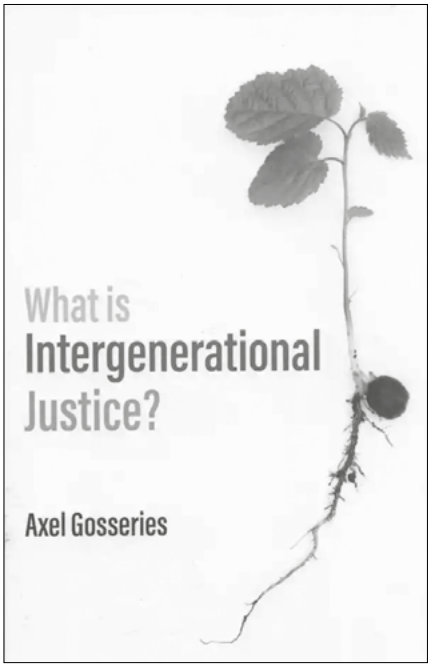
and justifying war, their piece certainly represents a strong and significant entry point into these debates. In this world of ever shifting justifications and definitions of warfare, *Can War Be Justified?* is a work dedicated wholeheartedly to clarity and readability which, combined with the thoroughness of its many arguments, makes it well worth a read.

Fiala, Andrew / Kling, Jennifer (2023): Can War Be Justified? A Debate. New York: Routledge. 233 pages. ISBN: 978-0-367-80985-0 (E-Book), ISBN: 978-0-367-40916-6 (Print). Price: paperback $36.99; hardcover $160.00, e-book $36.99.

Axel Gosseries: What is Intergenerational Justice?

Reviewed by Helene Weinbrenner



As Axel Gosseries states in the acknowledgements to his latest book, philosophy is an intergenerational effort. So is the conundrum about finding a good definition for 'intergenerational justice'. *What is Intergenerational Justice?* is Gosseries' extremely valuable contribution to advancing this search. Gosseries, a professor for economic and social ethics in Louvain, Belgium, is already a well-established voice in the field: As early as 2004, he published the monograph *Penser la justice entre les générations*, followed by the influential volume *Intergenerational Justice* (2009), which he edited together with Lukas H. Meyer. In 2016, he co-edited *Institutions for Future Generations* with Iñigo González-Ricoy. This study can thus be read as the subtotal of years of multi-thematic and polyphonic scholarship.

In his introduction, Gosseries gives a clear and concise overview of his study's scope, ambitions, and limitations. He starts off by defending philosophy's merit for the field of intergenerational justice, underlining the importance of theoretical considerations and insights for deliberative democracies, and thereby making clear that his book not only addresses experts, but the general public alike. Gosseries then proceeds to specify the study's central concepts, provisionally defining intergenerational justice as justice "between individuals from different generations" (5). He also distinguishes between age groups and birth cohorts (i.e. groups in the same phase of life and groups defined by the time of their birth; the study's focus being on the latter), and between overlap and non-overlap scenarios (i.e. coexisting and non-coexisting generations).

The book is structured around questions which, in a way, add up to answer the titular question: *What is Intergenerational Justice*? In asking: "Can we act *unjustly* towards the future?" (20), chapter 1 deals with the non-identity problem (NIP) and presents three distinct strategies to overcome the challenges posed by its implications. The first strategy consists in introducing a 'new grammar' (36), i.e. a norm-based notion of harm, in order to disband the 'harm-justice-nexus' at the problem's core. The second strategy, 'containment', aims at utilising overlap generational dynamics to contain the scope of the non-identity problem. As Gosseries argues, its implications for efforts in intergenerational justice do not apply to any scenario that involves an intergenerational overlap since the older generation, in these cases, is generally taken to be able to adapt their actions to the younger generation's existence and 'identity'. Strategy three envisions a 'full severance' of the relation between justice and harm. Only a notion of justice that does not equate a violation of justice with harm allows for 'non-person affecting approaches', thereby effectively "freeing justice from the non-identity problem" (50), Gosseries concludes.

Having thus established that we *do* have duties of justice to the future, Gosseries moves on to ask: "*How much* do we owe to the future?" (52) by reflecting on the principles of justice that efforts to support intergenerational justice should rely on. He presents four separate accounts. The first is called 'non-decline'. This account is based on (indirect, descending) reciprocity between generations and prohibits dis-savings (i.e. passing on less than inherited). Gosseries criticises this account for not allowing for net transfers. The second account is a utilitarian one, aiming for a 'better future' and requiring savings from one generation to the next (i.e. passing on more than inherited). The third account comes from a sufficientarianist perspective and is threshold-based, allowing for both savings and dis-savings as long as future generations are guaranteed to 'have enough', as well as requiring savings if this is not the case. The fourth and last account, called the 'narrow path', is based on leximin egalitarianism, prioritising each generation's least well-off individual, thereby leaving only a narrow path for just intergenerational distribution and very little room for both savings and dis-savings. Gosseries himself shares the most common ground with this account, although he advocates for a less strict version of it. He then goes on to problematise the role of inheritance in each of these accounts,

explaining that 'cleronomicity' (i.e. the rule of inheritance) imposes a certain amount of arbitrariness on intergenerational dynamics. As he lays out, none of the four principles is entirely independent from earlier generations' legacy, but they do differ in understanding it as reference point for current generations' duties ('non-decline', 'better future' and 'narrow path') or merely dealing with it as a constraint on current capabilities ('having enough'). Gosseries argues that 'better future' and 'narrow path' can at least be reframed in less cleronomic terms by adding 'from now on' to their requirements. This leads him to reflect on the relationship between intergenerational justice and sustainability, showing that the two notions are not at all synonymous – it is, as Gosseries argues, fully possible to come up with a concept of sustainability without justice as well as a notion of intergenerational justice without sustainability.

Following this discussion of potential *principles* of justice, Gosseries turns to the question of *metrics*, (i.e. the content of our duties to the future), in chapter 3: "*What* do we owe to the future?" (89). He begins by establishing a combination of sufficientarianism and 'Dworkinian resourcism', understood as the idea that allocating equal purchasing power to individuals while also assuming different talents and tastes will lead to some inequalities *without* being unjust. This account of justice is introduced in order to compensate for sufficientarianism's blind spots when dealing with above-threshold justice.

In applying this combination of accounts to intergenerational scenarios, Gosseries confronts us with our inability to anticipate future generations' tastes and talents. While this is easily solved by adapting a stepwise strategy (i.e. relying on overlap dynamics to reach non-overlap future people), another problem arises in this context: our influence, or lack thereof, on future generations' preferences. Gosseries presents three options to mitigate or avoid this predicament: He considers 'dematerialising' our heritage, but immediately rejects this idea as rather inefficient; he suggests 'open options', i.e. guaranteeing sufficient diversity for future generations to choose from. He also makes a case for 'inculcating frugal preferences' (106), i.e. teaching younger generations not to squander resources. However, in a final step Gosseries rejects the option of simply substituting resources with (anticipated or inculcated) frugal preferences as well as similar acts of substitution.

Having thus developed a framework of intergenerational justice in the preceding chapters, Gosseries applies this framework to the intergenerational challenges posed by climate change in chapter 4, asking: "What are our climate duties to the future?" (118). He first focuses on pre-1990s, i.e. pre-IPCC emissions and their relevance for our current climate duties. Based on the non-overlap with most of the 'perpetrators' as well as their ignorance about climate change, Gosseries makes a strong case for distributive instead of rectificatory approaches to intergenerational climate justice, arguing that past emissions and our relation to their causers should have no influence on our current duties. He then goes on to contrast three views of distributive climate justice, the first of which requiring the prevention of "injustice resulting from […] human-induced climate circumstances" (129), the second one including naturally occurring circumstances, and the third one allocating "climate-related rights" (129). This last view is the one favoured by Gosseries himself, as it "refuses to insulate a climate regime from broader concerns about justice" (132) and allows us to tackle various injustices by working towards intergenerational climate justice. Gosseries then asks if there is any possibility that a >2 °C temperature increase above pre-industrial level be considered fair. He concludes that the only way that could be viable, at least in principle, would be to accept the option of substitutability, which readers will recall he dismantled in an earlier chapter. Therefore, he finds climate change above 2 °C to be unjust. He then briefly discusses two ways to deal with this injustice, 'early efforts' and 'discount rates', as well as their respective drawbacks. As he explains, expecting higher efforts from earlier generations possibly disadvantages them and could therefore be specifically problematic from a 'narrow path' perspective. Any kind of discount rates applied to the interests of future generations tends to overlook the causal relationship between, for instance, discounting future wellbeing and future wellbeing itself, thus forming a circular argument and being similarly unfair in terms of the narrow path principle of justice.

In chapter 5, Gosseries discusses the issue of the "voiceless and toothless future" (153). Problematising the relationship between distributive intergenerational justice and democratic legitimacy, he asks: "Can policies be *legitimate* towards the future?" (150). Non-overlap future generations can neither participate in current democratic deliberative processes nor are they equipped to enforce policies in their interests in any way. In search for an answer to this problem of power asymmetry and potential democratic illegitimacy, Gosseries rejects a number of possible solutions (i.e. questioning the underlying notion of legitimacy; working with a concept of 'representation') and finally reaches a fairly nuanced conclusion, arguing that "our policies [are] unavoidably 'a-legitimate' (rather than the stronger 'illegitimate') toward the future" (163) and that therefore, 'legitimacy toward the future' should not be invoked as a *positive reason* in support of our policies" (163): "[W]e are unable to do better than being benevolent dictators toward the future." (163-164). Having arrived at this potentially discouraging verdict, Gosseries is adamant about reminding us of the relevance of his theory. Firstly, he notes that the scope of democratic legitimacy in intergenerational *overlap* scenarios is not diminished by these considerations. Secondly, he reminds us that where certain notions of legitimacy do not apply, notions of justice still do. Lastly, he touches upon models of future-sensitive institutional design which might help to attenuate intertemporal power imbalances, a topic which he and González-Ricoy published an edited volume about in 2016 (which was reviewed in IGJR 1/2017).

As outlined above, Gosseries begins his study with a defensive, almost apologetic gesture, reflecting on the merit and entitlement of philosophical considerations in times of urgent crises. As he argues, deliberative democracies are dependent on "a citizenry properly equipped to reflect upon and articulate its intuitions about what intergenerational justice is about. Philosophical clarification is one of the necessary steps in that direction" (2). In specialising his research for political education in this way, Gosseries expands his intended audience and explicitly includes non-philosophers. The endeavour to keep his arguments comprehensible to a general audience without detracting from the topic's nuance, thereby illuminating his ideas with a wide array of plausible examples, might be the most applaudable achievement of *What is Intergenerational Justice?* The book's helpful structure (its very intuitive chapter titles will hardly scare anyone off, unlike those of some other works in the field) as well as an accessible presentation of its theory of intergenerational justice leave the reader with an ample understanding of the philosophical issues surrounding the notion. In dedicating a separate chapter to applying the previously established framework to questions of climate change, the study

addresses the topic at the core of contemporary debates about intergenerational justice in a constructive and practical manner, thereby further supporting the author's petition for the relevancy and necessity of philosophy for current crises.

This matter of accessibility, however, connects to the one desideratum left by Gosseries' study. Given that the book not only develops its own hypotheses and theories, but arguably also serves as a summary of years of scholarly debate, one would wish for a slightly more transparent treatment of existing theories about intergenerational justice. Detailing the supporters of various philosophical positions presented in this study – and noting their influence – would certainly further Gosseries' already commendable accomplishments in giving a viable introduction to this scholarly field. As it is, one gets the impression that there are very few other scholars on intergenerational justice – which is all the more peculiar, as two of Gosseries' earlier publications on intergenerational justice were edited volumes. For instance, in his discussion of the NIP (that has been haunting theories of intergenerational justice for four decades now), he does not engage with solutions that focus on the particular notion of causality being used when framing the NIP as a problem (see the special issue of IGJR 2/2019 on this).

This limited engagement with other scholars' theories of intergenerational justice, also noted in Giulio Pennacchioni's review elsewhere,[1] does not substantially take from the merits of *What is Intergenerational Justice?* It is, all in all, an accessible yet sophisticated, concise yet thorough study on the topic and has the potential to benefit both scholarly debate and public discourse.

Gosseries, Axel (2023): What is Intergenerational Justice? Cambridge: Polity Press. 208 Pages. ISBN: 978-1-509-52575-1 (E-Book), ISBN: 978-1-509-52572-0 (Print). Price: hardcover $59.95; paperback $19.95; e-book $16.00.

1 Pennacchioni, Giulio (2023): Review of Axel Gosseries' "What is Intergenerational Justice". In: Zeitschrift für Ethik und Moralphilosophie, 6 (2), 209-212. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42048-023-00160-3.