according to which both currently and future living people are able to reach a sufficientarian conception allows us to avoid the misleading implications of both egalitarian conceptions. First, avoiding or reducing differences must not lead to a state of affairs in which people are worse off than they ought to be. Secondly, claims against currently living people are unreasonable if in fulfilling them the currently living people will bring about minimal or even trivial improvements of the well-being of future people but suffer losses themselves, causing them to fall under a plausible threshold level of well-being.

If these objections are valid, we have strong particular reasons for interpreting intergenerational justice in terms of a conception for which a sufficientarian threshold is of central significance. At the same time, the reasons for a sufficientarian understanding of intergenerational justice are not equally relevant for the relations among existing contemporaries—never mind whether we think of these contemporaries simply as people wherever they may live, or as members of a well-ordered liberal society, or as found in different basic political units. For the reasons reflect particular features of intergenerational

⁴⁵ The position of weak sufficientarianism can have this implication, too. For, even if we attribute particular weight to improving the well-being of people below the threshold, we might be able to do more good (in total) by benefiting many more people who are well-off already (compare, above, p. 224, last paragraph). This is an implication of both the priority view and the position of weak sufficientarianism even if the number of people to be considered is fixed; thus, it can arise in situations involving contemporaries only, as noted by Casal for the priority view (2007: 319f.).

relations: the non-identity problem simply does not arise in relations among existing contemporaries. The problem does not arise among institutionalised transgenerational legal entities such as Rawls's peoples or states understood as subjects of public international law, either. Also, as shown in sections 3 and 4 the (strength of) objections to egalitarian conceptions of intergenerational justice—to both the prioritarian conception and the conception relying on the notion that equality is of intrinsic value—reflect, in part, particular features of intergenerational relations. Thus, the reasons for a sufficientarian understanding of intergenerational justice are at least in part specific reasons and are not relevant for understanding either global justice or the notion of justice that holds among contemporary members of well-ordered societies.⁴⁶

5. Further Reasons for Intergenerational Sufficientarianism

Next, we should like to turn to some of the often-cited reasons for a sufficientarian understanding of global justice. They concern, first, the prerequisites of implementing welfare rights, second, the possibility of measuring (relative) differences, and third, the significance of co-citizenship as well as instrumental justifications for an egalitarian distribution. We will ask whether these reasons are relevant to an understanding of intergenerational relations and whether they, in fact, speak more strongly on behalf of a sufficientarian conception of intergenerational relations than on behalf of such a conception of international relations. We hope to show that this is, indeed, the case. The reasons that are said to speak on behalf of a sufficientarian understanding of global justice turn out to be relevant to our understanding of intergenerational justice, and this owing to other special non-contingent features of intergenerational relations: the unchangeable power asymmetry as well as the impossibility of interaction between non-contemporaries, and not least of all our uncertainty as to how in particular our actions will affect future people. If so, there are weighty and specific reasons that speak on behalf of a sufficientarian conception of intergenerational justice and that are independent of the reasons we delineated in sections 3 and 4.

First, some authors⁴⁷ raise the criticism that the egalitarian understandings of global justice is negatively utopian: regulating world politics in accordance

⁴⁶ On the notion of well-ordered societies see Rawls (2001: 8f); Rawls (1999).

⁴⁷ See Kersting (2001: 282–91); Miller (2005: 72f.).

with such demanding conceptions of justice—aiming either at globally establishing an equal distribution of well-being (and at a high level) or at giving weighted significance to globally improving the well-being of the not-well-off people—would require a world welfare state with far-reaching powers and authoritative means of implementation. For reasons familiar since Kant,⁴⁸ we cannot wish to live in a world state and in particular not in a world welfare state with regulatory powers. A world welfare state is likely to threaten seriously the liberty rights of all. We cannot hope to establish a sustainable well-ordered global state or its functional equivalent, or so the critics argue. On the other hand, a sufficientarian understanding is thought to specify a standard of distributive justice for international relations that could be implemented by means of co-ordinated efforts within a decentralized system (of a plurality) of basic political units. Of course, showing that a sufficientarian understanding of global justice is positively utopian would require further discussion. Here we just note that it is likely to be a less demanding goal of global justice.

We will not go into assessing the validity of the quasi-empirical claim that an egalitarian understanding of global justice is utopian in a negative sense, as its implementation will require a world state with far-reaching competencies and powers. Our point is simply the comparative one that we have additional and weighty reasons for believing that a world welfare state is a prerequisite for carrying out principles of intergenerational justice that require—in either of the ways specified—an egalitarian consideration of people whenever they live: solving so-called world problems⁴⁹ requires the global implementation of adequate measures. It is one thing, however, to aim at solving such problems without violating sufficiency standards; to aim at solving such problems and at the same time to pursue the goal of implementing an egalitarian conception of justice is quite another. The latter will demand a great deal both of currently living people (and as argued with respect to the priority view in section 4 possibly unreasonably much) and of international and intergenerational cooperation. Egalitarian solutions in particular will depend upon the reliable and stable

⁴⁸ See Kant (1795), (1784), (1793), and (1798), all in Kant (1968); but see Horn (1996); Höffe (1999); the so-called Clark-Sohn plan is the best-known post-World-War II proposal for the establishment of a world government. See Clark and Sohn (1960); see further, Suganami (1989) (who systematically compares and discusses alternative proposals for restructuring international society in accordance with its domestic counterparts).

⁴⁹ On 'world problems' see Opitz (2001). If we could realize intergenerational justice within well-ordered single states, we would not have to rely on a world state for its implementation. Here we do not discuss the problems of justice between age groups with respect to single-state cooperative schemes, e.g. social security systems. Rather, we take up problems of intergenerational justice among non-contemporaries. One such problem turns on the consequences of climate change and its normative implications.

cooperation of many influential actors in international politics; thus egalitarian solutions would require a world state or its functional equivalent:⁵⁰ If the solutions are meant to be just in accordance with an egalitarian conception and with respect to the claims of future people, a world welfare state is very likely presupposed. The implementation of measures aimed at securing the welfare rights of future people is particularly difficult. Non-contemporaries cannot give expression to and stand for their interests and they cannot impose sanctions on currently living people who do not carry out their obligations vis-à-vis them. Furthermore, the implementation of such measures is often dependent upon transgenerational cooperation. Both the fair representation of the interests of non-contemporaries and the securing of conditions of transgenerational cooperation require strong and stable institutions. Thus, if we hold that the implementation of an egalitarian understanding of global justice among contemporaries requires the institutions of a world welfare state, this will be true *a fortiori* for the implementation of an egalitarian understanding of global *and* intergenerational justice.⁵¹ To the extent that we do not wish to live in a world state, the objection is valid for egalitarian conceptions of intergenerational relations; this is especially so for the reason that such a state would have to be enormously powerful in order to be able to implement egalitarian intergenerational obligations. At the same time, the particular reasons for the prerequisite of a world state, where intergenerational justice is concerned, reflect non-contingent features of intergenerational relations, namely, the unchangeable power asymmetry that holds between present and (remote) future generations and the impossibility of interaction between them.⁵²

The second justificatory argument is connected with an argument on the level of practical validity. Some authors⁵³ claim that we cannot measure

⁵⁰ See Gardiner (2002: 406–416).

⁵¹ Other factors may support the implementation of an egalitarian ideal in the intergenerational context, or, at the very least, there are amoral factors that contribute to the improvement of the well-being of future people. For example, many parents hope that their children will be better off than they themselves; this may contribute to the well-being of future people generally. Saving for future people comes with an interest yield, and this may induce an additional motivation for such savings. Also, if people are motivated to act in such ways that enhance their prospects of being better off in, say, 30 years, this may have the (unintended) side-effect of improving the well-being of future people in, say, 80 years.

⁵² These features, one might well want to argue, require transgenerationally stable world state structures even for implementing the far less demanding conception of an intergenerational (minimal) sufficientarianism. However, our claim in this section is a comparative one: The world state or its functional equivalent is in all likelihood an institutional prerequisite if we are to fulfil intergenerational duties vis-à-vis (remote) future people and if (these) duties are interpreted in accordance with an egalitarian conception of justice, and less likely if we are to fulfil duties vis-à-vis (geographically distant) contemporaries and if (these) duties are interpreted in a non-egalitarian way.

⁵³ Miller (2005: 4–10); Brock (2005: 348–350).

globally what we would need to measure in order to be able to determine what in accordance with egalitarian conceptions of justice is owed to people who belong to different societies. We cannot say what an egalitarian justice, to quote David Miller, ‘means in a culturally plural world’⁵⁴, for we can neither assess the relative differences among people who live in very different, historically formed cultural and social contexts, nor can we determine how well off they are in a way that bears on the prioritarian attribution of weighted claims to improvements in well-being. In response, we ought to consider whether the alleged difficulties of measurement are simply greater than the difficulties of measurement in single societies⁵⁵ or whether the difficulties of measurement are principally different and of a kind that they should be regarded as insuperable given the global pluralism of conceptions of the good and socially shared forms of life. Proponents of both egalitarian and non-egalitarian conceptions of justice agree that no problems principally different arise with respect to the measurement of some goods and especially the basic goods of survival when compared with the well-being of people wherever they might live. This is not to deny, of course, that the means necessary for supplying these goods vary and thus also the costs involved in providing and securing them; reaching, for example, the tolerable minimum of well-being in an OECD country requires secure access to a different set of goods than in a country of the so-called Third World. Applying a minimal sufficientarian threshold globally rather than within a single society does not, however, seem to entail principally different problems of measurement.

Problems principally different might arise, however, where we compare goods that are relevant for people’s well-being above such a minimal threshold. People’s well-being depends upon access to valuable options whose existence depends in turn upon collective and, often, also participatory goods whose supply is secured within bounded societies whose members share a particular historically and culturally formed understanding as to why these options are valuable to them.⁵⁶ Access to such options—professions, social roles, being a mother or a father, and societal activities in sports and culture—is of vital importance to the well-being and social status of members of a society. For realising the value of self-respect, backed by social recognition, depends upon having access to such options and having success in pursuing them.

It is, however, not obvious why we should face principally different problems when we compare access to such goods globally. Instead one might want to

⁵⁴ Miller (2005: 9).

⁵⁵ For an example of an author who focuses on the problems which already arise within a single society, see Rosenberg (1995).

⁵⁶ For an account see Meyer (2000).

argue that access to such options and success in pursuing them are goods whose comparative assessment in accordance with a conception of justice will rely upon a value that people can be said to hold in common transculturally, say, the value of self-respect. The sources of and the prerequisites for self-respect may well differ from society to society (this is true, for example, for the significance of belonging to certain professions) or culturally (this is true, for example, for such life options as having your own family), but not the significance of the value of self-respect. If the impact of life options on the value of self-respect counts from the perspective of justice⁵⁷ and if we are in a position to compare the impact of very different life options on the value of self-respect globally, then the great plurality of ways of life globally will not carry with it principled problems in measuring the relative well-being of people or the level of well-being they realize.

Further, Joseph Raz in particular holds that the value of such options even within a single (well-ordered liberal) society can be incommensurable in the strong sense of being incomparable: ‘Two valuable options are incommensurable if (1) neither is better than the other, and (2) there is (or could be) another option which is better than one but is not better than the other.’⁵⁸ If so, the shared cultural-historical and social context within which these options exist does not guarantee their comparability for those who have access to these options. This might well not be decisive, however, if looked at from the perspective of an egalitarian understanding of justice. What counts is that people do have access to (morally acceptable) sources of self-respect quite apart from the options, whatever they may be, open to them in their particular cultural and social contexts. We may well be in a position to assess the impact of such options on the self-respect of people, even though, in other respects, these options are incommensurable.

It seems plausible both that problems of comparatively measuring the well-being of individuals both within single societies and globally will vary depending upon which goods we compare and that we will face problems of measurements more often in international relations given the far more far-reaching global pluralism of both conceptions of the good and available life options when compared with a reasonable pluralism within a single (Rawlsian well-ordered liberal) society. Thus, a conception of global egalitarian justice will be able to take into account only a selection of goods—which raises

⁵⁷ Of course we would have to show that the value of self-respect (or some other value) could play this central role for transculturally comparative judgements of justice. For self-respect as a central aspect of well-being or primary good, see Raz (1994: 24–26) and Rawls (2001: 58–61).

⁵⁸ Raz (1986: 325). Raz identifies incommensurability with the failure of transitivity. See also Raz (1991) und (1997), and Griffin’s response (1991) to Raz.

questions about the meaningful applicability of the conception—or will have to make generalized assumptions about the significance of various goods for the realization, say, of the value of self-respect. The assumption, given that the value of self-respect is equally transculturally significant, is that we can rely upon the value of self-respect for comparative measurements of the well-being of people (or for the prioritarian assessment of weighted claims to improvements in well-being).

Comparatively to measure the well-being of people is even more difficult in intergenerational relations, however. For our knowledge of the relevant conditions of life of future people is limited and this epistemic situation of ours seems insuperable. At least two considerations support the view that in our efforts to carry out such measurements with respect to future people we face principally different problems:

- The particular way of life of future people is likely to depend in part upon those new and today unknown technologies to which they will have access. However, we cannot or can only with great difficulty predict technological developments.⁵⁹
- The collective way of life of future people will depend, in part, upon their own individual and collective decisions. We are not in a position to predict how they will decide to organize their lives socially or how they will want to live individually and we cannot hope to determine these decisions either, that is, where we believe that the individual and collective autonomy of future people ought to be secured.⁶⁰ We also know that the decisions of their predecessors will have an impact on what options more remote future people will have as individuals and collectively; we cannot hope to determine the decisions of intervening generations either and for the same reason.

Thus, it might well be true that we are in no position to know what we owe to more remote future non-contemporaries in accordance with egalitarian conceptions of justice.⁶¹ We are in no position to determine their pertinent relative differences, for the particular historically formed cultural and social contexts that the lives of remote future people will have are uncertain to us. We do know, however, that these particular contexts will be of decisive importance for the particular level of well-being that future people will enjoy.

⁵⁹ See Birnbacher (1988: 168f.).

⁶⁰ See Meyer (1997b: 145–50).

⁶¹ It might be well to stress, at this point, that the argument in favour of sufficientarianism in response to the non-identity problem and as the more plausible specification of the intergenerational threshold conception (sections 3 and 4) is independent of the epistemic considerations we have discussed in this section.

Accordingly, over and above the satisfaction of certain general or basic needs or preferences⁶² which can be estimated with a certain level of reliability we cannot hope to determine today how well off future⁶³ people will be. We are in no position to know what impact our actions will have on the relative well-being of future people or their particular level of well-being, for their individual well-being will depend to a large part on socially shared understandings of what options are valuable as well as on who has access to them and how successful they are in pursuing them.⁶⁴

Third, some of the reasons that have been advanced against an egalitarian conception of global justice and in favour of global sufficientarianism do speak in favour of intergenerational sufficientarianism. This is owing to further particular features of intergenerational relations. Some have argued that institutional relationships among citizens ought to be regulated by an egalitarian understanding of justice if and to the extent that such a conception legitimately regulates citizens' claims to benefits in a scheme of cooperation that is made possible by authoritative rules that the state will enforce, where necessary, by means of coercion.⁶⁵ Non-contemporaries cannot be regarded as co-citizens in the relevant sense, however; there is no interaction possible among non-contemporaries, and future people cannot take part in today's political decision-making. The legitimacy of principles of intergenerational justice

⁶² See Barry (1977: 261f.) and (1989: 347).

⁶³ It can also be difficult to have a positive impact on the well-being of geographically distant people. However, in this instance we can learn from experience; the predictability of the consequences of our actions is not restricted due to the two reasons that characterise our epistemic situation with respect to more remote future people as mentioned in the text above (see nn. 56–7 and text).

⁶⁴ We would need to analyse more precisely what the problems of comparative measurement are, namely with respect to the subject-matter that we assess (in the sense of the so-called *Equality of What?*-debate). In the contemporary debate on justice the more common alternatives are to focus on resources or basic goods (see, e.g., Rawls (1971: 92–4); Dworkin (2000: 65–119)) or capabilities (see, e.g., Nussbaum (2000a: 78–80); Sen (1999)). As Pogge (2002) has convincingly shown, a highly advanced primary goods approach not only allows but requires us to take into account many of the factors Sen has identified as decisive for the quality of life people enjoy. Among these factors are: the significance of relative differences in access to goods for, e.g., self-respect; the significance of the particular social conditions (e.g., the availability of public goods—such as a tertiary educational system or advanced health care—or the crime rate within a society) for the value of claims and rights to, e.g., physical and psychic integrity of people and that they may move and reside freely within the territory of their societies; the significance of the quality of the natural environment and of its change; the value of having a job at a particular place and in a particular society. If, in our attempts comparatively to measure quality of life, we are to take into account these and similar factors and considerations, we will find that we cannot know for certain (or by relying on generalised hypotheses with little accuracy) how well off (more remote) future people will be (relative to their contemporaries). And this, in particular, for the reason that we would have to take into account that their conditions of life will depend, in part, upon their predecessors' decisions and actions.

⁶⁵ See for alternative interpretations of this view Dworkin (2000: 6); Blake (2002); Nagel (2005); Scanlon (2005: 10f.).

cannot depend upon future people's approval of these principles in any real sense. Further, there is no correlation between economic and political equality among non-contemporaries. This is one of the more common justifications for greater equality among citizens of one society: Large differences in wealth or income will make it possible for the rich to exercise impermissible power over the poor, which might, is indeed likely to, lead to unacceptable inequalities in people's liberty rights. There is, however, an unchangeable power asymmetry between non-contemporaries.⁶⁶ Furthermore, other instrumental advantages of equality among contemporaries are of very little, if any, relevance where relations among non-contemporaries are concerned. It makes no sense to claim that greater income equality among non-contemporaries will further intergenerational harmony, reduce intergenerational envy, or strengthen a sense of intergenerational solidarity or communal belonging.⁶⁷ And, finally, one further consideration might be noted: if we hold the view that the validity of calling for obligations of justice depends, in part, upon whether we can effectively fulfil them,⁶⁸ then, again, we have reasons for doubting that this is the case in calling for obligations of egalitarian justice vis-à-vis future people and, in particular, more remote future people. This is due, in part, to our dependency on transgenerational cooperation in fulfilling duties vis-à-vis more remote future people.⁶⁹

6. Concluding Remarks

We have particular and strong reasons for understanding the justice claims of future people vis-à-vis currently living people in terms of intergenerational sufficientarianism. This view is developed in response to the non-identity problem and other considerations that reflect the normative significance of non-contingent features of intergenerational relations, which include the dependency of the number and identity of future people on currently living people's decisions, the uncertainty as to how current people's actions will affect the relative well-being of future people, the problems of measuring relative differences of well-being of people whose particular conditions of life differ to a large degree, and the impossibility of interaction between non-contemporaries and their not sharing membership in a common polity.

Of course, many of us have concerns for future people that cannot be accounted for by considerations of justice: Duties of intergenerational justice

⁶⁶ See Barry (1989: 189, 246).

⁶⁷ See Beckerman and Pasek (2001: 49f.).

⁶⁸ See Scanlon (1998: 224f.); for discussion see Wenar (2001: 80f.).

⁶⁹ See Gardiner (2002: 402–6); Bimbacher (1988: 157–64).

(and the correlative rights of future people) can account neither for the concern that there be future people at all nor that they share a particular way of life nor that future people should have a life well above the level of a sufficientarian level of well-being. We might want to argue that over and above what currently living people owe future people as a matter of justice, they can stand under additional duties to benefit future people so that they will be able to continue their way of life and enjoy a level of well-being that is above any plausible understanding of a sufficientarian threshold. But going into these issues is a matter for another occasion.⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ See Meyer (1997b) and (2005: chs. 4 and 5).

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