

# Properly Divided Future\*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the intergenerational justice theory of obligations to future generations. I refer to queer temporality theory and evaluate its radical questioning. However, I argue that its destructive conclusions need not be accepted. Proper division of the time span according to the nature of the problem is important for reaching a moderate conclusion.

## 1. Introduction: Do We Need the Future?

Do we need to produce and nurture the next generation? Perhaps we do not. If so, how does this change the debate on our normative relationships with future generations? With this question in mind, this paper examines the theory of intergenerational justice in relation to future generations yet to be born.

The basic question of intergenerational justice is: What kind of justice relationship can we, the present generation, have with future generations that have not yet come into existence (and sometimes with past generations that no longer exist)? Since the 1960s, when global environmental problems began to be called more pressing, this question has been actively debated because of its increasing practical importance. However, intergenerational justice theory, which questions the diachronic normative relationship with people who do not yet exist, is not merely an applied issue, but has a distinctive philosophical significance that is not limited to the diachronic normative relationship. It poses a serious challenge to the theories of practical philosophy, which are said to have been "revived" since the 1970s. This paper will examine some of these works, but what

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we would like to question is the very premise of the "distribution problem," that is, the problem of what we should leave behind on the assumption that future generations will continue to exist. Lee Edelman criticizes this assumption, which is shared by both the left and the right, as *reproductive futurism*. In this paper, I would like to show that it is rather moderate to consider the issue of future generations from a zero-based perspective, using the *queer temporality theory* of Edelman and others as a guiding light.

When we refer to intergenerational justice, we sometimes deal with the normative relations among the groups separated by age within the present generation (specifically, the sustainability of public pensions and the "silver democracy" situation), which are distinguished as *intra*-generational problems in contrast to the inter-generational problems mentioned above. In some cases, the two are distinguished as *intra*-generational issues as opposed to the *inter*-generational issues described above. While there is some continuity between the two, we refer to other articles for a more direct examination (e.g., Kira 2016; Kira 2017).

## **2. Justice and Ethics, or Kyoto and Paris**

Discussions on intergenerational normative issues in Japan have been accumulating under the name of intergenerational *ethics*, mainly in the field of applied ethics (especially environmental ethics), partly because of Hisatake Kato's energetic introduction in the 1990s (Kato 1991, etc.). In addition, the term *equity* is often used in welfare economics. In contrast, since John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1999 [1971]), the term intergenerational *justice* has been commonly used in legal and political philosophy (mainly in the English-speaking world). The subjects of these discussions overlap substantially and are often used interchangeably.

Justice has been seen as the right way of *distribution*, as in the old formula "to each his due (*suum cuique*)." Of course, the distribution is not limited to material resources or goods but can include abstract rights, and the subject of the distribution is not limited to individuals but can be a group, such as a community. Therefore, the question to be asked is what should be filled in this formulation, but at least one becomes aware of the

distribution problem: *What* should be distributed *to whom*? In fact, the central issue of the theory of justice since Rawls has been precisely the just distribution. When intergenerational justice is discussed, the question of what the *share* of future generations should be, is also taken into consideration.

We also review the evolution of international efforts to address global environmental issues in reality; under the "Kyoto Protocol" regime adopted in 1997, the conflict between industrialized countries, which insisted on regulating greenhouse gas emissions, and developing countries, which insisted on the need for development, became increasingly acute. Multiple attempts have been made to alleviate this conflict, the most symbolic of which was emissions trading. This system of monetary trading of emission allowances, while a compromise, demonstrated that global environmental problems affecting future generations are not merely diachronic but also a matter of global distributive justice for those presently existing in the same time period. The *vertical and horizontal justice of diachronic and synchronic justice* needs to be explored in a relationship where one does not oppress the other.

Contrarily, the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, nearly 20 years later, will be the post-2020 international framework for climate change. While there are certain considerations based on the circumstances and capabilities of each contracting party, the Paris Agreement is characterized by the fact that climate change prevention is not seen as a distributional issue but rather as a universal obligation. However, its effectiveness was quickly cast in the dark by President Trump's 2017 declaration that the United States would withdraw from the agreement. French President Macron's criticism of it, "Make Our Planet Great Again," is a straightforward expression of the features of the universal obligation to address climate change in the future.

Of course, these developments are signs that climate change has become a pressing issue, and we must be cautious about reading into them a shift in moral principles regarding the issues of future generations. What we have identified here is that there are two possible ways of examining the issue of future generations: As a distributional issue among different actors or as a universal issue that is beyond such distributional issues.

### 3. Rights of Future Generations

These initiatives are rooted in the moral intuition that future generations should not suffer disastrous circumstances. This may be reasonable in itself and a normative theory that denies such an obligation would be unpersuasive. However, what does it mean for the present generation to owe an obligation to a future generation that does not exist yet? The justification for this is one of the greatest challenges of intergenerational justice theory.

For example, let us take an approach of "rights of future generations." This is a simple argument that the future generation has the right to enjoy a favorable environment, the present generation has corresponding obligations, and it has a certain amount of support because of the strong moral appeal of the word "right" (for a comprehensive review, see Kira 2010). However, this argument is challenged by the non-identity problem presented in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit 1984, chap. 16). If the present generation acts in an environmentally friendly manner in response to the rights demands of future generations F, the coupling of people will change, and the children who will be born will be different. Therefore, future generations that emerge later will not be the original F. This means that the realization of rights itself eliminates the original subject of rights, making the rights theory approach logically impossible.

Of course, this counterintuitive argument is the result of a narrow view of personal identity that makes it dependent on a genetic causal pathway (as a comprehensive examination of the non-identity problem, see Boonin 2014). For example, the most likely avoidance is in the direction of either (1) taking a loose view of the identity of the rights entity (e.g., considering a rights entity called "future generations" that is not subject to changes in its members) or (2) taking a loose view of the causal pathway (i.e., not making it dependent on genetic identity). Interestingly, the understanding of identity and causality tends to be loosened when the survival of humanity or life is at stake.

However, when considering the rights of future generations as collective agents that do not depend on the identity of their members, regardless of the content of their rights,

this is a prerequisite for the existence of such right subjects in the first place. Kobayashi (1999) summarizes that for a right to exist, a right holder is necessary, and that the rights of future generations imply the right of future generations *to be born*. If obligations corresponding to such rights are imposed on each individual in the present generation, reproductive rights will be severely constrained. This problem is not limited to the rights theory approach, but is likely to arise as long as the obligation to consider the well-being of future generations is accepted.

## **4. Obligations to Reproduce**

### **4.1 Perspectives of Queer Temporality**

Do we have to produce and raise children? This question leads directly to the nature of the normative order related to gender/sexuality: One of the characteristics of feminism since the "second wave" of the 1960s has been to problematize the micro ways in which the social meanings of gender/sexuality are constructed. This section considers the obligation of reproduction, while keeping in mind the arguments of its critical successor, the queer theory.

In contrast to the (possibly) essentialist view of gay and lesbian theories, queer theory emphasizes (1) a social constructionist view of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, (2) it positively evaluates the disturbance of meaning in micro-situations (e.g., inverting the word "queer"). Thereby, it has emphasized practices that "displace" the meaning of gender/sexuality (Pickett 2015: sec.4). Particularly targeted for criticism is heteronormativity (heteronormativity), which exalts families consisting of heterosexual couples and their children as the archetype of intimate relationships, and downgrades other ways.

Queer temporality theory, which has been developing since the 2000s and is important to the interests of this paper, focuses on meaning order in people's social time consciousness. In particular, it is important to note that, in most societies, it is optimized in a future-oriented manner that is most efficient for reproduction (procreation and child-raising). Its leading theorist, Lee Edelman, calls it "reproductive futurism," a

temporality shared by both the left and the right (Edelman 1988; 2004).

#### **4.2 Individual Obligations of Reproduction**

It is in the reproduction of the community that such normativity is most explicitly manifested; however, before considering this, let us examine reproductive obligations at the individual level. The claim that "individuals have a direct obligation to reproduce and raise children" is perhaps counterintuitive, but how can we deny it? Or should we deny it?

Jean Narveson, one of the leading exponents of libertarianism, previously discussed the individual's obligation to reproduce from a utilitarian standpoint (e.g., Narveson 1967). The question is whether the maximization of utility that utilitarianism seeks to achieve is the maximization of society's total utility (aggregate utilitarianism) or the maximization of the average (average utilitarianism). According to Narveson, aggregate utilitarianism is disadvantageous in reproductive situations. If a child's birth increases the utility of the world (no matter how miserable life may be), then the individual obligated by aggregate utilitarianism as individual morality is obligated to have as many children as possible. This would increase the number of people who live miserable lives even if the total utility is maximized, and the average utility would fall (the "repugnant conclusion" as Parfit later pointed out: Parfit 1983, chap. 17). To prevent this, we need only consider the obligation to maximize the utility of those present (i.e., average utilitarianism) and be neutral as to whether or not new life is created.

This argument is likely to be discarded as practically unproblematic because it is difficult to conceive a path of preference change in people that would lead to the existence of a huge population of miserable lives (Ando 2007, 121-2). Peter Singer's "prior existence view + aggregate utilitarianism" (Singer 2011, chap. 7) are also influential. There are various ways to avoid this, such as weakening Parfit's person-affective principle or setting a threshold for the level of utility (at the expense of theoretical consistency). However, under the assumption that giving birth increases the utility of the world even slightly, it seems difficult to directly deny an individual's reproductive obligation as long as utility calculations are made accurately (i.e., as long as the parental burden is

counted).

### 4.3 Collective Obligation of Reproduction

However, the individual obligation to reproduce is counterintuitive and it is difficult to imagine a situation in which alternative means of reproduction would not be allowed. However, what about the collective view that "the community has a collective obligation to reproduce itself"? In this case, each individual does not have a direct obligation to reproduce but has an indirect obligation to contribute to the reproduction of the next generation of the community. Note that "community" here refers to a certain group of people, and includes a large collective entity such as "humankind."

For most human societies, their own survival is the issue of utmost importance. In normative theories that address the question of how this should be, what Edelman calls "reproductive futurism" appears in various forms. Here, we review three representative arguments.

*Jonas's Categorical Imperative:* According to Hans Jonas, there is intrinsic value in the very existence of humankind, and for humankind, existence itself is a categorical imperative obligation. Based on this premise, Jonas posits that future generations yet to be born are absolutely vulnerable and that the present generation, which has unilateral influence over them, has the same unilateral responsibility to them as parents have for their children (Jonas 1979). Here, responsibility for the survival of future generations is captured in the image of the future-oriented temporality of the parent-child relationship.

*Rawls' Savings Principle:* Although Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* pioneered the explicit thematization of intergenerational justice in contemporary legal and political philosophy, Rawls' own argument is a modest "saving principle" that holds that each political community shall leave behind the resources necessary for the survival of the next generation (Rawls 1999, sec. 44). This is incorporated into the difference principle; however, it is unclear how it is grounded. Rather than an ad hoc modification of the rational subject image, it is more likely that (1) each person with a sense of justice makes choices with a certain future-oriented altruism even under the veil of ignorance, and (2) future generations that do not yet exist are the "most disadvantaged" on the time horizon

to whom the disparity principle diachronically applies. Herein lies one of the key words of Rawls' "turn" and a demand for (diachronic) "stability" that would be explicitly emphasized in the later period (on stability, Miyamoto 2018).

*Arguments from Democratic Legitimacy:* The so-called "silver democracy" or "gerontocracy" situation observed in many developed countries is often due to the intergenerational imbalance of the population. If democratic legitimacy is viewed as a matter of political responsibility, then in situations where younger generations are underrepresented politically due to extreme population imbalances, they have little reason (i.e., legitimacy) to abide by collective decisions. Then, if intergenerational democratic legitimacy is required for all generations with an eye to the future, as in the case of creating a system of intergenerational assistance through a levy-type public pension, for example, each generation has a collective obligation to reproduce so that extreme population imbalances do not occur (Ando 2017). The old age of the generation that neglects such an obligation is portrayed in dire images, and "deservedness" here, can be normatively justified as demo-sensitive (Gossries 2009, 141-3).

## **5. The View from No Future**

Social norms and legal systems related to sexuality almost always promote stable relationships that are heterocentric and unaffected by temporary passions. They also degrade other ways of sexual diversity and openness by labeling them "abnormal." Feminism since the second wave and queer theory have pointed out that this most efficiently promotes communal reproduction, as illustrated in some of the examples above.

These norms are oppressive to marginalized people. For example, arguments have been made to dismantle the heterosexual norm by abolishing the institution of marriage (dissolving it in a partnership contract). However, this can be criticized from the perspective of the need for communal reproduction (or from the perspective of fairness). That is, "Isn't it against fairness or self-destructive to criticize the heteronormativity that underpins the heterosexual norm and the legal system that embodies it, even



though one is benefiting from the continuation of the community?"

There are two main types of responses to these criticisms.

- (1) *Moderate response*: Injustice in reproduction lies in the imbalance of burdens between males and females (perhaps promoted by heterosexual norms in many cases), and it is necessary to distribute these burdens appropriately in a way that does not reinforce heterosexual norms.
- (2) *Radical response*: The injustice caused by the heterosexual norm is so malignant that its correction outweighs the need for communal reproduction.

Edelman's "No Future" declaration explicitly takes direction (2). Politics is a conservative effort, bound by "reproductive futurism" that "the future must be sustained," both on the left and the right. From this arises the curse of evaluating people by their "productivity." Queer is the practice of bringing conflict into this situation with the *death drive*, which rejects the future.

Edelman's proposal is a radical abandonment of the future-orientedness associated with reproduction, which is hardly realistic. However, a critical perspective is important. To paraphrase Thomas Nagel's famous phrase, *the view from no future* asserts that future generations yet to be born should not be taken for granted, but this does not necessarily have destructive consequences. It does not look too far into the future of intergenerational issues, but allows us to build up our thinking from scratch, so to speak, while balancing it with synchronic issues. For example, this means appropriately using both intergenerational *ethics* in situations where the survival of the human race is at stake, and intergenerational *justice* as a distributional issue in response to various problems. Moreover, future generational issues such as the reproduction of the next generation in the short term, resource conservation in the medium term, and climate change countermeasures in the long term have different normative characteristics depending on the timespan of the issue, and it is necessary to discuss how to separate the appropriate generational agencies. Therefore, a diachronic and universal perspective is required. The diachronic universal perspective will be reconsidered as only one of them. The arguments discussed in this paper will be positioned accordingly.

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