

empirical observation but does not try to systematize these in a philosophical foundational way.

For all of Sen's criticism of Rawls there is one concept that Sen barely mentions: the concept of the *reflective equilibrium*. The reflective equilibrium, which in Rawls is meant to ground the whole theory of justice, is the idea that we can abstract from our own perspectives, check these against those of others and adjust our own views accordingly. The reflective equilibrium, in my view, is remarkably close to Sen's own view of public deliberation. When all is said and done, Sen's and Rawls' theories bare remarkable similarity to one another when it comes to their philosophical commitments about the role of rationality and human agency. What they share is a rejection of Kant's attempt to provide a metaphysical foundation for morality. This means that they have, from a philosophical point of view, more in common than Sen may think.

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Axel Gosseries and Lukas Meyer (edited by), Intergenerational Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 419. ISBN: 9780199282951

Justice between generations is now a major preoccupation for many human sciences, especially for political and moral philosophy. This development is partly a result of the complexity of the issue, about which numerous debates offer new and exciting challenges, such as discussions on what we owe to people who do not yet exist. But this phenomenon is mostly due to the social consequences of the question. Intergenerational justice leads us to think about the stability and sustainability of retirement plans, about environment damage, etc. It urges us to conciliate the individual interests or needs of current, future and even past generations. With their book *Intergenerational Justice*, Axel Gosseries and Lukas Meyer provide the reader with an exhaustive and sustained overview of these questions, thanks to the insight of many specialists. In the first part of the book, the authors try to accommodate different theoretical approaches, in particular in the face of specific challenges arising in intergenerational issues. In the second part, the other contributors to the volume deal with applicative problems.

The contributions gathered in *Intergenerational Justice* present several lines of thought and the perspectives are sometimes substantially different. However, it is possible to distinguish an internal logic and to underline grounds for disagreement: each author relies implicitly on an account of why individuals from current generations should take into account future generations. At the same time, all articles deal with theoretical challenges specifically related to intergenerational issues. From these two perspectives, Rawls's influence seems to be predominant. *Intergenerational Justice* provides different interpretations of this Rawlsian approach, notably through an important debate between egalitarianism and sufficientarianism. The latter interpretation seems to prevail. We are going to try to understand whether this prevalence is justified.

Intergenerational Justice gives the reader an opportunity to identify the main debates, in particular the discussion about the reason why current generations should act for future ones. Some authors consider that individual interests are good and sufficient

reasons to act. It is the case of contractualist theories defended by Gardin (chapter 3), and reciprocity-based theories, introduced by Gosseries (chapter 4), even if the latter considers that generations must also avoid “free-riding”: a generation is unfair toward future generations if it consumes all the resources it has inherited from preceding ones. Birnbacher defends a similar conclusion in his reflection about motivational assumption, when he takes into account the absence of future generations in individuals’ behavior (chapter 10). According to these theories, an individual would act on behalf of future generations only because of his personal interest or his offspring’s. Others show however that personal motivations toward future generations are of a moral order. For example, Bertram invites us to make use of the Marxist concept of *exploitation* in order to know whether future generations could ask for compensation from the current one (chapter 5). For instance, a generation which made efforts to improve future one conditions of life without back reward, for itself or next generation, could ask for compensation. According to Thompson, in the context of a “weak communitarianism”, the motivation lies in the respect we owe to our ancestors: people must cultivate and promote their predecessors’ efforts and values (chapter 1). In a libertarian perspective, Steiner and Vallentyne defend the principle of equal opportunity between individuals in an intergenerational context (chapter 2). According to them, current generations do not have an obligation to save, but they have a duty not to limit the benefits that future generations could derive from natural resources as well as their capacity of ownership.

Finally, authors who adopt a Rawlsian perspective consider that current generations should make it possible for future generations to live in good conditions through a “just saving principle”: in a hypothetical situation, participants decide what they should save for the next generations (1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. See especially § 44, “The Problem of Justice between Generations”, 251 – 58). But the correct interpretation of Rawls is a controversial matter, in particular between egalitarianism and sufficientarianism, from the difficulty this perspective encounters when trying to cope with intergenerational justice. John Rawls applied to it his theory in order to determine the principles of justice between generations: under a “veil of ignorance”, participants do not know their “real” situation – but they do know that they belong to the same generation. Since the first principle of justice grants equal liberties for all, the participants must define a just distribution principle between generations, called the just saving principle: a trade-off between consumption and saving which allows each individual, whatever his generation, to develop and pursue his conception of the good life.

According to Rawls, two stages must be distinguished. In the first one, the “accumulation stage”, participants must save enough capital to build institutions that warrant equal liberties for members of future generations and respect the first principle. In the second one, the “steady state stage”, institutions already exist and the participants have mainly to preserve them. Therefore, the first stage benefits from a “lexical” priority: before determining a just distribution between individuals from different generations, it is required to insure equal liberty for all. The egalitarian interpretation, represented here by Attas (chapter 7), supports a fair distribution of living conditions, based on a reflection about the correct level of savings from current to future generations. On the

other hand, the sufficientarian interpretation, embodied by Meyer, Roser (chapter 8) and Wolf (chapter 13), requires the establishment of minimum standards below which living conditions are no longer considered as decent. The latter establish equivalence between basic institutions advocated by Rawls in his reflections on intergenerational justice, and his concept of *basic needs* as it appears in *Political Liberalism*. Rawls had suggested that we should add to his theory of justice a principle requiring that all individuals could dispose of sufficient or decent resources or life conditions (1993, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press).

Like Rawls's, all theories of justice have to adjust their principles to cope with the specific challenges raised by intergenerational justice issues. The main difficulties come from the fact that future generations do not yet exist. The peculiar statute of people who do not exist makes it difficult to impose on members of current generations obligations on behalf of members of future ones. How could we grant rights to people who do not exist? Furthermore, how could we harm people who may not exist at all, and whose existence depends on our choices? These paradoxes, pointed out in particular by Derek Parfit (1984, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press), called respectively the "non-existence" and the "non-identity" challenges, reveal the limits of some theories about intergenerational justice issues. Attas considers that egalitarian principles of justice can be applied as Rawls did to such a context: by virtue of a Kantian universalization principle, the duties that members of current generations have towards future individuals is almost similar to the duty they have towards their contemporaries. A Rawlsian original contract allows us to determine a level of obligations since a just distribution principle chosen by participants from the same generation must be followed by individuals from future ones: the principles of social justice established between contemporaries are also valid for other generations (chapter 7).

However, Heyd argues for the exact opposite position. According to him, the intergenerational situation does not coincide with David Hume's circumstances of justice: cooperation and obligations between individuals are required only if certain conditions are fulfilled (moderate scarcity in resources, same territory, etc.). Therefore, individuals from current generations do not have any obligations towards future ones. Moreover, individuals may not be rewarded for their efforts in favor of their successors: the risk of "chronological injustice" is serious. A solution could consist in building an intergenerational solidarity or cooperation through another institution, as family. A mother, or a father, has special obligations toward her son. The obligations of members of the current generation would depend indeed on the strength of the relation. Birnbacher's article is mostly an attempt to solve the non-existence challenge by underlining the fact that the effective absence of future generations discourages the current ones to take them into account. Nevertheless, the author considers that a chain of cooperation may stem from indirect causes: a selfish behavior could have indirect consequences benefiting the next generations. A chain of cooperation and family links promote some kind of reciprocity between individuals from different generations: each individual, whatever his generation, equally gives and receives. But such a proposition does not resolve all difficulties specific to intergenerational context. Gosseries puts forward a discussion about reciprocity-based theories to cope with the "population challenge". According

to him, there are inconsistencies when we consider demographic fluctuations between generations: it seems impossible to respect the reciprocity condition.

The problems that the egalitarian approach meets, despite accommodations, are one of the reasons why sufficientarianism seems to prevail on this issue. Meyer and Roser's interpretation of the Rawlsian perspective provides consistent discussions about chronological injustice. Thanks to a minimum threshold establishment, each individual is insured to benefit from decent conditions of life. Sufficientarianism seems also to be able to solve other difficulties egalitarian perspective cannot deal with. For instance, the establishment of a decent threshold is independent of the identity of the persons, as well as of the future size of the population. Wolf argues as well for a sufficientarist approach based on Rawlsian basic needs through a reflection about the long-term consequences of climate change. Climate degradation could become an obstacle to autonomy. In such a case, it is required to insure decent conditions of life for all, so that each person is able to develop her own conception of the good life. Bertram argues also for a sufficientarist solution but with a different basis, namely Sen's concept of *capabilities*: all individuals need to get decent conditions of life – good health, access to drinking water, access to education, etc. – to enjoy a real liberty (1992, *Inequality reexamined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press). According to Wolf and Bertram, sufficientarist theories can be used in intergenerational context.

Intergenerational Justice aims at better understanding general issues and specific theoretical challenges, through a wide range of contributions. By their rank and importance, the theories inspired by an interpretation of Rawls's work seem to be the most influent. The book illustrates the important debate between two such interpretations: egalitarianism and sufficientarianism. However, egalitarian perspectives are not able to deal with specific paradoxes. The latter approach appears to be the most adequate for intergenerational justice issues since it warrants all generations decent living conditions. But such an approach encounters with internal debates and difficulties that must be resolved. First of all, there are *a minima* two models, inspired by Sen and Rawls. Is it required to choose between them whereas *capabilities* concept appears so closed to basic needs principle? It is also necessary to define what a decent life means, and to consider whether such a definition will apply to all individuals in each generation. One difficulty comes indeed from the radical inequality of life conditions around the world: for instance, in developed countries, the access to drinking water is not anymore a problem, but it is a crucial issue in the developing world. Therefore, whether we assume that decent life conditions mean that human being must get capacity to enjoy autonomy, obstacles to autonomy vary from a region to the other. Should we establish the same threshold for all, or is it required, for instance, to impose a priority for the world's poorer? Whereas we argue for sufficientarian perspective in intergenerational justice issues, it seems crucial to keep in mind inequalities of life conditions in current generations around the world.

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