

Chapter 56

Introductory Remark

We opened these two volumes with a citation from Herbert George Wells' *Modern Utopia*, in which he characterizes utopia by both a world dimension and a dynamic ("kinetic") evolution. A dynamic evolution is not only opposed to the antic conception of the world that has to preserve its natural harmony—a conception that remains present in early modern utopias—, but it is also opposed to any teleological perspective of human progress towards a universal goal of reason. Each person's duty is no longer either to keep her place within the natural order of the city or to sacrifice herself and her generation for the sake of progress. Moral duties towards a transcendent order, or a *telos*, are replaced by principles of justice between generations. And in the context of a globalizing world with growing interdependences, intergenerational justice necessarily is a global justice. In fact, some future benefits are expected to result from current restrictions to the use of natural resources, but no state or group of states can really make sure that these benefits will be enjoyed by its descendants in one or two centuries from now. And one cannot even assume that the members of any current state really care for what will happen to their remote descendants in one or two centuries, even assuming that it were possible to make any forecast about such a remote future. Thus, with regard to the remote future, the impartial perspective required by global justice is not primarily a justice between diverse existing groups, but rather between diverse generations. In this respect, intergenerational justice does not primarily intend to merely extent to the future such a global distributive justice as initially determined for simultaneously living agents (i.e., global social justice and global economic justice as discussed in the two previous parts of this volume). Intergenerational justice is a sphere of global justice on its own.

Diverse questions are raised in relation to principles of intergenerational justice. One of them is whether the present generation should care for transmitting to the future ones more than what it is enjoying itself, or whether the threshold—if any—should be even lower. Asking this question does not necessarily presupposes that there will be future generations, and in fact it is compatible with the case in which it would be better for future generations not to be born.

Indeed, some principles of intergenerational justice, combined with certain empirical situations, as well as with certain premises about what is a valuable life, may lead to the conclusion that it would be better for future generations not to exist.

Intergenerational justice concerns a plurality of goods, e.g., scientific and technological progress, income and welfare, stable institutions of the rule of law and of international peace, etc. However, the goods that are the most discussed in relation with intergenerational justice are the quality of the environment and the question of natural resources. In fact, these are the goods about which one perceives the bigger and more acute dangers and threats. They also are the goods on which the last of our spheres of global justice focuses. Our network devoted themselves to these goods at a 2006 conference that Philippe Coppens organized at the Centre de Philosophie du Droit of his Université Catholique de Louvain in cooperation with Axel Gosseries, who does research about intergenerational justice at the Chaire Hoover d’Ethique Economique et Sociale of the same university.¹ All of his colleagues in the network “Applied Global Justice”, from which the present volume results, thank very much Philippe Coppens, as well as Axel Gosseries, for this successful and excellent conference, of which we selected the following papers.

¹ Among other publications, Gosseries published *Penser la justice entre les générations. De l’affaire Perruche à la réforme des retraites* (Paris: Cerf, 2004) and he co-edited with Lukas H. Meyer *Intergenerational Justice* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2009).