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Groundworks for Intergenerational Justice



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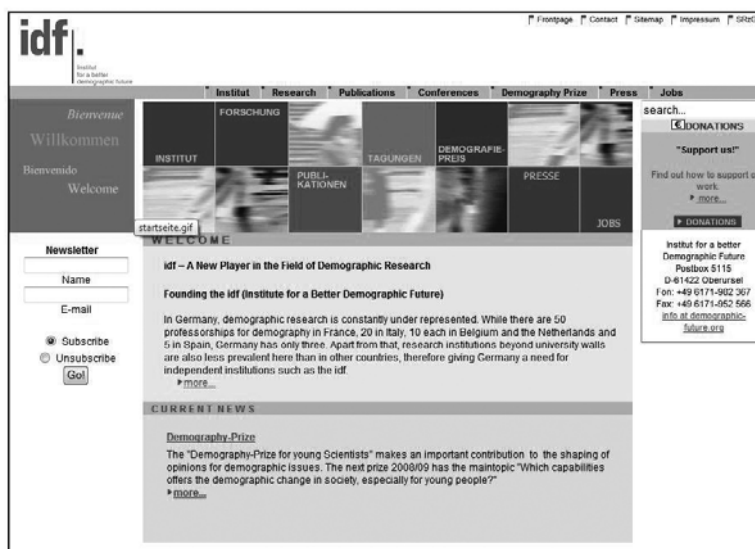
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Editorial

Usually, issues of the Intergenerational Justice Review address specific problems within the realm of intergenerational justice, such as climate change, financial debt, youth discrimination on the labour market, etc. But from time to time, it is necessary to reassure that the groundworks for intergenerational justice are still intact, and evolving. That is why the editors asked renowned scholars to outline their answers to the question, 'What is intergenerational justice?'

In the first article of this edition, the consultant, writer and lecturer Ernest Partridge invites us to an intriguing thought experiment, pinpointing the uncertainty problem. Subsequently, he dismisses the main arguments against us having responsibilities to future generations. In the rest of his article, Partridge argues that it is both possible and morally required to devise rules of just provisions for all successor generations.

Edward Page, associate professor in political theory at the University of Warwick, GB, and author of the second article, summarizes four main problems of intergenerational justice (IGJ) as follows: IGJ involves the specification of which future entities should receive what level of benefit as calculated in terms of what conception of advantage and specified by which principles of burden sharing. In his article, Page evaluates three arguments for restricting justice to dealings amongst contemporaries: uncertainty, reciprocity and contingency (non-identity). He concludes that each can be overcome without abandoning the central tenets of liberal egalitarianism.

In the third main article, Clark Wolf, associate professor of philosophy at Iowa State University, puts forward the notion that many of our obligations to future generations can be understood in terms of the intergenerational benefits and debts we pass on. Wolf proposes that we can think of environmental debts in the same way as financial debts, and that this will help us to understand our most important obligations of intergenerational justice.

We also review, like in every issue of this journal, new or influential books and

inform you about current activities of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG). The reviewed books are "Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge" (by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley) and "Economics for Humans" (by Julie Nelson). In addition, there is an extensive summary of Dr. Tremmel's second PhD thesis, "A Theory of Intergenerational Justice".

This is the last edition of Intergenerational Justice Review (IGJR) that is not peer-reviewed. The journal will be relaunched in fall 2008 as peer-reviewed journal, seeking to publish articles of the most important research and current thinking. It will be published quarterly in English with continuity from now on. The target group of the IGJR are scientists and present and future decision makers. The editorial board is currently assembled. Members are, so far, Prof. Ernest Partridge, Prof. Dieter Birnbacher, Prof. Lukas Meyer, Dr. Axel Gosseries, Prof. Claus Dierksmeier and Prof. Leslie Thiele. As a scientific, peer-reviewed journal, IGJR fills a lacuna and offers an interdisciplinary platform in order to investigate intergenerational issues. It mainly focuses on the political, ethical and legal dimensions of IGJ. A main purpose of the journal within its core discipline 'political studies' is to investigate how intergenerationally just policies have been or are designed (descriptive task), what triggered such policies (analytic task) and how such policies should be designed on the basis of agreed upon principles (normative task). These three tasks need to be addressed separately for the corresponding international and national policies such as, for example, environmental policy, pension policy, health care policy, financial policy, education policy, labour market policy and peace policy. This list may already give an impression of the range of scientific areas which will be developed within the 'Intergenerational Justice Review'.

Furthermore, the structural problem of short-term policy within democracy has to be mentioned: each democracy usually wrestles with the problem that it weighs the present as more important than the future. Future individuals are non-voters

within today's electoral system; hence, they cannot take part in the actual decision-making process resulting in consequences that will change their conditions of life irreversibly. Politicians who prepare their re-election usually do not consider these non-voters and, thus, do not calculate their needs sufficiently. The journal shall give a platform to develop solutions for this problem as well.

Why not restrict the journal to political science? The issue of inter- and intragenerational relations inevitably raises normative questions; for example, questions concerning a single person's moral obligations (micro-level), obligations of institutions (meso-level) or societies or the entire populace (macro-level) towards other generations—issues which are hardly reflected within the daily life. Ethics is the only science which directly addresses the question of justice, and may explain: What is justice? In how far can we apply established principles of justice within the context of intergenerational justice? The journal simultaneously connects ethical issues with legal questions. For example, the subdiscipline 'law' examines whether or not moral obligations to future generations can be transformed into certain legal obligations.

Methodologically, normative as well as analytical and empirical articles are considered for publication by the editorial board. The balance between normative, analytical, empirical/research based and practice orientated papers will vary from issue to issue and depends mainly on the special topic of a certain issue.

For the first peer-reviewed issue on "Historical Injustice", scholars, experts and young scientists are invited to submit articles until 1 August 2008 (see Call for Papers on p. 23).

We hope you will enjoy this edition of Intergenerational Justice Review.



Dr Joerg Chet Tremmel,
Editor-in-Chief

Just Provision for the Future

by Prof. Ernest Partridge

Abstract: Can individuals of one generation devise rules of just provision for all successor generations, despite a profound and unresolvable ignorance of life conditions of future people whose lives are not concurrent? I argue that it is both possible and morally required to devise such rules. I then propose seven rules of just provision for the future.

Two Thought Experiments:

Looking Ahead from 1787. When delegates from the newly independent United States of America met in 1787 to draft a Constitution, the rights and welfare of future generations were prominent among their concerns. In the Preamble, we read that this document was ratified “in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.”

Perhaps, in private conversations, some of the delegates to the Constitutional convention speculated about the practical policies that their generation might adopt to address their responsibilities to future generations. They might have proposed that quotas be imposed upon the whaling

rights of the native Americans being of no great concern to the framers), the prospect of future overpopulation and resource depletion was far from the minds of these individuals.

Looking Back from 2508. My home is in the San Bernardino mountains of California, some 30 kilometers north of the city with the same name. It is impossible to know today if this site will be occupied in five hundred years, or, if it is, what might be the living conditions of the residents. Climate scientists project that if present trends continue without human mitigation, the semi-arid southwestern quadrant of the United States may become an uninhabitable desert. Throughout the world, coastal cities and some island nations will have to be abandoned, as the loss of most of the Greenland and Antarctic ice caps results in the sea level rising more than thirty meters. If new and sustainable energy sources are not developed, the depletion of fossil fuel reserves in the next century may cause the collapse of industrial civilization, widespread famine, disease, warfare, and eventually a drastic reduction in global population.

inexhaustible energy, and might, through massive “geo-engineering” projects, remove excess greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, stabilize sea levels and reverse global warming.

Which of these or countless other scenarios eventually take place five centuries in the future depends significantly upon policy decisions and investments made by the present generation of humans and its immediate successors. But what policy decisions and investments might the present generation, with even the most benevolent intentions, make to benefit remotely future generations, when we manifestly do not and cannot know the conditions of their future lives or the knowledge and technology at their disposal to deal with these problems? Will the people in that remote generation judge us well or judge us ill for the provision we might have made, or failed to make, for our successors? How can they fairly judge us when we can know so little of the conditions of their lives?

We will address these questions in the remainder of this essay.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

/ Martin Luther King /

industry, so that the whales would not be hunted to extinction and thus that future generations might be permanently supplied with whale oil for lamps. Similarly, forests should be preserved to supply firewood to heat homes, and in order to preserve resources for transportation and communications, pastures should be set aside to ensure an adequate supply of horse-power far into the future.

They might propose all this because they were totally unaware of the significance of electricity and petroleum to the future economy of the nation. There are still good reasons to protect the great whales, but ensuring a permanent supply of lamp oil is not one of them. At the same time, with an “empty” continent to the west waiting to be settled and subdued (the

That is the doomsday scenario. Fortunately, there are others. In five hundred years, the time interval separating our generation from the discovery of America by Columbus, this mountain community, along with communities throughout the world, may be thriving economically, within a robust and sustainable natural ecosystem. Even today, world population growth is decelerating as some demographers project a peak world population next century of about nine billion, followed by a slow decline to an eventually sustainable level. Scientific discoveries and technological developments as unimaginable to us today as were gasoline engines, petrochemicals, household electrical appliances and telecommunications to the delegates of the Constitutional convention of 1787, may supply abundant, cheap and

Arguments Against Responsibility to Future Generations.

Our brief glance forward and backward in time has highlighted several difficulties entailed with proposals of just provision for the future. Such difficulties have led some philosophers and other scholars to deny that the present generation has any responsibilities whatever to future generations. Listed below are the most prominent reasons put forth to deny such responsibility. Because I have published lengthy responses to each I will mention them briefly here without extended rebuttal and then cite my published responses in the end notes.¹

Future persons are not identifiable as individuals. But the fact that one cannot identify future victims of negligence (e.g., leaving broken glass on a public beach) does not absolve one of responsibility.² This rebuttal applies to potential victims both living and as yet unborn.

Future persons, because they are potential or even imaginary, do not exist now and thus have no rights-claims upon the present generation. They

will have rights only when they come into existence. This assertion is true for some but not all rights: namely, “active rights”, but not “passive rights.” True, future persons can not act now to exercise “option rights” (to do or not do such and such). But they have rights today not to be harmed by acts or policies of those now living.³

We cannot know what future generations will value and therefore do not know how to benefit them. But while we cannot foresee what future persons will value in the arts, literature, sports, folkways, or mores, we are well aware of what John Rawls calls their “primary goods” – that which is valued by all people at all times, no matter what else they might or might not value. Among these primary goods are health, longevity, liberty, opportunity, and a sustainable natural environment.⁴

Individual human ingenuity and market incentives will suffice to meet the needs of future generations. Public policy is not required, and might even be counter-productive. This is the libertarian position, and particularly the view of the late economist, Julian Simon.⁵ On the contrary, history and practical experience teach us that the uncoordinated, self-interested activity of individuals can lead to disastrous consequences (“the tragedy of the commons” – *good for each, bad for all*), and that social benefits often require mutually acceptable personal sacrifices (e.g., taxes and legal constraints – *bad for each, good for all*).⁶

Let justice be done, though the heavens may fall.

/ William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield /

The motivation problem. Human beings, individually and collectively, are incapable of accepting and enduring the sacrifices required to significantly improve the life prospects of remotely future persons. According to the metaethical rule, “ought implies can”, the present generation has no responsibilities to the future. In rebuttal, history shows that in times of war and other emergencies, individuals and societies are capable of extraordinary sacrifice. Furthermore, human capability is a function of culture and education. Finally, there is abundant evidence that the “primary good” of psychological health is characterized by “self-transcending concerns”, which would include a benevolent concern for the well-being of future persons.⁷

The Future Persons Paradox. We cannot harm

*or benefit particular future persons. The policies that we enact today will cause different persons to exist in the future. Because the very existence of future persons depends upon choices of their predecessors, they can not complain about past policies, since, had they been otherwise, those future persons would not exist.*⁸ But while it is true that those of us now alive cannot improve the lives of remotely future individuals, we do influence the life qualities of various alternative future populations. Moreover, this is a forced choice – “doing nothing, is doing something” – whatever we choose, responsibly or not, will result in some future, for better or worse, for some persons.⁹

Just Provision for Posterity: Some Policy Proposals.

If we successfully surmount all the above objections, the question remains: how might the present generation best respond to its moral responsibility to future generations?

In his landmark book, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls addressed the question from the perspective of a “hypothetical contractor” in what Rawls called “The Original Position” – an elaborately articulated version of what philosophers call “the moral point of view”. The “contractor” in the Original Position possesses general scientific, economic, historical and psychological knowledge and is aware of the “primary goods” – that which any person at any time would desire for oneself. The primary goods include health, intelligence, rights, liberties, opportunities and

self-respect. “Whatever one’s system of ends” writes Rawls, “primary goods are the means.”¹⁰ What one does not know in the Original Position, is anything at all that identifies one as an individual – one’s personal economic circumstances, tastes, aspirations and, most relevant to the posterity issue, one’s place in history. Thus, in the original position, as one chooses for oneself, one chooses for all mankind and all generations. And from this perspective, not knowing one’s generation, one judges what one’s generation justly deserves as a legacy from one’s predecessors, and conversely, what one should justly provide for one’s successor generations.

From this perspective, Rawls derives his

principles of “just savings”, according to which each generation should set aside a portion of its goods and preserve its advantages for the benefit of its immediate successors. “Just savings” writes Rawls, entails that “each generation must... preserve the gains of culture and civilization... maintain intact those just institutions that have been established... [and] put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation”. By “capital”, Rawls means “not only factories and machines, and so on, but also the knowledge and culture, as well as the techniques and skills, that make possible just institutions and the fair values of liberty”.¹¹

It is a good beginning, but in need of some elaboration.

Just Anticipations and Forbearances. Just provision for the future presupposes a knowledge of the future consequences of current events and processes if these are uninterrupted, or, on the other hand, if they are altered and mitigated. For example, the erosion of the stratospheric ozone layer would have continued causing a devastating increase in ultraviolet radiation had not Paul Crutzen, Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina discovered the consequences of the release of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere. An international ban on these chemicals followed, to the great advantage of future generations. Similarly, studies in the biomultiplication of pesticide residues and the effects thereof on predatory fish and bird populations led to remedial action. Today, atmospheric scientists throughout the world are warning of dire consequences if global climate change continues unchecked. These warnings entail responsibilities to the future. If the current generation fails to avert future catastrophes, this failure cannot be excused due to ignorance, for we can foresee the consequences of business as usual.

The Critical Lockean Proviso. In his essay, *Of Civil Government*¹², John Locke wrote that a person is entitled to remove a resource from nature, mix it with his labor and then claim it as his property, provided he leaves “enough and as good” for the use of others. This made good sense in a sparsely populated world with open frontiers and abundant resources. However, in today’s world, over-populated and with limited and declining resources, this “Lockean Proviso” is no longer tenable. If, for example, we were to share the remaining unextracted fossil fuels with all future generations, our personal share

would be a lump of coal and a cup of petroleum, and the present industrial civilization, entirely dependent upon these energy resources, would collapse. What we owe future generations is not fossil fuels, but what these resources provide: namely, energy and critical organic chemicals. Our obligation to the future is realized as we invest in research and development of alternative and sustainable energy sources, utilizing the remaining available fossil fuels as a “bridge” to a future that will no longer require them.

“*First Do No Harm.*” This fundamental principle of medical practice applies as well to just provision for the remote future.¹³ Earlier, we encountered the objection that the present generation cannot predict what future generations will value – what will be their tastes in the arts, literature, or what will be their folkways and mores. The objection appeals to common sense and ordinary experience. Pain and misery that can be avoided and treated demands the moral attention of everyone, while “the pursuit of happiness” is a private concern. Moreover, the pleasures and satisfactions of future persons will result from an evolution of culture, taste and technology that we cannot imagine. Even so, we are not absolved of all responsibility for the future. For while we may not know what might benefit future generations, we are well aware of what will harm them; namely, anything we do now that will deprive them of their “primary goods” of health, intellect, rights, liberties, opportunities and self-respect. Thus we are not entitled to leave future generations a legacy of long-lasting radioactive and chemical debris in the ground and the

oceans, nor are we permitted to ignore the projected consequences of global warming (sea level rise, expanding deserts, extinction, etc.) without attempting massive programs of mitigation.

find his place in a cyclical ecological system which is capable of continuous reproduction.”¹⁵ All the resources that humanity has, or can ever have, with the exception of the incoming solar energy, is

Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice.
/ Alexander Solzhenitsyn /

Just Stewardship. Because there is no prosperity on a ruined planet, a flourishing ecosystem must be prominent among the “primary goods” that a responsible generation would preserve for its successors. For whatever else they might need – knowledge, technology, just institution, resources and capital – future generations will need a life-sustaining atmosphere, water, food and a viable gene pool. To have all this, they must have what all preceding generations have had: a functioning ecosystem.

A Spaceship Economy. In nature, there is no “garbage”. All plants and animals, when they die, return their matter to the soil or the sea, whereupon this matter is reduced by decomposing organisms to provide nutrients for succeeding organisms. Nothing is wasted, and nothing is lost. It is a system that can endure, as it has in the past, indefinitely, as long as the sun continues to supply the energy that drives the life-machine. Modern industrial civilization does not work this way. Instead, raw materials are extracted from nature, fashioned into economically valuable goods, used up, and then discarded “forever” into land fills, ocean dumping, or as air, water, and soil pollution. The US Environmental Protection Agency reports that in 2006, “US residents, businesses, and institutions produced more than 251 million tons of [municipal solid waste], which is approximately 4.6 pounds of waste per person per day.”¹⁴ This massive “throughput” conversion of raw materials into garbage is unsustainable, as, even today, concentrated ore deposits are depleted, and the end of cheap and abundant petroleum is in sight. If human civilization is to endure long into the future, the “cowboy economy” of use up, discard, move on, must be abandoned. In its place, writes Kenneth Boulding, mankind must adopt a “‘spaceman’ economy, in which the earth has become a single spaceship, without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution, and in which, therefore man must

now on “spaceship earth”. There will never be any more.

Doing Well by Doing Good. As noted earlier, a lack of *motivation* can be a significant obstacle to just provision to future generations. This obstacle might be partly overcome by adopting policies that will benefit not only remotely future generations, but also, at the same time, our own generation and the generation that follows immediately – the generation of our children and grandchildren, individuals with whom we have bonds of affection and to whom we have personal responsibilities. Among the economic and planetary emergencies that face us immediately and, at the same time, threaten the welfare of future generations, are pollution, “peak oil” and the need to develop alternative energy sources, global warming, and the maintenance of just political institutions. Promoting these benefits and avoiding these threats, to the advantage both “to ourselves and our posterity”, leads directly to my final policy proposal.

Education and Research: The Foundational Responsibility. Prerequisite to all these policy proposals is a substantial investment in education and scientific research. At the beginning of this essay, I conceded that it is difficult to provide for the remote future when “we manifestly do not and cannot know the conditions of their future lives or the knowledge and technology at their disposal to deal with [their] problems.” Future generations may devise new sources of energy, methods of controlling global climate, and technologies for recycling essential resources that we can not even imagine today. But if they are to do all this and more, they will do so because they have acquired the required knowledge and technological capacities. But while we cannot provide today the advanced knowledge and technology that might solve future problems, we can invest today in the institutional means that might lead to these developments in the future. For example, the Massachusetts Institute of

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Technology was not founded in 1861 specifically to discover and develop genetic engineering, or digital computers, or nanotechnology. It was founded to support basic and applied research which, as it turned out, was to lead to these technologies, none of which were anticipated in 1861. Likewise, today we can not foresee a solution to the planetary emergency of global climate change. However, we can support basic and applied research that might eventually lead to a solution.

It is never too late to repair an injustice.
/ Amir Afsai /

It is no secret that the current generation is delinquent in its responsibilities to future generations. This generation is creating, not solving, the climate emergency. It is lavishly consuming fossil fuels while it is miserly in its research and development of alternative energy sources. It is not facing the implications of continuing population growth. All this and more supports the pessimistic view that human beings are incapable of just provision for future generations.

But such neglect of the future is not inherent in human nature, it is absorbed from the culture. Accordingly, it can be discarded. Thus if this generation and the next are to fulfill their responsibilities to future generations, the pivotal institution must be public education, including the mass media. We and our children and grandchildren must learn anew a loyalty to our planet and our species. We must regain an historical consciousness, and see ourselves as participants in an ongoing drama. In the words of Edmund Burke, we must appreciate once again, that “Society is ... a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”¹⁶

Notes:

- (1) All of these published articles are included at my website, The Online Gadfly, <http://www.igc.org/gadfly>.
- (2) Pletcher 1981; Partridge 1990: 56. Also: <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/orfg.htm>.

- (3) deGeorge 1981; Partridge 1990: 48-56. Also: <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/orfg.htm>.
- (4) Golding 1981; Partridge 2001. Also: <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/futgens.htm>.
- (5) Simon 1981.
- (6) Partridge 2004. Also www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/liberty.htm. And Partridge

- 1998a. Also: <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/cornuc.htm> (Revised, expanded and improved post-publication version).
- (7) Care 1982; Partridge 1981. Also: <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/wcaf.htm>.
- (8) Schwartz 1978, Kavka 1982 and Parfit 1982: 351-441.
- (9) Partridge 1998b. Revised, expanded (and much improved) post publication at <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/swsabf.htm>.
- (10) Rawls 1971: 93.
- (11) Rawls 1971: 285, 288.
- (12) Rawls 1971: Sections 26-27, 30-32.
- (13) Primum non nocere. Contrary to popular belief, this maxim is not in the Hippocratic Oath, although it is found in the *Epidemics*, an ancient text attributed to Hippocrates.
- (14) US Environmental Protection Agency 2007. <http://www.epa.gov/msw/facts.htm>.

- (15) Boulding 1970: 96. The concept of “spaceship earth” originated with Buckminster Fuller, in his book, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, originally published in 1969.
- (16) Burke 1906.

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The FRFG is a think tank. What does that mean?

A think tank (also called a policy institute) is an organization, institute, or group that conducts research and engages in advocacy. According to the National Institute for Research Advancement, think tanks are “one of the main policy actors in democratic societies ..., assuring a pluralistic, open and accountable process of policy analysis, research, decision-making and evaluation.”

Many think tanks are non-profit organizations, which provides them with tax exempt status. While many think tanks are funded by governments, interest groups, or businesses, FRFG derives income from its support club ‘friends of FRFG’, or research work related to its mandate.

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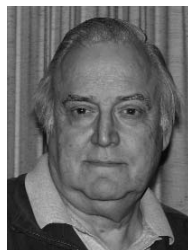
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Prof. Ernest Partridge is a consultant, writer and lecturer in the field of Environmental Ethics and Public Policy. Now retired, he has taught Phil-

osophy at the University of California, and in Utah, Colorado and Wisconsin. He publishes the website, "The Online Gadfly" (www.igc.org/gadfly) and co-edits the progressive website, "The Crisis Papers" (www.crisispapers.org).

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Three Problems of Intergenerational Justice

by Prof. Edward Page

Abstract: Intergenerational justice raises profound questions about the appropriate scope, pattern and currency of distribution. In this short article, I evaluate three arguments for restricting justice to dealings amongst contemporaries and argue that each can be overcome without abandoning the central tenets of liberal egalitarianism.

A full account of intergenerational justice, which I take to be the problem of ensuring an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens amongst non-contemporaries, must address at least four crucial problems. The first, and most basic, problem (the ‘scope of justice’) concerns the identification of the legitimate recipients of intergenerational justice. The second, the ‘pattern of justice’, concerns the level of benefit to which each subject of justice is entitled. The third issue concerns the specification of a ‘currency of advantage’ in terms of which alternative accounts of the pattern and scope of intergenerational justice operate. The fourth issue, the ‘burden of justice’, concerns the identification of the agents with fundamental responsibility for establishing and maintaining intergenerational justice, as well as the method by which fairly precise demands

As background to what follows, consider the following generic argument for the existence of extensive duties of intergenerational justice:

The Intergenerational Justice Argument (IJA)

P1: Depletory policies threaten the interests of future persons

P2: Human activities that threaten the interests of future persons are unjust

P3: Depletory policies are unjust

According to the *uncertainty theorist*, the IJA should be rejected because P1 is clearly false or is at the very least unverifiable. The idea is that the profound lack of knowledge of the future experienced by each generation means that we have no reliable information about the long-term impacts of human activities. So, unlike the case of existing persons or future persons whose lives overlap at some stage with our own, we have insufficient information on which to base our duties to remote future persons. Note that the idea here is not that we have no

to gross uncertainties are human health (through changes in morbidity and mortality); resources usage (through changes in the balance and use of renewables and non-renewables); warfare (through introduction of new weapons systems or delivery mechanisms); and, not least, human tastes and values. Evidence for our present ignorance can also be gleaned from the numerous, and sometimes hilarious, historical failures to predict the future impacts of new technologies or sociopolitical trends, one example being Churchill’s frequently quoted remark about nuclear weapons.

So, do the obvious problems associated with predicting the future impacts of our actions deal a fatal blow to theories of intergenerational justice on the grounds of scope? Should discussion of justice be limited to contemporaries on epistemological grounds alone? I think not. The uncertainty argument, firstly, overstates the level of outcome certainty that characterises the moral relationships of contemporaries. Even relationships amongst contemporaries, compatriots and family members are subject to significant uncertainty as to tastes, values and outcomes.² The second, and clearest, response to the argument is simply to point out that even in the most unclear contexts, we know enough about the future to know that it would be a great injustice to adopt policies that threaten the most vital and predictable of future interests to drink clean water; breathe clean air; possess shelter from the elements; and to enjoy an environment not modified beyond any reasonable understanding of human adaptive ability.³ The IJA requires that each generation possess a certain level of knowledge to identify the key risks to future well-being posed by any given policy. But this requires far less precision than the uncertainty argument presupposes.

According to the *reciprocity theorist*, the IJA should be rejected because P2 is false. It is false because no agent can be said to wrong another if the two share no mutuality of communication or physical interaction. More formally, the following argument arises:

Atomic energy might be as good as our present day explosives, but it is unlikely to produce anything more dangerous.

/ Winston Churchill / 1939 /

can be made of each duty bearer. Put together, then, we might say that intergenerational justice involves the specification of *which future entities* should receive *what level of benefit* as calculated in terms of *what conception of advantage* and specified by *which principles of burden sharing*.

In this short article, I evaluate three frequently developed arguments that suggest that intergenerational theorising may struggle to deal with the most basic question of the legitimate scope of justice without relying on controversial premises. The arguments, in decreasing order of tractability focus on *uncertainty*, *reciprocity* and *contingency* (= *non-identity*).

predictive ability at all with regards to the future, but that we have insufficient knowledge to discriminate between alternative hypotheses about the impacts of our actions on future well-being to ground claims of intergenerational justice.¹

At first glance, this seems a strong argument – at least for consequentialists, who define moral duties in terms of their tendency to produce good, or avoid bad, outcomes. In nearly every current human endeavour we encounter huge uncertainties plaguing our attempts to determine the well-being impacts of our behaviour. Areas of human life subject

The Non-Reciprocity Argument (NRA)

RP1: Requirements of justice are owed only to those who can reciprocate with us.

RP2: Reciprocity exists only between persons who can affect each other's interests.

RP3: It is not possible to affect the interests of those who belong to earlier generations.

RPC: Social policies that threaten the well-being of future persons are not unjust.

What can we say about this argument? First, RP1 is highly controversial, arguably more controversial than the notion of intergenerational justice with which it seems to conflict. Many authors in the liberal egalitarian tradition, for example, flatly deny that reciprocity has any connection to the scope of justice. For them, justice is 'subject centred' in the sense that 'basic rights to resources are grounded not in the individual's strategic capacities but rather in other features of the individual herself'.⁴ Second, even those more sympathetic to reciprocity-based justice hold that a lack of reciprocity on the part of an agent would limit its claims to justice only in terms of positive rather than negative duties.⁵ We might not be obliged to relinquish resources so that non-reciprocators enjoy a full share of society's wealth, but we would not be permitted to kill or wound them. So the first premise of the NRA is incomplete, if not actually false, even on its own terms. Third, the NRA as a whole appears to restrict reciprocity to direct, mutualised, interaction and in so doing promotes an interpretation of justice as 'self-interested reciprocity'. In so doing, it neglects a more subtle form of reciprocity based on the idea that reciprocal duties are discharged both by providing benefits for those that have made sacrifices for us as well as by providing benefits for an intermediary where a lack of direct contact renders impossible a direct exchange of benefits. This 'justice as fair reciprocity' approach not only generates a more sophisticated and intuitive distributive outlook for contemporaries than its self-interested sibling but also opens the path to a subtle account of intergenerational justice. There are two main possibilities here, each of which has merits. Taken together, they show that the NRA is not a serious threat to intergenerational justice.⁶

According to the 'Chain of Concern' approach, RP2 and RP3 are vulnerable to the objection that human beings share a sentimental concern for their nearest descendants with the result that it is rational for them to treat the well-being of the next generation as a public good, and the basic ingredients of this good (clean air and water, income and wealth, a habitable biosphere) as essential items for conservation. The near universality of this sentimental concern means that each person in this and every subsequent generation is obliged to contribute their fair share to activities that prioritise the needs of the next generation. There are various drawbacks with the chain of concern approach, such as what should be done about non-procreators or what action should be taken to reduce the risks of our activities for remote generations. Yet the approach does capture an intuitive moral reflection of what many parents already take for granted in their everyday lives.

According to the 'Stewardship' approach, many of the benefits enjoyed by present persons were produced by past persons with the intention that they be preserved indefinitely or for a specified amount of time. Although the intended recipients of these benefits are not always specified, these benefits are nonetheless intended for someone. The result is that the obligation to pass on these benefits to future persons is analogous to the obligation to reciprocate for benefits received from unknown contemporaries. Not to do so would be to violate the 'moral requirements of reciprocity'.⁷

What should we make of this argument? One issue worth noting is that the lines of duty are quite different to the previous approach in that present persons discharge their duties to past persons by providing benefits to future persons. In one sense, this means the approach has the merit of true temporal inclusiveness because all three tenses are in play. Yet, the backwards directionality of the duties defined also brings with it a sense that the

sibly received consensually. I have argued elsewhere that a suitably broad interpretation of the principle of fair reciprocity may yet finesse the problems of unintentional provision and involuntary receipt so the debate continues as to the intergenerational limits of reciprocity.⁸ Two points are worth making here. First, even if reciprocity is a component of justice, the attenuation of reciprocal dealings over time does not, as Addison joked, mean that we can simply ignore the effects of our actions on future well-being. Second, since so many theorists deny that reciprocity has a bearing on burden and benefit distribution, we have reason to move on to consider our third, and final, barrier to intergenerational justice.

According to *non-identity theorists*, the problem with the IJA is that its first premise is clearly false in numerous cases since the depletionary acts and policies that appears to threaten the well-being of future persons also operate as necessary conditions of these persons coming into existence. The upshot is that the claim that any given act or policy is unjust because it harms, or will harm, the interests of future persons is incoherent.⁹ For the sake of clarification, consider the following choice between rival policy approaches to the global and generational threats posed by anthropogenic climate change. The scenario is hypothetical, but draws to a certain extent on recent debates concerning the appropriate successor to the Kyoto Protocol after 2012. The first approach, which we can call *Kyoto Lite*, will set voluntary targets on carbon emissions based on the ratio of national carbon emissions to economic output. The idea is that countries would reduce the carbon intensity of their economies but would not be required to reduce their total emissions as such. The predictable consequence of choosing *Kyoto Lite* would be the rapid onset of dangerous climate change. The second approach, *Contraction and Convergence*, guarantees each existing and future person an equal share to the absorptive properties of the atmosphere regardless of when or

'We are always doing', says he, 'something for Posterity, but I would fain see Posterity doing something for us'
/ Addison 1968: 592. /

protection of the biosphere and human civilisation is placed at the mercy of benefits that (i) in many cases were unintentionally bequeathed to us by (ii) the no longer living and (iii) we could not have pos-

where they live; and would establish a global ceiling for greenhouse emissions calculated on the basis of the amount of carbon the global environment can withstand without prompting dangerous climate

impacts. Each country is then allocated a yearly carbon emissions budget consistent with the global ceiling not being exceeded. The predictable consequence of choosing *Contraction and Convergence* over its rival would be that, after a century or so, many more of the people who will later live will enjoy a much higher quality of life than those who would have lived had *Kyoto Lite* been chosen. Next, consider the following argument, which suggests that we cannot plausibly appeal to the rights or interests of future persons to explain what would be wrong in favouring *Kyoto Lite* over *Contraction and Convergence*:

The Non-Identity Argument (NIA)

NP1: If any particular person had not been conceived when s/he was in fact conceived, s/he would never have existed.

NP2: A social policy is unjust only if it harms a particular person.

NP3: A social policy harms a particular person only if it makes them worse off than they otherwise would have been.

NP4: The adoption of either *Kyoto Lite* or *Contraction and Convergence* would be a remote, but necessary, condition of an entirely different set of individuals coming into existence in the future.

NPC: Adopting *Kyoto Lite* would not be unjust to future generations.¹⁰

How might we rebut the non-identity argument? Well, the first thing to note is that in a number of cases it does not need to be rebutted. That is, there are limits to the argument that question its relevance for scholars of intergenerational justice. First, the argument does not affect our duties to persons not yet born so long as the act or policy choice under evaluation will not affect that person's identity. Second, the argument does not have clear implications when the act or policy in question will predictably render many people worse off than any intuitive understanding of a life not worth living. Third, the argument has no relevance at all for theories of intergenerational justice that seek to promote valued outcomes irrespective of how particular persons fare under different policies. The argument is only raised, then, against person-affecting theories of justice, such as those that appeal to the rights of particular future citizens of an environmentally damaged world. Despite such limitations, the non-identity

It may help to think about this question: how many of us could truly claim, "Even if railways and motor cars had never been invented, I would still have been born?"
/ Parfit 1984: 361. /

argument is still a profound challenge for anyone whose moral outlook looks to the rights and interests of particular persons. For reasons of space, I mention here just three possible solutions that draw upon the notions of *specific interests*, *subjunctive harm* and *collective interests*.

According to approach spearheaded by James Woodward, it is instructive to distinguish between general and specific interests. A person's general interests consist in maintaining a high level of well-being all things considered. A person's specific interests (such as personal integrity, avoiding physical harm, or being treated with respect) are not reducible to an 'all things considered' or general level of well-being. Essentially, Woodward's idea is that *Kyoto Lite* policies threaten the specific interests of future people (their moral integrity, self-respect and their right not to be born into an environmentally destructed world) even though such policies could not possibly be said to have made them worse off than they would have been all things considered.¹¹ One problem with Woodward's approach is that we might think it rational for the people who later live if we choose *Kyoto Lite* to waive their rights not to come into existence with compromised specific rights if we can predict with accuracy that they would lead decent lives on the whole. The rationale might be that a life worth living, even if it is pursued in the context of environmental austerity, is nonetheless worth living and well worth the violation of a few of its owners specific rights.¹² The suspicion, then, is that even if the specific interests of some future persons play some role in our intergenerational theorising, they could not possibly provide a complete response to the NIA.

According to the approach spearheaded by Lukas Meyer, premise NP3 should be rejected since it is compatible with the existence of only one of the two main senses in which a future person might be harmed. NP3, that is, presupposes the *subjunctive-historical* sense of harm, according to which an act harms a person if it makes them worse off than they would have been if it had not been performed. However, NP3 ignores the *subjunctive-threshold* sense of harm, that an act harms a

person if it causes them to fall below some non-arbitrary threshold.¹³ The approach to intergenerational justice favoured by Meyer is the following: 'An act harms a [future] person if it predictably, and avoidably, causes their life to be sub-standard *or* does not minimise the harm if unavoidable *or* causes them to be worse off than they would otherwise have been.' He calls this the 'combined view'.¹⁴ To my mind, Meyer's otherwise ingenious approach *finesses* rather than solves the non-identity argument. For one thing, the 'combined view' clearly assumes an unexplained theory of distribution that can motivate the adoption of the two senses of harm, explain what happens when the two senses support alternative policy evaluations, and explain how we might operationalize the notion of a 'sub-standard life.' Another set of problems flow from the fact that Meyer offers no argument for his bifurcation of the notion of harm except that it solves the non-identity problem. This is a problem because, for many, the subjunctive-historical criterion, while stunted in its intergenerational application, is a far more plausible and recognisable as an understanding of harm than its subjunctive-threshold rival.

Finally, then, to my own attempt to solve the non-identity puzzle from a broadly person-affecting perspective. This is to embrace the merits of a group-centred shift in our moral thinking to claim such that premise NP2 of the non-identity argument is rejectable on the grounds that it should actually read: 'A social policy can be wrong only if it harms a particular person or group.' The idea is that there are a range of human groups within the *Kyoto Lite* and *Contraction and Convergence* populations (small island communities; communities located in coastal areas; communities located in arid areas) whose interests can be degraded, and therefore harmed, by the actions of earlier generations. The suggestion is not that we violate the collective rights of a whole generation when we behave in environmentally negligent ways. It is rather to claim that there are a number of cultural, national and linguistic groups that should be protected 'as if' they were artificial persons. An appeal to future group interests would avoid problems of non-identity because the condi-

tions of group existence are more robust than those of their individual members. Nations, state and linguistic minorities typically endure for a much longer time-span than individual persons and their existence does not depend upon the combination of a particular egg and sperm.¹⁵

It is, of course, easier to sketch the advantages of group rights than it is to explain exactly how any human group can possess interests and ethical status in quite the same manner as a particular person. There are several considerations that point in this direction, however, with some of the most interesting reflecting the behaviour and attitudes of persons. Many people act and believe *as if* the destruction of entire communities or cultures is bad over and above the fact that this is often accompanied by the deaths (or reductions in well-being) of their individual members. Many people are also disposed to view a natural, or anthropogenic, disaster as being more regrettable if it involves the destruction of a whole community than if it involves an identical amount of human misery dispersed amongst distant strangers. The idea is that, if we adopt a 'practical' approach to ethical standing, we should not be deterred by the lack of a clearly definable list of conditions that will rule certain entities in, and other entities out, of the bounds of justice. Rather, we should ask which entities we already make assumptions about and build 'into our actions, habits, practices and institutions'.¹⁶

Can we go a step further and identify which groups are worth protecting? A full answer is beyond the scope of this paper, but one useful starting point lies in the notion of *societal culture*. Societal cultures are groups that provide their members 'with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres'.¹⁷ Adopting the view that societal cultures are the only group-entities which can be treated as artificial persons from the perspective of justice explains why the destruction of random groups of individuals or interest-groups is only regrettable because of the harm this destruction does to their individual members. Such groups cannot provide for the full range of physical and emotional needs of their members, and so their disintegration as a result of environmental damage should not be expressed as an injustice.

Notes:

- (1) Routley/Routley 1978.
- (2) Routley/Routley 1978.
- (3) Barry 1989.
- (4) Buchanan 1990: 231.
- (5) White 2003.
- (6) Page 2006.
- (7) Becker 1981: 231.
- (8) Page 2006: 99 et seq.
- (9) Parfit 1984.
- (10) Parfit 1984: 351 et seq.
- (11) Woodward 1986: 809.
- (12) Parfit 1984.
- (13) Meyer 2004.
- (14) Meyer 2004.
- (15) Page 2006: 150 et seq.
- (16) O'Neill 2000: 192.
- (17) Kymlicka 1995: 76.

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Justice and Intergenerational Debt

by Prof. Clark Wolf

Abstract: Many of our obligations to future generations can be understood in terms of the intergenerational benefits and debts we pass on. This article proposes that we can think of environmental debts in the same way as financial debts, and that this will help us to understand our most important obligations of intergenerational justice.

No one, wrote my grandfather in the quotation below, can “make a world for his grandchildren.” As he argued, our present ideas about what would be good for our distant descendants will be cramped by the limitations of our own time and our own understanding. Later generations will have different tastes and different ideas, and we may hope that they will possess knowledge of things we cannot imagine. So the attempt to “create the world” in which they will live, if we do it badly, is more likely to impose inappropriate constraints on their lives than to liberate them.

Still, our present choices can expand the range of opportunities that will be available to our descendants. By working to secure peace, by extending the scope of democracy and the protection of rights, we make it more likely that their lives will be secure. By expanding knowledge and promoting appropriate technologies, we may provide them with opportunities we cannot even imagine. Our present choices can constrain opportunities as well, and there are increasing grounds for concern that our way of life might create serious hardships in the future. I would like to suggest that we should understand important parts of this problem as a matter of intergenerational debt and saving, and that we can understand many of our most important obligations to the future using a simple economic model. While only some of the debts we incur are financial, the

National Debt as a Problem of Intergenerational Justice

I must begin with the very practical problem of intergenerational financial debt. At the time of my writing, the present U.S. national debt is \$9,205,850,342,267.07 USD. This bewildering number needs to be put in perspective: This is about 67% of the Gross Domestic Product of the U.S. Given an estimated U.S. population of 304,223,926, this amounts to an average individual debt of \$30,260.11 USD. But the US debt is increasing at the rate of about 1.43 billion dollars every day, so the per capita debt burden changes regularly. President Bush has proposed a budget for 2008 of about \$3 trillion USD, which means that we would add about 240 billion dollars to the deficit this year even if no additional spending were to take place. Of course, the U.S. typically exceeds its planned budget by a significant amount, so this value underestimates the likely rate at which the U.S. debt will actually increase during 2008.

What is the United States purchasing with this massive pile of borrowed cash? Public frustration is often focused on the portion spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other costs associated with President Bush’s “War on Terror.” The expenses associated with these wars do not appear in a single item on any official spreadsheet—at least, not on any I could find. The costs have been carefully sequestered under different headings in the budget, making it difficult to say exactly how much we are spending on the present military adventure. But while we should be concerned to ask what is being purchased with this loan, it is at least as important to ask who will eventually pay it off. Debts come due, and an ever increasing debt load cannot be maintained forever. Older Americans may take comfort in

difficult for people to pay for the things they want and need, national debts can constrain a nation’s ability to accomplish important social goals.

Jefferson and Madison on Intergenerational Debts

Thomas Jefferson was deeply concerned about the possibility that the choices of one generation might come to bind or constrain later generations. In one context his concern was associated with his interest in the U.S. Constitution: he argued that the document should be re-written every nineteen years so that it would represent the continuing and ongoing consent of each new generation as it arrives. Nineteen years was the appropriate interval, urged Jefferson, because given the birth and death rates, it was the period after which a new majority would be in place. But Jefferson was also concerned about intergenerational debt: the possibility that a profligate generation might mortgage the future of the nation by borrowing vast sums of money, spending it irresponsibly, and passing on to later generations the burden of paying it off. He urged that public debts must be retired by the generation that incurred them, and that it would impose “solid and salutary” discipline on the government if this could be made a requirement of law. It is especially interesting to note that he thought that this financial discipline would discourage ruinous conflicts and wars, since the cost of war would then be carried by those who would take the nation to war. It is much easier to urge war when the cost of conflict can be transferred to a later administration, and ultimately to the younger generation.

Jefferson’s statement that “The earth belongs in usufruct to the generations of the living”¹ is often quoted as implying that we are stewards who hold resources in trust for later generations. Surely this is part of Jefferson’s meaning: usufructuary rights are stewardship rights or tenant rights. But Jefferson was also concerned that as stewards, we must avoid passing the costs of our present activities on to later generations. If later generations inherit the cost of debts but none of the benefits these debts were incurred to pur-

Anyone familiar with the crippled appearance of any utopia fifty years after the death of its writer understands that no one can make a world for his grandchildren.

/ John B. Wolf 1952: 1. /

simple model of saving and expense provides an essential insight into the structure of our obligation to the future.

the thought that this debt probably will not be paid in our lifetimes. But just as individual debts eventually make it more

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chase, then they have been treated unjustly by the previous generation. So, at any rate, was Jefferson's argument.

James Madison's response to Jefferson was thoughtful and measured. He urged that it would introduce too much instability to require that the constitution be rewritten at regular intervals, and that the process would "engender pernicious fractions that might not otherwise come into existence, and agitate the public mind more frequently and more violently than might be expedient." While he acknowledged Jefferson's principle that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the generations of the living," he allowed that the present generation might be responsible for *improvements* that would render later generations better off than their predecessors. These improvements, he urged, constitute the basis of a debt that the living owe to the dead, which can best be paid off by "obedience to the will of the Authors of the improvements." With respect to the problem of monetary debt, Madison noted that some debts might be incurred "principally for the benefit of posterity." In such cases, he saw no reason why the debt might not be passed on with the benefits, even if they could not be retired before the new generation arrived. Madison praised the spirit of Jefferson's argument, and urged that it should always be "kept in view as a salutary restraint on living generations from *unjust and unnecessary* burdens on their successors." While he argued against legislative provision prohibiting the acquisition of intergenerational debt, Madison clearly shared Jefferson's concern that it is unjust for present generations to pass on a debt burden to their successors *except* where those burdens are fully compensated.

Intergenerational Debt, Sustainability, and 'Hicksian Income'

Characteristically, debts accrue interest over time. But when we borrow and spend, we don't simply incur the burden of interest, we also forego the benefits we might have gained from present investments. Just as borrowing shifts consumption from the future to the present, investments can shift it from the present to the future. Sir John Hicks described this dynamic long ago, and the resultant view of saving and consumption has come to be known as 'Hicksian income':

"The Purpose of income calculations in practical affairs is to give people an indication of the amount they can consume without impoverishing themselves. Following

out this idea, it would seem that we ought to define a man's income as the maximum value which he can consume during a week, and still be expected to be as well off at the end of the week as he was at the beginning. Thus when a person saves, he plans to be better off in the future, when he lives beyond his income, he plans to be worse off. Remembering that the practical purpose of income is to serve as a guide for prudent conduct, I think it is fairly clear that this is what the central meaning must be."²

A person's Hicksian income might be considered the amount she or he can sustainably consume, or alternatively, the amount one can consume without accruing either debt or credit. When we consume at our Hicksian income rate, we maintain the same underlying stock of capital so we are neither poorer nor richer over time. Of course, people have varied needs at different points in life, so even the most prudent people do not usually consume at the Hicksian income rate. For example, one might decide to consume less when younger, in anticipation of greater needs in old age. When young people decide to stay in school instead of entering the job market earlier in life, they are "saving", in a sense, since they are foregoing present income and consumption in order to build up their personal capital so that they will be able to earn more over the course of their lives.

One kind of careless imprudence is exemplified by the person who fails to save appropriately over time, burning through the stock of capital early on. Those who are blessed with a large stock of capital early in life may not be personally imprudent when they behave like this, as long as the capital stock they hold at the beginning is large enough that it will not be used up over the course of life. But those who burn through capital in this way are using up resources that will not be available later. Profligate heirs will not leave a fortune for their descendants because they consume at a rate faster than their Hicksian incomes would allow.

As individual persons, our saving and consumption rates are usually planned around the life-cycle changes we expect to live through. But as *nations*, or as a *global society*, we might plan for a longer time horizon. A nation that lives beyond the means provided by its Hicksian income consumes its capital resources, leaving later generations impoverished. And a global community that behaves in the same way will impoverish

the human population of the earth. Just as individuals need to plan for different needs at varying stages in their life-cycle, nations and global communities also need to plan consumption and saving to accommodate for expected needs. In the case of nations and of the global community, however, changing needs are not created by a natural lifecycle but by changing size and constituency of our population. Populations with different age constituencies have very different ability to address their own needs. To plan for a larger population with more people whose needs must be met, we may need to insure that available resources will expand to meet their needs. Where population is growing and needs are expanding, it will not be sufficient to pass on the same fundamental stock from one generation to the next. If we want the members of sub-

True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.

/ Martin Luther King, jr. /

sequent generations to have fully adequate life opportunities, we may need to *increase* the stock of resources that will be available to them.

Of course, people are not just consumers. We might expect each generation to provide for the circumstances of its own economic welfare. Instead of focusing on the availability of raw capital resources, it might be more appropriate for us to insure that future generations will enjoy circumstances that will enable them to maintain or increase the marginal rate of per-capita productivity so that they will be able to support themselves. While the future productivity rate does not depend *only* on the availability of raw capital stocks, the focus on future productivity will not allow us to *ignore* these stocks either. Nor will it allow us to ignore the rate of intergenerational debt: intergenerational debt can be understood as a drag on future productive possibilities.

Still, it would be a mistake to think of our legacy to the future only in terms of the debts we accrue. We provide future generations with knowledge and capital improvements, not just with debts. These benefits constitute at least partial compensation for the disadvantages represented by the debts we pass on. But it is appropriate for us to ask whether our capital improvements constitute effective and appropriate

compensation for the burdens we leave behind. Jefferson and Madison do not specifically speak of Hicksian income, of course. But they both express concern that a profligate administration might impose inappropriate debts on subsequent generations. And in both Madison and Jefferson, we find support for the underlying idea that such debts are unjust if they are not fully compensated. To avoid perpetrating injustice of this sort, we must pass on to later generations productive resources fully sufficient to provide them with adequate opportunities. And if our own opportunities were more replete than this, perhaps we owe the future more.

Non-Monetary Debts

The idea of Hicksian income is tightly tied to Jefferson and Madison's conception of

unjust intergenerational debt: Where a nation consumes at a rate higher than its Hicksian income, it passes on uncompensated disadvantage to later generations. Of course the calculation is more complicated than the simple description above might seem to imply: we cannot simply look at growing national debt—to know whether a nation is consuming beyond its means it is necessary to look at the entire package that is passed on to those who inherit the debt. If the economy has grown, is this compensation for the burden? If knowledge has been created, can we consider this to be adequate compensation?

Many of the costs we pass on to later generations are non-monetary, but they have precisely the same structure as a monetary debt: Where our present actions damage or degrade the natural environment, we pass on a burden that can be measured in terms of the rate at which the environment can recover from our assaults. The rate of recovery translates to a measure of the cost we pass on, since future generations will not only need to forego the direct benefits they might have enjoyed if we had passed on more intact environmental resources. The cost of present environmental damage also includes the investment they would need to make in order to recover the resource to its condition before our damage.

Consider, for example, the management of the ocean fisheries, which are currently being harvested at a rate much faster than they can regenerate. Our present consumption standard means that we will pass on to later generations a resource that is depleted, and stands in need of recovery. At some point, fisheries collapse. Recovery after collapse is a complica-

sible to organize agricultural systems so that there is little topsoil loss, but the high-input productionist agriculture favored in the United States (and increasingly, elsewhere in the world) does not conserve the resource on which it depends. Iowa is blessed with a thick layer of the most fertile soil to be found anywhere in the world, and at present it

continue on more or less the same course for a long time—perhaps for 50-100 years. Second, environmental changes caused by climate change are likely to affect the rate of global GHG production as well as the rate of global heat absorption from the sun. As permafrost melts, especially in the arctic north, it is releasing naturally present GHGs at an unprecedented rate. Much of the gas released is methane, which is many times more potent, as a GHG, than carbon dioxide. Finally, the rate of global GHG metabolism, M , is itself subject to change as a result of environmental degradation. As forests are turned into pasture in South America, as natural areas are transformed into housing subdivisions in California, the earth's environmental systems are able to fix carbon at a lower rate. The corresponding reduction in M constitutes an *increase* in the environmental rate of interest associated with our inherited GHG debt. The sustainable rate of GHG emission is thus increasing over time.

Fixed Stock Resources

Where the resources we consume, like Iowa topsoil, are regenerated at geological rates of time, we should consider them to be a non-renewing finite stock. Soil and oil are available to us in a fixed quantity, and if we consume them, we cannot

Laws change, depending on who's making them, but justice is justice.
/ Odo in 'Star Trek: Deep Space Nine' /

ted matter, since a new environmental equilibrium may arise that simply does not include the depleted species. But in the interval before collapse, when recovery is still possible, we can model the cost of recovery as the payment of interest on an environmental debt. If later generations simply wish to maintain the resource in its depleted state, they might pay no more than the 'interest' on the environmental debt we pass on to them. That is, they might continue to harvest fish but at a lower rate that will permit them to pass on to subsequent generations a fishery that is no more damaged (but no less damaged) than the one we will pass on to them. If later generations of US citizens were to decide to pay only the *interest* on the current debt instead of retiring the principle, they would be making a similar decision. But in order to restore the fishery resource, future generations would need to consume at a rate much lower than the 'sustainable' rate. The resources needed to pay down the environmental debt burden are much greater than those necessary to maintain a depleted system. But over time, a *depleted* system will produce at a lower rate. The fishery will produce less fish over time if it is a depleted system than it would if it were a healthy fishery managed at a sustainable rate of consumption. And unless later generations behave much better than we are currently behaving, it is quite possible that this resource will never recover.

Other intergenerational environmental burdens can be modeled in exactly the same way, but the recovery period can be much longer: By some estimates, a forty acre farm's worth of Iowa topsoil flows down the Mississippi river every day. Topsoil regenerates itself when Iowa land is left as prairie, but the time period required is very long. Topsoil regenerates over *geological* time, so when it is gone it is as if it were gone forever. To be sure, it is pos-

seems to many people that it is an inexhaustible resource. But just like our fishery practices, our agricultural practices involve passing on an environmental debt. In this case, it is unlikely that the principal will ever be retired.

Our climate debt is one of the most disturbing debts we presently accrue. Some green house gases (GHGs) have a very long 'lifetime' in the atmosphere of the earth. In this case, the 'interest' rate on our present consumption is measured by the rate at which the earth's atmosphere can absorb and digest our emissions. So if we chose to pay only the *interest* on the climate debt incurred through the course of the industrial revolution, we would produ-

All human situations have their inconveniences. We feel those of the present but neither see nor feel those of the future; and hence we often make troublesome changes without amendment, and frequently for the worse.

/ Benjamin Franklin 1706 -1790 /

ce GHGs at the rate at which the earth's atmosphere and its biological systems, can metabolize them. Call this rate M .

When we produce GHGs at a rate higher than M , we are consuming an exhaustible capital stock. We can think of M as the rate of interest on our climate debt, and if we were to live within our means, on our Hicksean climate income, we would at least need to pay the interest on the loan we inherited by dumping GHGs in the atmosphere at a rate no *faster* than M . For three important reasons, this is especially difficult in the case of climate: first, the earth's climate is a lagging indicator of its present GHG burden. This means that the climate implications of present and past emissions have not arrived yet. Even if we were to cease our production of GHGs immediately, global changes would

expect to do so at a sustainable Hicksian rate. The best we can hope is that as we use these resources up, we may provide later generations with economic substitutes for them, so that our depletion will not leave the future worse off overall. But can we reasonably hope that our improvements in computer technology will compensate later generations for the loss of a stable climate, along with the other debts, financial and environmental, that we seem prepared to pass on to them?

Growing out of our Debts?

There are economists who urge that the U.S. national debt is not a problem. It is an advantage that other nations are willing to continue to lend us money, and if the economy grows quickly enough the debt may come to seem smaller when we compare it to the size of the U.S. economy itself. If

we cripple the economy in an effort to pay our debts, it is urged, then we will pass on less, not more, to future generations. By diminishing the rate of economic growth, we diminish their economic prospects and the opportunities that will be available to them. In response to the present threat of

But by mortgaging their welfare to purchase present advantages, we risk promoting their *illfare*. We need to begin to live within our means, within the economic and environmental budget that represents our Hicksean income. Failure to do this, as Jefferson and Madison would have urged,

the surface of our planet, they will have to resort to more laborious processes, and these will involve a gradual lowering of the standard of living. Modern industrialists are like men who have come for the first time upon fertile virgin land, and can live for a little while in great comfort with only a modicum of labor. It would be irrational to hope that the present heyday of industrialism will not develop far beyond its present level, but sooner or later, owing to the exhaustion of raw material, its capacity to supply human needs will diminish, not suddenly but gradually.”³

The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world.

/ Jimmy Carter /

economic recession, the U.S. President and Congress are apparently prepared to take out an additional loan to provide an economic stimulus package.

But when we consider the financial debt in the context of all the non-monetary loans we continue to draw, can we reasonably hope that the process can continue over time? In the quotation at the head of this article, my Grandfather, John B. Wolf, urged that we should avoid making decisions for our descendants, because we are likely to make the wrong ones. We can't know what they will want or need or value, so our efforts to promote their welfare may be a hopeless shot in the dark.

is a violation of our obligations of intergenerational justice.

I close with a quotation from Bertrand Russell, who saw more clearly than most that the rate of consumption in the modern world must create debts that will one day come due. Writing on this subject many decades ago, he wrote:

“I cannot be content with a brief moment of riotous living followed by destitution, and however clever the scientists may be, there are some things that they cannot be expected to achieve. When they have used up all the easily available sources of energy that nature has scattered carelessly over

If we wish to avoid imposing our debts on our grandchildren, we need immediately to begin to live within our means.

Notes

- (1) Peterson 1977: 445.
- (2) Hicks 1948.
- (3) Russell 1951: 37.

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that discusses current ethical issues with educators and the public. Prof Wolf is 45 years old, and has two children, ages 9 and 12. He hopes to avoid leaving any uncompensated debts, financial or environmental, for them to pay off.

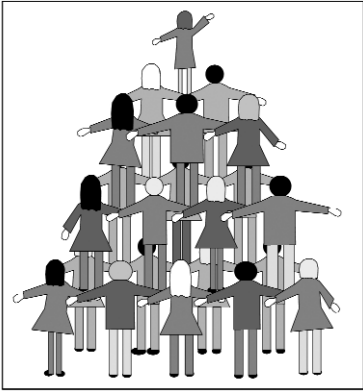
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Joerg Chet Tremmel: A Theory of Intergenerational Justice, PhD thesis

Extensive Summary:

Ever since Greek antiquity, the notion of justice has been in the centre of intense philosophical debates. Nevertheless, systematic concepts and theories of justice between non-overlapping generations have only been developed in the last few decades. This delay can be explained by the fact that the impact of man's scope of action has increased. Only since the twentieth century, modern technology has given us the potential to irreversibly impair the fate of mankind and nature until the distant future. In Plato's or Kant's days, people did not have the same problems with regard to the environment, pension schemes, and national debts as we have today. Therefore, there was no objective need for theories of justice that were unlimited in space and time. According to Hans Jonas, the new territory man has conquered by high technology is still *no-man's-land* for ethical theory. This study is meant to contribute to exploring that *no-man's-land*.

There follows a brief epistemological section on scientific criteria for definitions; it is referred to whenever controversial terms required clarification. The study is then divided into four large sections:

1. Comparisons between 'Generations'
2. Arguments against Theories of Generational Justice
3. What to Sustain? Capital or Wellbeing as an Axiological Goal?
4. How much to Sustain? The Demands of Justice in the Intergenerational Context

The first section deals with the fact that statements on generational justice require comparisons between generations. Yet, the term 'generation' is ambiguous. Distinctions are drawn between 'societal', 'family-related', and 'chronological' meanings of the term 'generation'. Statements on generational justice normally refer to the chronological meaning of 'generation'. They can also refer to the family-related meaning of 'generation', but not to its societal meaning. Then, various comparisons between chronological generations are distinguished: vertical, diagonal, horizontal, and overall-life courses. As a result, it is shown that diagonal comparisons as well as comparisons of overall-life courses are decisive. Other comparisons are of only limited use for statements on generational justice.

The next section deals with the most important arguments against all theories of generational justice. In this context, the non-identity paradox is discussed, as well as the claim that, for logical reasons, future generations cannot be granted rights. The non-identity problem coined by Schwartz, Kavka, and Parfit says that we cannot harm potential individuals if our (harmful) action is a precondition for their existence. According to this argument, we would not harm future people by using up all resources, because these particular people would not exist if we would preserve the resources. Several arguments are discussed which, in their totality, show that the non-identity paradox is irrelevant for the kind of problems that are usually discussed in the intergenerational context such as wars, environmental pollution, or national debts, and that it can only be applied to a very limited field of reproductive medicine. The argument of 'your neighbour's children' distinguishes between individual actions and the collective actions of entire generations. The scope of the non-identity paradox is therefore limited. It can be used only with regard to a person's own children, but not to other members of future generations. Secondly, the 'butterfly-effect argument' questions the validity of non-identity problem altogether. A monocausal relationship cannot be construed on the basis of a weak multicausal connection. The causality between actions that are hostile to posterity, e. g.

non-sustainable resource management, and the genetic identity of the next generation is not greater than the famous butterfly effect, according to which the beat of a butterfly's wing in Asia can set off a tornado in the Caribbean. A phrase like 'because of a war or a certain environmental policy, x percent of all children were conceived at a different time' is contestable because of the 'because of' in it. Other arguments like the 'quasi-harm argument' and the 'catching-up argument' are mentioned.

Subsequently, the objection is dealt with that future generations cannot have rights. The theory of generational justice elaborated in this study is based on the wellbeing, not on the rights of future generations. Therefore, the question whether potential future individuals can have rights, and if so, which ones, is not a major challenge for such a theory. The concept of justice, which has been discussed for more than 2,000 years, should be distinguished from the concept of rights, which was only developed a few centuries ago. Nevertheless, the objection that future generations cannot have rights is dealt with in this study, and the answer is: 'No logical or conceptual error is involved in speaking about rights of members of future generations. Whom we declare a rights-bearer with regard to a moral right is a question of convention. Whom we declare a rights-bearer with regard to a legal right is an empirical question.'

Sections 3 and 4 deal with the questions of what and how much should be sustained. Section 3 examines the axiological question of what is ultimately the valuable good that should be preserved and passed on to the next generation. 'Capital' and 'wellbeing' (in the sense of need-fulfillment) are examined as two alternative axiological objectives of societal arrangements. Capital is divided into natural, real, financial, cultural, social, and knowledge capital. The many facets of 'wellbeing' are also discussed, and subjective methods of measuring it are compared with objective ones. It is concluded that the axiological objective 'wellbeing' is superior to 'capital', because capital is only a means of increasing wellbeing. Many utilitarian accounts have only a weak conception of the axiological good, and refrain from operationa-

ling it. A closer look at such concepts as wellbeing, happiness, and utility reveals that the so-called ‘repugnant conclusion’ is a misled concept, based on misleading terms.

In section 4, answers are sought as to how much we owe future generations for reasons of justice. The section focuses on three concepts of justice that are established in the intragenerational context and asks whether they can also be applied to the intergenerational context: ‘justice as impartiality’, ‘justice as the equal treatment of equal cases and the unequal treatment of unequal cases’, and ‘justice as reciprocity’. The core of this study is the use of Rawls’ ‘veil of ignorance’ for determining principles of justice between generations. Rawls himself did not complete this train of thought. Tremmel concludes that the individuals in the ‘original position’ would not opt for all generations to be equal, as it would mean that later generations would have to remain on the low level of earlier generations. In this context, the ‘autonomous improvement rate’ is of particular importance: “Later generations will inevitably benefit from the experiences, innovations, and inventions of earlier ones. There is no way earlier generations could benefit from future technology and medicine, because time is one-directional. Justice as ‘equality’ is not an option, unless the participants behind the veil of ignorance ordered each generation to burn down all its libraries and destroy all innovations and inventions before its death.” But then, progress becomes impossible for all times, and all later generations of mankind would be doomed to vegetate on the low level of the Neanderthals.

On account of the inequality of all generations, only the second part of the justice maxim ‘treat the equal equally and the unequal unequally’ can be transferred to the intergenerational context. The second part of this maxim requires treating different generations in a differentiated manner. Each generation should have the right to fully exploit its potential and reach the highest wellbeing attainable for it (and only it). On account of the ‘autonomous factors of progress’, each generation has a different initial situation. The initial situation of later generations is normally better than that of earlier ones. So, opportunities are never equal in an intergenerational context. No generation has the right to spoil this initial advantage of its successors with reference to an ideal of equality. Instead of a savings rate in the sense of sacrificing consumption, a ‘preventive savings rate’ should be imposed on each generation, i. e. an obligation to avoid eco-

logical, societal, or technical collapses. Whenever the principle ‘justice as reciprocity’ legitimises egoism, its consequences are purely and simply immoral, be it in the intergenerational or in the intragenerational context. In such cases, the wellbeing of the acting person is increased at the cost of another person (win/lose situation). But not every principle of reciprocity requires the assumption of an egoistic nature of man, thus many versions still can be applied as a moral concept. A variation of ‘justice as reciprocity’, namely the ‘principle of indirect reciprocity’, can even be applied to the intergenerational context and sensibly justify our actions affecting posterity.

The core element of a convincing theory of generational justice, however, is the demand for making improvement possible for the next generation. Our duties to posterity are stronger than is often supposed. Intergenerational justice has only been achieved if the opportunities of the average member of the next generation to fulfill his needs are better than those of the average member of the preceding generation. This does not imply that today’s intertemporal generation must sacrifice itself for the next one. If a good has to be distributed among two generations with the same number of members, it is just for each generation to receive one half. How can equal distribution produce an improved standard of living? This is not a paradox because we have to take into account the autonomous progress factors. The members of today’s generation A need not give more than they have received to the members of the next generation B. But if they give them as much of it, they will provide their descendants with the possibility to satisfy their own needs to a higher extent than A. Therefore the described concept is labeled ‘intergenerational justice as enabling advancement’.

The following sentence is attributed to the German poet Heinrich Heine: “Every age has its specific task, and by solving it, mankind moves on”. Today’s generation lives in a particularly decisive age. Just now, more and more states have nuclear weapons, there is man-made global warming, and we have huge amounts of toxic waste. So today’s generation has the potential to irreversibly reduce the wellbeing of numerous future generations. It bears a great responsibility.

This study is philosophical in nature, but the borders to other disciplines are frequently crossed. Especially the section ‘What to sustain?’ includes many sociolo-

gical and economic aspects. The study incorporates the most important literature on generational justice from German-speaking as well as English-speaking countries.

Statements by readers:

Finally, a comprehensive work on justice between generations! Long delegated to the margins of economic, political, and philosophical debate, Tremmel puts the subject of “intergenerational justice” where it belongs: at the very center of our ethical concerns today.

At a time, where we hold it in our hands to wipe out life on earth as we know it, or to eradicate the diseases and destitution that forever plagued humanity, the importance of the question what exactly we owe to future generations can hardly be overrated. Tremmel’s “Theory of Intergenerational Justice” provides the right insight at the right time.

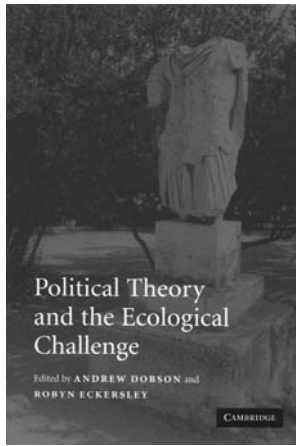
Joerg Tremmel is uniquely qualified to take on this intricate and vast subject. He has spearheaded research on the topic for many years now, and through advocacy and manifold interdisciplinary studies gained an expertise in the field that is second to none.

Weaving together important insights from economics, psychology, sociology, political science and moral philosophy, he brings his reader to one forceful conclusion: “Our duties to posterity are stronger than is often supposed.” Tremmel is absolutely right: We owe “intergenerational justice as enabling advancement” to all future humans, and it is high time that we begin to act accordingly.

*Prof. Claus Dierksmeier
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“a comprehensive, solid, even superior work“

*Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Otfried Höffe,
Research Center on Political Philosophy
University of Tübingen, Germany*



**Andrew Dobson / Robyn Eckersley
(eds.): Political Theory and the
Ecological Challenge**

Reviewed by Michelle Wenderlich

Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley have compiled and written an extremely useful and enlightening book in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*. The book is a series of essays tying major political ideologies and concepts to green and environmental thinking from renowned experts in their respective fields. Thus in Part I: *Modern political ideologies and the ecological challenge*, Roger Scruton contributes on conservatism, Marcel Wissenburg on liberalism, Mary Mellor on socialism, Val Plumwood on feminism, Avner de-Shalit on nationalism, Robyn Eckersley on communitarianism and Andrew Linklater on cosmopolitanism. Likewise in Part II: *Political concepts and the ecological challenge*, we hear Terence Ball on democracy, James P. Sterba on justice, Andrew Hurrell on the state, Michael Saward on representation, Richard Dagger on freedom and rights, Andrew Dobson on citizenship and Daniel Deudney on security.

The gift of this volume is that it is readily accessible to people of different backgrounds in that since it deals comprehensively with arguments from the environmental standpoint as well from as traditional politics, it will fill readers in on the area they are less familiar with. Therefore it is not only helpful for political theorists looking to integrate “new” environmental challenges into their thinking, but also for environmental activists who want to organize better within existing political and societal constraints. From this latter standpoint the volume is especially helpful in illuminating (often unexpected) allies and outlining challenges that lay already within the framework of some political ideologies. Thus we are encouraged by Roger

Scruton, for instance, to think of conservatism as an ideology that is traditionally friendly to environmentalism. For environmentalists are, in fact, environmental conservatives. Scruton distinguishes between the free trade ideologies that have come to be connected to the ideology and its true principles and roots of “trusteeship rather than enterprise, conversation rather than command, friendship rather than solidarity” and of preservation of legacy. He discusses Edmund Burke as an example of these original ideals:

The conservative response to this kind of problem is to recognize that environmental equilibrium is a part of any durable social order. The conception put before us by Burke is in fact one that ought to appeal to environmentalists. Burke’s response to Rousseau’s theory of the social contract was to acknowledge that political order is like a contract, but to add that it is not a contract between the living only, but between the living, the unborn and the dead (Burke 1987). In other words, to speak plainly, not a contract at all, but a relation of trusteeship, in which inherited benefits are conserved and passed on. The living may have an interest in consuming the earth’s resources, but it was not for this that the dead laboured. And the unborn depend upon our restraint. Long-term social equilibrium, therefore, must include ecological equilibrium. (p10)

More than redefining environmental values in terms of motivations of love and connectedness between generations, Scruton also advocates for more local-scale conceptions and actions. He believes that ideals of disconnected sustainability and cosmopolitan world governments cannot hold the loyalties of most people and argues that: “[t]he conservative approach, it seems to me, is more reasonable, even if it is also less ambitious. Rather than attempt to rectify environmental and social problems on the global level, conservatives seek local controls and a reassertion of local sovereignty over known and managed environments.” (p 15)

And here we can also see another interesting facet of the volume—interconnections between the chapters putting our common problems in perspective from many different viewpoints. Scruton’s advocacy of local and national loyalties falls directly into an ongoing debate carried out throughout the book—we can see the connections especially here with Robyn Eckersley’s chapter on communitarianism, which explains that communitarians see the “traditional ontology of the self as asocial, detached and radically autonomous... as *incoherent*” and “[f]rom a communitarian perspective, human identity is always *bounded* in space and time,” lea-

ding to a need for “[u]nderstanding human *motivation* in terms of bounded and particular loyalties.” Scruton also advocates conceptualizing environmentalism on a national level, but interestingly when we investigate Avner de-Shalit’s chapter on the subject we are cautioned from considering it an ideology that is well-suited to environmental interests. Although he remarks that some elements of nationalism (solidarity, common heritage preservation) can help the environmental cause, others (nationalism’s romanticized, “mystical, abstract and instrumental” sense of place, importance of national sovereignty/autonomy, “national interest,” conflicts between national and ecological borders, anthropocentrism...) can obstruct this aim. He even goes so far as to claim that “[n]ationalism seems to be one of these phases through which a people should go in order to acknowledge that perhaps there are much more important and valid political ideals.” (p 88) And within this volume we also find a counter of Scruton’s disbelief in international organizations (although granted he puts the WTO and Greenpeace in this same category despite monumental differences in areas of operation, influence, organization, and purpose) for instance in Andrew Linklater’s statement in “Cosmopolitanism” that: “Promoting a global conscience which keeps pace with the economic and technological unification of the human race is one of the great moral and political challenges of the contemporary age.” (p 115)

The struggle for ecological change finds another unexpected ally in feminism, as Val Plumwood explains. Environmental activists can learn from how feminists have framed their arguments: for one, the hyperseparation that western culture promotes between both women and culture and between humans and nature is artificial, a societal creation and not representative of reality—“a truly human life is embedded in both nature and culture.” (p 55) Indeed:

A feminist approach enables us to see what the dominant theories have obscured, that the environmental problematic is double-sided, with denial of our own embodiment, animality and inclusion in the natural order being the other side of our distancing from and devaluation of that order... The key insight here, as Rachel Carson understood in the 1960s, and the work of Mary Midgley and Rosemary Ruether suggested in the 1970s, is that the resulting conception of ourselves as ecologically invulnerable, beyond animality and ‘outside nature’ (as a separate and pure sphere which exists ‘somewhere else’), leads to the fai-

ture to understand our ecological identities and dependency on nature, a failure that lies behind so many environmental catastrophes, both human and non-human. (p 62)

Plumwood remarks that environmentalists should also reject false dualisms and choices between “deep” and “shallow” ecology: “What is problematic about deep ecology, then, is not its challenge to the non-human side of this tradition, but the way it goes on to marginalize the human side, the many highly significant hybrid forms of environmental activism that are concerned with environmental justice and with situating human life ecologically.” Also extremely interesting are Plumwood’s parallels between the roles of the reproductive work of women and nature:

Feminist models suggest parallels to women’s coverture in the denial and subsumption of nature’s agency, especially in systems of property that erase subordinate contributions and award all credit for and benefits from joint production to the dominant party. The invisibility and erasure of agency on with this unjust appropriation is based provides an important further structural parallel between the situation of women and that of non-human nature. The modern equivalent of ‘nature’ is the category of ‘maintenance labour’, sometimes called ‘reproduction’, especially those forms involving bodily services. (p 68)

And she explores the roots of these problems:

The model of nature as slave or coverture wife underpins the dominant model of private property that is the foundation of contemporary global capitalism. As I and others have argued, capitalism’s nullification of non-human contributions and agency in production work appears in Locke’s famous model of property formation, in which the colonist is entitled to appropriate that product into which he has mixed his labour, on condition that it falls under the category of ‘nature’, a class whose separate agency and deserts are entirely erased... The reasons for capitalism’s colossal environmental destructiveness go right to the heart of liberal concepts of property and their original dispossession of nature. (p 66)

Instead of these distorted views of both women and nature, Plumwood suggests concepts of partnership and of “solidarity with nature distinct from unity”: “A feminist partnership ethic advocates communicative strategies of recognising, listening to and negotiating with the land and the systems that sustain all our lives, so as to allow for their renewal and flourishing. A dialogical form of rationality aimed at mutual benefit clearly cannot be one that aims at maximizing outcomes, including economic outcomes, for just one party, the human party.” (p 72)

Plumwood was however not the only au-

thor to examine the social and economic roots of ecological problems: Marcel Wissenburg sees ways that liberalism can accommodate green political thought, but he also points out many fundamental conflicts between the two systems: “As a *political* theory, liberalism is by definition focused on the welfare and wellbeing of humans, thus not just placing human interests, wants and desires above others but making them the exclusive measure of morality.” (p 21) Thus humans must come before the environment, also with the concept of consensus-building neutrality—individuals are free to do what they want with their lives and property, including destroy the environment. Additionally, “[a]s for specific, typically liberal, rights that would inhibit sound ecological behaviour, the role of property and free trade rights are probably most noteworthy. Private property is seen as a symptom of a deeper problem within liberalism: its acceptance (neutrally put) of materialistic plans of life and lifestyles, i.e. the idea that a good life can be defined by the kinds of goods one owns and consumes.” (p 22) And like Plumwood, Wissenburg points to (Robert Nozick’s argument that) “Locke’s classic justification for ‘original acquisition’, that is, taking natural resour-

Justice and equity are therefore the same thing, and both are good, though equity is better.
/ Aristotle /

ces and calling them private property, was based on the flawed proviso that one cannot take anything from nature unless one leaves ‘enough and as good’ for others. The proviso is flawed because it assumes infinite resources... The Lockean proviso actually makes the existence of legitimate property impossible.” (p 29)

We gain more important insights through other authors, including Richard Dagger in “Freedom and rights”:

The more important point, though, is that facing up to the ecological challenge is entirely consistent with the right of autonomy, which I have elsewhere elaborated as the right on which all others rest: the right to the promotion and protection of the ability to lead a self-governed life. We are both individuals and members of communities, on this view. We owe our individuality and whatever degree of autonomy we attain in large part to the other members of our communities, but they also owe us respect for our autonomy, whether potential or actual. They owe us respect for our right of autonomy, that is, just as we owe them respect for theirs; for only an agent who is capable of respecting the rights of others can be the bearer of

rights... [W]e should think of rights not simply as barriers or shields that protect us against others, but as forms of relationship that enable us to pursue peacefully our private and public endeavours. (p 213-14)

And activists receive not only insights, but also warnings, including not to from Andrew Hurrell in “The state”: “[T]he ecological challenge has indeed been one of the most important factors contributing to the changes that have taken place in the changing normative structure of international society. And yet, even in relation to the environment, there is a real danger that transformationist claims overstate the scale of the changes that have actually taken place and, more important, that this exaggeration might lead to a misdiagnosis of the challenges to be faced.” (p 181) Daniel Deudney also puts out a warning in “Security” to not make the definition of security irrelevant by attaching on too many environmental concerns and overestimating the extent to which environmental conflicts lead to armed conflicts, but I think in this case he overlooks an important and real opportunity to show the changing nature of our interconnected world. While the danger he points out is real, he does not mention, for instance, the role that scarcity of oil

had on the Iraq wars, or the extent to which climate change, drought and water shortages enflamed the circumstances for conflict in Darfur. Or even the roots that the global poverty and desperation that create favorable circumstances for the rise of extremist terrorism have in a flawed and hugely unjust economic system that does not take into account ecological limits to growth. These newly recognized limits to growth, after all, are what delegitimize Locke’s formation of private property with their absence of prescriptions for distributive justice. Deudney also uses false examples to prove his claims: a reduction in price in raw materials in the last several decades does not necessarily stem from non-renewable resources becoming less scarce. To declare so is to confuse money with value, and also not to recognize that prices could also be falling due to the accelerating rate of harvesting raw materials all over the global South (leading then, in fact, to increased scarcity and possibly ecosystem collapse). And although a claim that economic power and military power are perhaps not as tightly

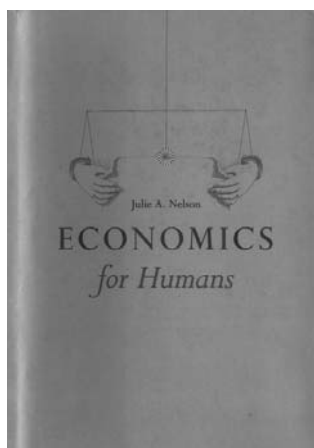
coupled as in the past may even be true (with the unmentioned major exception of the United States), the claim that Germany and Japan since World War II justify this claim fails to account for the directly historical circumstances that artificially limited the growth of their militaries.

With this one possible exception, *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge* is a shining example of the benefits of hybrid

“Future Generations should be inheritors, not survivors.”
/ George Schaller /

thought and interdisciplinarianism, as well as understanding theory for its applications and implications for practice. For we find the latter here in bulk along with many other provocative questions that encourage us to draw many lessons and new perspectives vital for seeing environmental challenges within the complex political and social system in which they actually arise. Add this to its clear and eloquent writing style, and I can recommend this book without hesitation.

Andrew Dobson / Robyn Eckersley (eds.) (2006): Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 262 pages, ISBN: 0-521-54698-2, price: \$31,99



Julie Nelson: Economics for Humans
Reviewed by Michelle Wenderlich

In *Economics for Humans*, Julie Nelson argues that both the Right and Left have been mis-conceptualizing economics and markets, leading to a widespread simplification and devaluation of economic life. She takes on an historical context to show that Adam Smith's view of the economy

as a machine that has defined the Western view ever since arose out of the particular world view of the late 18th century and Industrial Revolution and does not hold in reality. It is this view of economy as machine that she rejects. Markets cannot be reduced to maximization of profit and economic man, and the attempt to do so takes ethics artificially out of their normal context as part of society in the process of our decisions on what we need and want in our lives.

In fact, she argues, this devaluation of economics was not even created by the classical economists, but rather by their followers, including John Stuart Mill, who thought “it would be useful to assume ‘an arbitrary definition of man’” (what came to be known as economic man) “in order to practice economics as a science.” (p 19) What this practically meant was that economists wanted to be able to mathematically predict behavior, but to do so, they had to assume away normal human actions, leaving only logic. In particular the command to maximize profit, for example, arose because it fits well with calculus. These mathematically-minded economists, Nelson explains, felt drawn to do away with the concept of basic needs for living because some higher needs could be debated. Likewise concepts such as health, environmental welfare, and justice could not be examined because they are not “objective.” But “[b]y attempting to create a certain kind of ‘value-free’ or ‘objective’ approach amendable to mathematical treatment, neoclassical economics in fact, by omission, devalued concern with human needs, justice, and sustainability.” (p 24)

Many people are aware of this standpoint, but what Julie Nelson adds to the debate is that the market critics fail in their analyses because they take neoclassical economics on its own terms and attack it because it is dehumanizing—because it is a machine. But in doing so, they reinforce this outdated, ineffectual and untrue belief.

She sums up her arguments for us:

- The idea that economic systems are inanimate machines operating according to amoral laws is a belief, not a fact.
- This belief has harmful effects—for life on the planet, for human society, and for you in particular.

- Understanding that economies are vital, living, human-made, and shaped by our ethical choices can help to improve our decisions—both individually and as a society. (p 4)

She criticizes also the standpoint that often comes from market critics view that for-profit necessarily equals greed as leading to the views that all non-profits must be altruistic, as well as that people who are interested in having money must be morally suspect. This later position, she claims, leads to many problems in the caring professions such as nursing and teaching that are especially evident in the United States today: employers, for example, can still use the justification that nurses should not be interested in money to keep their salaries low, which thus leads (expectedly, as would happen in any branch, Nelson points out) to chronic nursing shortages.

What she is arguing for, in short, is to step away from growth or maximizing profits (arbitrary aims set more by greed than the intrinsic drives of the market) and toward activities that are “*socially as well as financially profitable.*” (p 92, italics original) Because business decisions are ethical decisions.

In her evaluation, Nelson is insightful and makes good arguments to show why neoclassical machine metaphors do not hold for economics in reality. She passionately argues for reconnecting economics with ethics, while being clear that how we conceptualize the current problems of the system do make a difference for proposing solutions. Especially strong is how she contextualizes the roots of neoclassical economics in society and history, showing them for what they are—(convenient) assumptions.

She could have perhaps however given more in the way of how to create this “caring economy” or what a system that integrated ethics and economics would look like. A look at more nuanced critical voices could also be helpful.

But she undoubtedly raises important questions and issues that all could benefit from hearing—especially those interested in working toward a more just and sustainable economy and social structure. And her book is exceedingly accessible, clearly organized and well written. She examines much within a slim 127 pages of main text, and *Economics for Humans* will stimulate all readers—knowledgeable in economics or not.

Julie A. Nelson (2006): Economics for Humans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-226-57202-4, ISBN-10: 0-226-57202-1, 164 pages, price: \$16.00

Announcements and Interna

Reform of IGJR and Call for Papers: 'Historical Injustice'

The Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) is currently reforming its journal Intergenerational Justice Review (IGJR) in order to reach a more professional level with an international readership all over the world. The journal will be relaunched in fall 2008 (starting with issue 3/2008) as peer-reviewed journal, seeking to publish articles of the most important research and current thinking from political science, ethics, and other disciplines. It will be published quarterly

Justice of the world is in its creativity, in solving problems, in our activity and struggle. While I am alive there is the possibility to act, to strive for happiness, this is justice.

/ Simon Soloveyckik /

in English with continuity from now on. All articles are translated into German and possibly other languages. The target group of the IGJR are scientists and present and future decision makers. Present decision makers that are part of the subscription list are: national and international parliament members, business executives, journalists and professors, numerous scientific institutions and libraries. Future decision makers included in the subscription list are many dedicated students in various fields of study.

Members of the editorial board are, among others, Prof. Ernest Partridge, Prof. Dieter Birnbacher, Prof. Lukas Meyer, Dr. Axel Gosséries, Prof. Claus Dierksmeier and Prof. Leslie Thiele.

We are looking for articles in English for the upcoming issue 3/2008 of the IGJR with the topic "Historical Injustice". The following questions may give you an idea for your article:

- *What are the effects of historical injustices on the well-being of present and future individuals and/or groups?*
- *What is the normative (moral and/or legal) significance of historical injustices? What are the long-term societal and moral consequences?*
- *How should a response to historical injustices*

and their indirect effects look like? Are there certain kinds of measures of reparation and symbolic restitution which are most appropriate?

- *If so, who are the bearers of claims to compensation owing to historical injustices, and who are the bearers of duties to provide restitution or compensation? May collective and societies stand under such a duty?*

- *Can past people be said to have 'rights'? Can currently living people stand under duties towards past people and, in particular, past victims of historical injustices?*

Proposal of your article: If you are interested in submitting an article please first send us a short proposal (up to 500 characters). Subsequently the editor will contact you and discuss the details of your possible article.

Size limit of final article: up to 30,000 characters (including spaces, annotation etc.).

Deadline: 1st of August 2008

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Joerg Chet Tremmel is the founder and the scientific director for the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations. He studied political science (MA) and business administration (MBA), afterwards he finished two PhDs in sociology and philosophy. He teaches "Intergenerationally just policies", "Population Sociology" and "Epistemology" at several German universities.

Guest Editor: Prof. Dr. Lukas H. Meyer, professor for philosophy at the University of Bern in Switzerland, has his main research interest in the fields of practical philosophy, political theory, history of moral and law, international justice and public international law as well as in the area of intergenerational justice.

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FRFG is awarded the Integration Prize 2008 from the Apfelbaum Foundation

The Apfelbaum Foundation, founded in 1989, is an independent non-profit organization. Its aim is to support, in the long term, processes of development and connection while focusing on similarities between different kinds of foundations. Since 1996, the foundation has been awarding a special Integration Prize of 5,000 Euro to persons and/or institutions who/which stand out due to their sustainable and successful work on integration matters.

Previous laureates were, for example, well-known institutions such as Amnesty International, the Max Planck Society and, recently, Terre des Femmes.

In January of this year, the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) receives the Integration Prize 2008. The Apfelbaum Foundation recognized the FRFG as an initiative which continually and effectively exerts influence in public through its conferences and writings on principles and topics of main interest, and due to the fact that the foundation dedicatedly takes a firm stand on current issues like voting rights. In addition, the Apfelbaum Foundation stated that the FRFG would strongly support newcomers by working together with young employees and scientists; particularly, within its new Institute for a Better Demographic Future.

The FRFG sincerely thanks the Apfelbaum Foundation for the Integration Prize! Awards like this one are an extraordinary incentive to keep on doing a good job.

Dr. Joerg Tremmel appointed to the Climate Legacy Initiative's Distinguished Advisors Panel

Dr. Joerg Tremmel has been appointed to the Distinguished Advisors Panel of the Climate Legacy Initiative (CLI), a joint project of the Vermont Law School

Environmental Law Center (<http://www.vermontlaw.edu/elc>) and the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (<http://www.uichr.org>). The CLI, chaired by Prof. Burns H. Weston, researches and promotes legal doctrines, principles, and rules appropriate for recognition by courts, legislatures, administrative agencies, and private sector institutions to safeguard present and future generations from harms resulting from global climate change. A „Green Paper“ detailing the CLI's findings and recommendations is planned for public distribution in October 2008. FRFG's task will be to scientifically advise the CLI on its planned paper and to otherwise support the CLI's project before and after the Green Paper's release.

For further information on the CLI, please visit <http://www.vermontlaw.edu/cli/>. One of Prof. Weston's articles (entitled „Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice: Foundational Reflections“) is available on the CLI website and also at FRFG's website:

<http://www.intergenerationaljustice.org/images/stories/researchtopics/cli.pdf>

New Advisory Board Member: Prof. Dr. Meinhard Miegel



The Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations is glad to have had a new member within its advisory board since January 2008: Prof. Dr. Meinhard Miegel accepted the FRFG's invitation by answering:

„Thank you very much for your letter in which you invite me to contribute to the Advisory Board of the Foundation of the Rights of Future Generations. I accept your invitation because I consider the foundation's activities as highly worth supporting.“

Meinhard Miegel was born in Vienna in 1939, studied philosophy, sociology and law in Frankfurt, Freiburg and Washington D.C. and promoted 1969 in law. After having been a company lawyer for Henkel for four years, he became an employee of Kurt Biedenkopf, then secretary general to the Christian Democratic Union party. From 1975 onwards he was also the chief of the main department for

policy, information and documentation in the CDU federal headquarters.

Until recently, Miegel was director of the IWG BONN, a think tank dealing with economy and society, which Miegel himself had founded together with Kurt Biedenkopf back in 1977. Prof. Miegel will close the IWG BONN in mid-2008. He is currently establishing the new „Denkwerk Zukunft – Stiftung kulturelle Erneuerung“, a foundation for cultural renewal which aims to help to develop and spread a Western culture which shall be able to be universalized and sustainable. Furthermore, Miegel was an unscheduled professor at the University of Leipzig from 1992 to 1998, director of the Commission on Future Issues of the federal states of Bavaria and Saxony from 1995 to 1997 and advisor to the German Institute for Old-Age Provisions from 1997 to 2006.

These activities clearly demonstrate Meinhard Miegel's extraordinary interest in social and demographic issues which he has extensively dealt with within his publications, too. Hence, he is, without any doubt, a great enrichment for the Advisory Board of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations where people from all political directions and scientific disciplines communicate and work together.

“Fair generational contracts” Conference of the Initiative New Social Market Economy in Berlin, 12/6/2007

At the conference „Fair Generational Contracts“, which was held by the Initiative New Social Market Economy (INSM) and the Research Centre on Generational Contracts (FZG) of the University of Freiburg on 6 Dec. in Berlin, renowned experts discussed how generational justice might be incorporated into social insurance systems. Wolfgang Gruendinger participated at the conference as the representative of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG).

It came to an unusual consent concerning the pay-as-you-go procedure of the statutory pension insurance: By now, the euphoria about the funding principle has disappeared all around the world. Pay-as-you-go elements within combined systems have to remain as the strongest element of

old age pension. A mixture of pay-as-you-go pension and private savings is necessary, whereas only the exact proportion of the mix is still debatable.

Financial scientist Prof. Dr. Bernd Raffelhueschen, director of the FZG and member of the advisory board of the FRFG, considers generational justice as an ethical-philosophical issue which appears to be economically indefinable. He also states that it is not supposed to be the basic idea of the method of generational accounting. This controversial method shall merely show mismatches between the generations („sustainability gap“). A levelling of these mismatches may lead to financial sustainability in terms of equilibrium. Nonetheless, the board of FRFG upholds the view that we can see financial sustainability as a part of generational justice.

(by Wolfgang Gruendinger, Berlin representative of the FRFG)

New Staff



Felix Stahlmann, Ref. iur., LL.M., 27 years

My name is Felix Stahlmann and I am 27 years old. After finishing the law degree at the Johannes Gutenberg University

of Mainz (Germany) in February 2006, I decided to make some foreign experiences due to the increasing importance of globalisation. Therefore, I participated in a Spanish language & Mexican culture program at the Universidad Internacional de Cuernavaca (Mexico) and in a master of laws program at the University of Auckland (New Zealand) in 2006 and 2007, respectively. After having successfully finished the LL.M. degree (Specialisation: Public Law) in February 2008, I started to work as a volunteer at the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) with the aim to support the foundation's scientific and ideological work in the field of intergenerational justice – an issue which should be seen as highly important in a world of climatic abnormalities and demographic changes.

Falk Bartscherer, 24 years

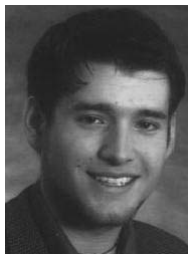


My name is Falk Bartscherer. I am a student of Political Science and Economics at the University of

Liberty, equality – bad principles! The only true principle for humanity is justice; and justice to the feeble is protection and kindness.

/ Henri-Frédéric Amiel /

Heidelberg. Why am I interested in demography and intergenerational justice? When I spent my year abroad in Paris, I noticed that, despite many similarities between Germans and French, the population in France generally looked younger and that the French most notably seemed to have more children. I became curious to learn about the reasons for lower birth rates in Germany, the pronounced awareness of demography in France and the consequences of the demographic change. Therefore I applied for an internship at the idf and the FRFG. I am currently charged with the organisation of the Demography Prize 2008/2009 and co-edit our journal, the Intergenerational Justice Review.



Ilja Gold, 21 years

My name is Ilja Gold and I study political sciences and law at the University of Bremen since October 2006. I decided to intern at the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG), because I would like to learn more about the procedures of a scientific foundation in general and especially because the issues of the foundation fit to the focus of my studies. In consid-

eration of the demographic change and the still increasing global pollution it is very important for me to emphasise these problems and to get involved to give the next generations a future worth living.



Dana Patowsky, 24 years

My name is Dana Patowsky, and I study sociology at the Martin Luther University in Halle since 2004. For two months, I am an intern at the FRFG in order to make some working experiences and to get to know how a scientific foundation works. After finishing the practical training, I would like to write my dissertation about intergenerational relationships.



Jakob Toebelmann, 25 years

My name is Jakob Toebelmann, and for the next two months, I am intern at the FRFG. Originally I'm from Schleswig-Holstein in Northern Germany, and since 2004 I have been studying at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in

Münster political science, medieval history and geography.

After five months of studying abroad in Barcelona (from September 2007 to January 2008) I came directly to the FRFG to get a general impression of the work in a scientific foundation and, specifically, in order to know more about demographic and intergenerational issues. Assumingly I will finish my studies in early 2009 by writing a thesis about German foreign and defence policy.



Stefan Westemeyer, 21 years

My name is Stefan Westemeyer, 21, and I am a trainee of the FRFG at the moment. My work for the foundation will amount to seven weeks. I am studying political science and sociology (B.A. social sciences) at the Justus-Liebig-University in Gießen (Germany) since October 2006. Accordingly, my aim at the foundation is to learn more about demographic processes and solutions for demographic issues in our community. So I will try to accumulate as much knowledge as possible in my time at the FRFG and the Institute for a better Demographic Future (idf).

One hundred members of the German parliament propose a clause demanding intergenerational justice in the German constitution.

It is now almost a year ago that 100 Representatives of the German Bundestag introduced a bill demanding intergenerational justice in the German Constitution. In October 2007 the bill is finally being discussed in the Bundestag. The proposed bill (16/3399) is co-sponsored by 27 Representatives from the Union Faction and from the SPD, 27 from the CDU, 25 from the Green Party and 21 from the FDP. Through a new constitutional Article 20b the state will be mandated to protect the interests of future generations. The text reads: "The government has to respect the principle of sustainability and to safeguard the interests of future generations" In the part of the Constitution addressing financial matters, Article 109 Paragraph 2 will be altered as follows: "The nation and states must consider the requirements of macroeconomic balance, the principle of sustainability and interests of future generations in their budgets."



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Read a short summary of the first reading of the bill for generational justice to be laid down in the German Constitution www.intergenerationaljustice.org.

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The Journal Intergenerational Justice Review is produced entirely complimentary and is published quarterly. It aims at encouraging the consciousness of our responsibility for future generations. In addition, it informs on relevant developments around Intergenerational Justice and Sustainability. Moreover, it reports on the work of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) as well as on projects that deal with Intergenerational Justice of other organisations, particularly youth organisations. There are four issues a year. These are published in German, English or as bilingual issues (thereof so far twice in German-French and one time each in German-Polish and German-Spanish).

The annual subscription costs 25 Euro and has to be paid in advance. The cancellation period is three months until the end of the year. For subscription, see last page.

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Demographic Change and Intergenerational Justice

The Implementation of Long-Term Thinking in the Political Decision Making Process

J. C. Tremmel, Oberursel, Germany (Ed.)

Intergenerational justice has been achieved if the opportunities of the members of the next generation to fulfill their needs are better than those of the members of the preceding generation. For this, each generation ought to leave for the next generation an amount of resources is at least equal to its own amount.

The book deals with the complex relationship between intergenerational justice and demographic change and is characterized by its interdisciplinary approach. The authors come from a multitude of professional backgrounds and from several countries. This illustrates the implications of the demographic shift from many different perspectives. The book deals not only with the aspects of economic policy but also with environmental, societal and philosophical issues. The comprehensive volume is composed of five sections that pinpoint demographic trends, examine the impact of demographic changes on key indicators, investigate the relationship between key indicators and intergenerational justice, scrutinize population policies, and finally propose ways to implement long-term thinking on these issues.

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