

The ethics of intergenerational relationships

Janna Thompson

Department of Politics and Philosophy, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

According to the relational approach we have obligations to members of future generations not because of their interests or properties but because, and only because, they are our descendants or successors. Common accounts of relational duties do not explain how we can have obligations to people who do not yet exist. In this defence of the relational approach I examine three sources of intergenerational obligations: the concern of parents for their children, including their future children; the desire of community members to pass on a heritage to their descendants; and the relationship of citizens in an intergenerational polity.

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Two approaches to intergenerational ethics

Jeopardising the well-being of future people is morally wrong. But this moral truism encounters an obvious hitch. How can non-existent persons be the objects of moral duties? There are two ways of answering this question. The individualist approach makes future people the objects of moral concern because they will possess the same needs, interests, capacities or properties that make existing individuals the objects of moral concern.¹ The relational approach derives duties to future generations from relationships between present and future people. It gives us obligations to members of future generations because, and only because, they are our descendants or successors.²

Those who take the individualist approach typically extend to individuals of the future those moral theories that take as basic equal respect for individuals. They treat future people as persons whose interests and well-being, no less than the interests and well-being of present people, must be taken into account by moral reasoning. Consequentialists do this by including interests of future people when weighing up the costs and benefits of actions and policies,

CONTACT Janna Thompson  j.thompson@latrobe.edu.au

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deontologists by requiring that moral principles apply to future as well as present individuals. However, it is possible to hold an individualist position that discounts the interests of future people – regarding them as less significant than the interests of present people. It is also possible for an individualist theory to be partial: to favour individuals, present and future, who have certain properties over those who do not. An individualist theory can also assign responsibility for the well-being of individuals to those in a relationship to them.³ A doctor, for example, has the responsibility of caring for the health of her patients. The defining feature of the individualist approach is that it justifies moral obligations and entitlements in whole or in part by appealing to the properties or states of individuals. The doctor has a moral duty to her patients because they are individuals in need of medical care. If she could put her skills to better use by giving over her patients to other doctors and treating people who have greater needs she would be justified (some would say obliged) to do so.

The individualist approach has the advantage of being in accordance with an assumption basic to moral reasoning in the liberal tradition: that human individuals have properties that make them valuable in themselves and that they possess entitlements, and others acquire obligations to them, because of this value. On the other hand, this approach runs into serious difficulties when it is applied to future generations, the most notorious of which is the non-identity problem. How can future people, at least those who find life worth living, claim to have been harmed by our activities if they would not have existed if we had acted differently?

The relational approach does not abandon the view that moral obligation and entitlement must rest ultimately on how actions and relationships affect individuals. A friendship is only good and worth maintaining if it promotes the well-being of the individuals who are friends and does not unjustly harm others. Friendship is generally a good thing because it does people good. But what distinguishes the relational from the individualist approach is that it justifies moral requirements by reference to the value of a relationship that can be realised or maintained if and only if these requirements are met. The good of friendship, for example, can be maintained if and only if participants in this relationship satisfy the requirements of friendship. According to Raz (1989), duties that attach to such relationships have an internal justification. To understand what friendship is it is necessary to understand what friends are entitled to expect from each other. 'The duty is justified by reference to a good which is itself made in part by that duty' (20–21).

Relational duties answer to an important human interest. In the words of Scheffler (1997, 200):

We human beings are social creatures, and creatures with values. Among the things we value are our relations with each other. But to value our relationship with another person is to see it as a source of reasons for action of a distinctive kind. It is, in effect, to see oneself as having special responsibilities to the person

with whom one has the relationship. Thus, insofar as we have reasons to value our interpersonal relations, we have good reasons to see ourselves as having special responsibilities.

We are disposed to believe that we have special responsibilities to our children and even more distant descendants, and to those who will succeed us in our nation, state, tribe, ethnic or religious group. The relational approach thus has the advantage of according with the way that many people reason about inter-generational duties.

A relational account of duties to future generations also has the advantage of avoiding the non-identity problem. A person has a relational obligation, a duty to her child, for example, because and only because she is in that relationship. Since the obligations and entitlements of the relationship are determined by the relationship itself, their fulfilment depends on, and only on, whether its requirements are met. As Rahul Kumar puts it (2003, 111), the entitlement belongs to someone because of his status in a relationship and not because of his interests or characteristics as an individual. Prospective parents fulfil their responsibility to the person who has the status of being their child if and only if they take appropriate steps to ensure the well-being of whoever turns out to have that status. The child's particular identity is irrelevant to his/her entitlements and thus irrelevant to how his parents should be judged if they fail to fulfil their responsibility. If because of their failure their child is deprived, then he has a legitimate complaint even if he would never have been born if they had been more responsible. The relevant comparison is not between his present well-being and the well-being he would have had if his parents had done their duty but between his well-being and the well-being that a child of these parents would have enjoyed if they had fulfilled the obligations of the relationship.⁴

Relations are judged to be good or bad in so far as they answer to the interests of individuals. So it might be argued that an appeal to these interests resurrects the non-identity problem in another form. But this is mistaken. Parent-child relationships serve the interests of children and, often, parents. But in the relational account, the obligations themselves exist because and only because of this relationship.

Nevertheless, we need an account of when and how relationships generate obligations. Keller (2013) discusses three ways of justifying relational duties. The first, the one he attributes to Scheffler and Raz, holds that the intrinsic value of a relationship like friendship gives participants a duty to maintain it. The justification for this requirement is the value of the relationship and not the interests or properties that a friend possesses as an individual (though friendship or parenthood requires concern for these interests and properties). The second account justifies the entitlements and obligations of participants in a relationship by reference to their joint commitment to a project. Because of this commitment individuals in the relationship acquire duties to each other. The third account, the one Keller favours, appeals to the incommensurable value

of the individuals who participate in a relationship. Moral concern is focused on individuals. The relationship provides an explanation for why we focus our concern on some individuals rather than others.

None of these accounts is suitable as an explanation for intergenerational obligations. Keller's appeal to the value of individuals is an obvious non-starter. A view that requires acquaintance with particular individuals and focuses on their value as individual persons cannot be applied to individuals with whom we cannot be acquainted and who do not yet have an identity. The projects account seems to be ruled out by the fact that we can't make commitments with future people. If the intrinsic value account requires that participants mutually acknowledge the value of their relationship (as is the case for friendship) then it cannot apply to relationships with young children or future people. Moreover, relationships between parents and their young children or between present people and their descendants are not the sort of connections that can be, or ought to be, indefinitely maintained.

Keller, like most people who discuss relational obligations, focuses on relationships between co-temporal people. The problem of finding a relational account of intergenerational obligations may be due to a failure to understand and appreciate intergenerational relationships. I will explore three candidates for relational obligations spanning the generations: the obligations of parents to care for their children; the obligations of members of communities to pass on traditions and other things they value to their descendants; and obligations of justice that existing citizens of a polity owe to citizens of succeeding generations.

Obligations to children

Mary and Mike, a couple with few resources, want to start a family. However, they acknowledge that their future children have an entitlement to a better start in life than they can now give them. So they accept a duty to save before conceiving their first child.

Parents (more generally, carers) have a relationship to their children that gives them obligations. The children of Mary and Mike have an entitlement to their care and concern that is not possessed by anyone who is not their child. Parents have a duty of care to their children simply because they are their children. Let us accept that these propositions are true. The duties and entitlements of the parent-child relationship do not depend on a joint commitment or a mutual recognition of the value of the relationship. Nor do they depend on parents' acquaintance with the particular individual who turns out to be their child. It is possible to have duties to those who can be specified only by the term of a relationship: 'my future children'. The duties are owed to whoever will turn out to answer to that description and performing them may require that a person acts for their sake before making their acquaintance, or even before they come into existence.

The belief of Mary and Mike that they owe a duty of care to their children before they conceive them is not only intelligible. It is also surely true. Kumar, appealing to Scanlon's contractualism, says that a child has a legitimate claim because of a principle that morally requires those responsible for a child's welfare not to let him or her suffer a serious harm that they are able to prevent without substantial cost (112).

However, there are two ways of understanding why this requirement, called by Kumar Principle M, cannot reasonably be denied. According to the first, it follows from a more general duty to avoid causing serious harm. The source of the duty prescribed by Principle M is the vulnerability to harm of a future individual and the parent-child relationship gives Mike and Mary a responsibility for fulfilling the duty in respect to that individual. So understood the duty of Mike and Mary is similar to the duty of a doctor to her patients and it does not escape the non-identity problem. According to the second interpretation, the parent-child relationship itself generates the responsibilities and entitlements of those who are parents and children. The duties, as Raz says, are intrinsic to the relationship and parents have them because and only because they are in this relationship.

One reason for preferring the relational interpretation is common opinion. Parents regard themselves as having a special responsibility to and for their children, not because parenthood assigns them a duty to fulfil a humanitarian requirement but simply because of their having or adopting them. They would not think it justified to give up their responsibility if they thought they could use their parenting skills to do more good for other children.

However, being a parent can merely be a matter of having causal responsibility for the existence of a child. The parent-child relationship so understood has no moral connotations. An account of this relationship as a source of moral obligations must therefore give some account of why it is, and should be, so interpreted. The moral obligations of parenthood are not explained by reference to the satisfactions of having and raising children. They exist even for those who do not enjoy parenthood. Nor do they necessarily depend on consenting to have or raise a child. Perhaps people volunteer for the duties of parenthood by putting themselves in a position where their acts can result in the birth of a child, or by intending to have a child, but they cannot refuse responsibility if it turns out that their child needs much more care than they anticipated. They cannot reject responsibility if they have a child by accident.⁵

Since consent does not play a necessary role in the justification of intergenerational duties we have to look elsewhere for an account of why the relationship between parents and children generates obligations. Facts about human life and intergenerational dependencies are a good place to start. It is a fact about human existence that members of a family, community or society begin as helpless infants; they need care and support not only to continue to exist but also to become participants in social relationships. To become full-fledged persons

and to have an opportunity for a good life, children not only need physical care. They need to be the focus of attention and concern. They need a relationship with particular individuals who come to know them intimately and care for them sufficiently so as to develop their potential to be a person and a member of a community. They need to enter and learn how to thrive in a particular social world, to acquire an identity as a member of a family and a wider community and to fit into this social environment in a way that enables them to make use of its opportunities. These needs are not adequately satisfied unless some member or members of an older generation in this social world has the responsibility, whether acquired voluntarily or assigned, for a child's well-being. Most often these people will be its parents, but depending on the situation or the norms of the society they might be other family members or foster parents.

The moral obligations generated by the relation of parent (or carer) to child are thus best explained by the value of the relationship for a child or prospective child. They exist because this value will only be realised if the requirements of the relationship are satisfied by a person or persons who are partial to that child. For the relationship to be an obligation-generating good it is not necessary that the child recognises the existence of this value. It is also not necessary that parents gain satisfaction from it. Parents *are* likely to value their relationship to their children. They are likely to obtain satisfactions and a sense of purpose from fulfilling the obligations of parenthood that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. People have children for these reasons (and others). But having done so, they acquire the obligations whether or not they achieve the satisfactions. Since the focus of the relationship is on the good of the child, it must change as the child grows. Parents who want to prolong the satisfactions of parenthood by refusing to allow their children independence are doing them wrong.

The responsibility for ensuring that a child thrives in a social world can extend to children who do not yet exist. Mary and Mike are rightly concerned about how their future child will fare in the social world they inhabit. This responsibility also requires that they assess their social world. They might decide that it is not a good place for children. Or perhaps their reasons for having children include their desire to perpetuate their social world and traditions they value.

Obligations in essentially intergenerational groups

Katerina and Peter belong to a Russian Orthodox community in a country where this group is in a minority. They intend to bring up their child in their religious and ethnic tradition – indeed they believe that they have a duty to do so. They also believe that they share a responsibility for the maintenance of the heritage of their community and they contribute to various community organisations for that reason. Perhaps they have these beliefs about their obligations because they think that their tradition and religion is better than any other and ought

to survive for this reason. But perhaps they acknowledge that other traditions and religions can be just as good for people but nevertheless believe that their religious and ethnic community has achieved values that ought to be handed on to their successors. This idea of their duty is relational. They believe that it exists because and just because they are members of a particular intergenerational community.

Members of families, tribes, ethnic and religious groups, nations and states are disposed to believe that they have an obligation to perpetuate values, traditions or institutions of their group and to hand down these things to their descendants. The fact that they think that they have this obligation does not of course mean that it actually exists. Their traditions may not be worth valuing or not so much as to think that anyone should accept a duty to maintain them. If they belong to a community that harms its members or outsiders then they have a duty to ensure that its traditions are not continued – at least not in their present form. But let us assume that Katerina and Peter are right to think that their community and its traditions are worthy of being valued and that perpetuating them would not conflict with other obligations they have. But what is the justification for their belief that their communal relationship generates an intergenerational obligation, and what are its nature and limits?

Groups whose relationships are especially likely to encourage belief in an obligation to maintain a heritage for future generations are what I will call essentially intergenerational groups. An essentially intergenerational group satisfies two conditions. Firstly, it perpetuates itself primarily through family lines: through members having (or adopting) and raising children. Secondly, the value to members of belonging to the group depends, at least in part, on its being intergenerational. Families (understood intergenerationally), tribes, nations, ethnic and (most) religious groups perpetuate themselves primarily through descent and through raising children to participate in their practices. This heritage is valued by members not just because it has properties that they find good but also because it locates them in relation to the group's history, connects them to their forebears, binds them together as members of their group and provides a legacy for their descendants. The value to members of their heritage cannot be separated from the value to them of their group as an intergenerational continuum that maintains, enhances and transfers a heritage from one generation to another.

Being a member of an essentially intergenerational group is of value to individuals. It provides a meaning for their lives and activities that transcends their own existence. It gives individuals an identity that answers to their existence as what Baier (1985) describes as 'second persons'.

Persons are essentially successors, heirs to other persons who formed and cared for them, and their personality is revealed both in their relations to others and to their response to their own recognized genesis.

An essentially intergenerational group provides members with a heritage the value of which is the product of the work of many generations. In this sense members of different generations can be said to have a common project.

If the heritage valued by members of essentially intergenerational groups is worthy of being valued and if they have available to them no competing good that is of greater value, then they are right to believe that they have an obligation to maintain it for future generations. However, it does not follow that a person acquires this obligation simply by being born into an essentially intergenerational group. Because members are brought up to appreciate the values of their group, because they form their identity as group members, they are likely to value their heritage. But they are not obliged to do so. The obligation exists only for members who do justifiably value their heritage and thus have a common commitment to maintain it, though 'commitment' is a somewhat inappropriate expression in a context where most members are likely to share communal values as a matter of course. Those who do value their heritage have an obligation to ensure, so far as they can, that their descendants will inherit it, but these descendants have no duty to value or maintain it. At most they have a duty to make an effort to appreciate it. Members of essentially intergenerational groups may value some aspects of their heritage and not value other aspects. They may decide that their practices and institutions ought to be changed in order to accommodate new conditions or changing values. And members can disagree among themselves about what aspects of their heritage are worth preserving and what changes should be made. But even when they do disagree about the value of aspects of their heritage, they remain bound together by a common conviction that they are participants in a generational continuum that gives them an obligation to maintain a heritage for their descendants.

Intergenerational justice in a political society

Relational intergenerational obligations exist: some because of dependencies inherent in intergenerational relationships and some because of the value to members of essentially intergenerational groups of their heritage. These obligations do not depend on knowing the identities of future people or making a commitment with them. They take into account the fact that intergenerational relationships are different in important respects from relationships between co-present people. However, when philosophers and others concern themselves with duties to future generations they generally have in mind duties of justice – the duties present generations of a political society owe to their successors or, more generally, the duties of present people to people of the future. Is there a defensible relational account of intergenerational justice?

The obvious place to look for such an account is the social contract tradition. Contract theories of political obligation are relational. They give people duties to each other and to their political society because and only because they

have made themselves into citizens by agreeing to the contract. These theories raise familiar questions about the obligations of citizens who have never actually made such an agreement, but perhaps we can assume that their willing cooperation or acquiescence in the political and economic life of their society demonstrates a commitment. However, there is no possibility of a contract with the young or future generations.

John Rawls makes two attempts to solve this problem in the contract theory framework. In *A Theory of Justice* (1972, 284–293) he argues that the concern of heads of families for the well-being of their children and grandchildren motivates them to accept requirements of intergenerational justice: to maintain institutions of justice and to save for the benefit of future citizens. This theory provides no motivation to those who do not have, or intend to have, children and it violates what is basic to Rawls's account of how agreement is reached concerning principles of justice: that reasoning should take place behind a veil of ignorance where nothing is known about the status of the contractors or their relation to others. In *Political Liberalism* (1996, 273–275) the existence of a political society as an intergenerational society in which each generation provides benefits to its successors is taken as basic. In the context of ideal theory, any generation, given that it does not know where it comes in the sequence of generations, has an interest in agreeing to an obligation to save for the benefit of its predecessors. However, Rawls's reliance on ideal theory ignores a critical non-ideal world issue: why citizens should value their society as an intergenerational relationship sufficiently so that they forgo the advantages they might gain from not fulfilling obligations to future generations or why they should refrain from bringing this relationship to an end if they can benefit. Perhaps Rawls is tacitly relying on the acceptance of a duty to ensure the well-being of future generations. Carter (2001) interprets him in this individualist way and points out that the theory so understood is not immune to the non-identity problem.

Using conclusions reached in previous sections I offer two ways of defending a relational account of intergenerational obligations in a political society. Each bears a close relation to one of Rawls's approaches.

The first way of defending a relational account of intergenerational justice is to appeal to what has already been established: that parents and other carers have relational obligations to their existing or prospective children and that members of essentially intergenerational groups have obligations to maintain for future members a heritage that they value and have reason to do so. Parents, I have argued, ought to be concerned about the state of their society and to interpret their parental duties accordingly. So it is reasonable to insist that parents and other carers belonging to a political society ought to accept a collective duty to establish and maintain institutions of justice and economic and political conditions in which their descendants will thrive.

Some citizens, as critics of Rawls often point out, have no family concerns. However, many of these people will be members of essentially intergenerational

groups and are likely to regard themselves as having obligations to maintain their group and its heritage. These obligations would be difficult or impossible to fulfil in a society that discriminates against members of their group or does not allow them to practice their customs, and so they also have reason, in a society that contains many such groups, to reach an agreement about requirements of justice that will allow all of them to maintain at least some of their traditions through the generations. There may be some citizens who do not have either family or group responsibilities, but respect for the fact that other citizens have obligations to future people – a respect that their contractual relationship with them surely requires – should be sufficient to give them a duty to support requirements of intergenerational justice.

To be sure, this reasoning goes against the grain of a lot of liberal thought. Rawls does not appeal to the obligations of family or other group members in *A Theory of Justice* because he does not want reasoning in the original position to be contaminated by pre-existing obligations. In taking this position he, like other liberals, assumes that a society is of, by and for individuals and that its obligations of justice have to do with respecting their rights and treating them fairly.⁶ But this is surely wrong. Societies consist of individuals and groups, most importantly families and essentially intergenerational groups, and the interests of individuals are in many cases not distinct from their interests as family or group members. A theory of justice that does not start by taking into account group interests and the obligations they generate does not answer to the concerns of citizens.⁷ By taking them into account, a theory of justice for a political society will contain intergenerational requirements as a matter of course.

According to the above approach to intergenerational justice, its requirements are instrumental means for enabling parents and members of essentially intergenerational groups to fulfil their obligations. However, a political society, for many of its citizens, is itself an essentially intergenerational group. It perpetuates itself mostly through members having children and raising them as members of that polity. And its traditions, institutions and practices are viewed by many of them as having a value that obligates them to act to perpetuate them through the generations. These citizens are likely to regard themselves as participants in an intergenerational project of building, maintaining and reforming institutions of justice for the sake of themselves and their political successors. They value their institutions not only for their properties, but also for being the result of this historical process. They value having a role in an intergenerational continuum that binds them to their predecessors and successors. They are predisposed to regard themselves as being in a relationship to their successors that obligates them to maintain the good things of their society including its institutions and traditions.

Future generations are entitled to refuse to continue this project. Perhaps they will prefer to bring the project to an end by emigration, secession or amalgamation with another state. But the possibility that future citizens will reject

what past generations have done does not relieve present citizens who do value their heritage from having an obligation to ensure that their political successors are able to continue it. It does not prevent future citizens from having an entitlement to their inheritance, and this entitlement belongs to whoever counts as the political successors of present citizens regardless of how they come into existence or who they turn out to be. Citizens do not have an obligation to perpetuate institutions that they do not value or ones that they think are out of date. Maintaining institutions and traditions of value is compatible with reforming or reinterpreting them. Citizens are not likely to be in agreement about what aspects of their inheritance from past generations should be maintained and which should be reformed or discontinued. But so long as they value their relationship as members of this essentially intergenerational group, they will look for ways of settling their differences.

Citizens whose identity is bound up with their membership in their political society as an essentially intergenerational group are patriots. Not all citizens are patriots and they have no obligation to be. They might accept obligations of intergenerational justice simply because a society that maintains institutions of justice through the generations provides a favourable political environment for fulfilling obligations they owe to children and grandchildren and to their heirs and successors in the intergenerational groups that they do value. Citizens do not need to have the same reasons for supporting requirements of intergenerational justice.

Intergenerational obligations and partiality

Members of a political society have obligations to future generations because and simply because they have good reason to regard themselves as being in a relationship to their descendants or successors that gives them these obligations. Establishing that these relational obligations exist underwrites an intuitively plausible view of intergenerational justice that also avoids the non-identity problem. However, relational obligations are often criticised because they institutionalise partiality. They give agents duties to some people that they do not have to others – thus making an exception to the basic premise of liberal moral philosophy: that individuals are equally entitled to consideration. Though many philosophers who adhere to this premise are prepared to concede that special duties to friends, family and (perhaps) compatriots exist, they are concerned to put limitations on the amount of favouritism that these relationships can justify.⁸ We have special duties to friends, family and compatriots but our ability to favour them is limited by our humanitarian duties to outsiders.

However, intergenerational obligations to members of families, compatriots or members of groups of other kinds pose a special problem. These obligations exclude as objects of duty those future people who are not members of these relationships. If the non-identity problem is a reason for believing that

humanitarian duties to future people do not exist then it seems that people outside of our relationships are also outside the scope of our moral concern even when our actions are likely to affect them.

Very few philosophers think that non-identity precludes having duties to future people that are justified by their qualities as human individuals. But let us suppose for the sake of argument that it does. If our duties are only to future members of our own society then we have no direct duties to future member of other societies, but this does not mean that we do not have duties in respect to them. For we do have humanitarian duties and duties of justice to people in other countries and in determining what we ought to do for their sake we must take into account their obligations to their successors. Respect for others requires respect for the obligations that these others possess. It would be wrong to act in ways that would make it difficult or impossible for them to fulfil their obligations to their successors.

Moreover, there are obvious ways in which the relational approach could be extended to encompass an ever-widening collection of people. In a global society the intergenerational projects of many people are shared with individuals and groups in other countries or depend on their cooperation. There are projects that everyone has good reason to share: for example, to maintain a healthy natural environment to pass on as an inheritance to future generations. So it could be argued that our obligations to future members of our society give us good reason to enter into a relationship with citizens of other intergenerational societies, who also have obligations to their future members, to ensure that all of our obligations can be fulfilled, or that we ought to build global institutions as the basis for intergenerational obligations that bind everyone. The relational approach to intergenerational duties is not inherently partial.

These replies concede that an individualist approach might be preferable for explaining why we have duties to all future people. They merely consider how a relational approach might be interpreted or expanded, if need be, to do the same work. But there is another possibility that needs to be taken into account: that our humanitarian duties, including duties to future people, cannot be properly understood without reference to relationships.

In a discussion of why we have duties to humans that we do not have to animals Anderson (2004) argues that an approach that concentrates merely on properties of individuals – like their sentience or their ability to have a point of view – cannot explain the difference. We owe humans, however mentally impaired, special consideration that cannot be claimed for animals, however able and intelligent. She does not think that this is the result of specieism or an inconsistency in our ethics. Humans do have a special moral status, she argues, not because of any qualities that all human individuals share but because of their inclusion in human social relationships. ‘Human’ is not merely a species description but a moral status that exists because and only because of being included in human society. Human rights, she believes, have this relational basis.

The same argument can be applied to intergenerational duties. We have a duty to ensure that domestic animals present and future will be well treated (a duty that, Anderson says, derives from our relationship to them). But we do not have a duty to ensure that a population of wild animals – even those with characteristics that make them morally considerable – will continue thrive in their habitat through the generations or, failing that, will be able to find a home in another. We might undertake to preserve a habitat in order to ensure the survival of a species or for aesthetic reasons. But these are different considerations. We are, however, disposed to believe that we have a duty to ensure that future generations of humans, wherever they live, will be able to enjoy decent lives. The best explanation for this difference in our concern for future humans seems to be, as Anderson suggests, relational. We regard ourselves as having special duties to humans because we implicitly value participation in an intergenerational continuum that links us to a human past and gives us a moral concern for those who will share a human future.

Notes

1. Most philosophers who discuss intergenerational duties are individualists. They include Page (2006), Mulgan (2006), Dobson (1999), Feinberg (2013).
2. Those philosophers who take a relational approach include Passmore (1980), chap. 4) and Golding (1972), John Rawls's treatment of intergenerational justice in both *A Theory of Justice* (1972, 128) and *Political Liberalism* (1996, 273–275) can also be so interpreted, as I explain below. My approach (Thompson 2009) is also relational.
3. An example of this position is in Goodin (1985). Vulnerable individuals ought to be protected from harm, he says. Being in a relationship to others that makes them vulnerable is a good reason for assigning us a duty to prevent the harm. He extends this reasoning to our relationship to future generations. 'The vulnerability of succeeding generations to our actions and choices seems to be the strongest basis for assigning to present ones strong responsibilities for providing for them' (177).
4. Kumar's account of how the non-identity problem can be avoided puts an emphasis on the distinction between wronging a person and doing him harm. In my view the crux is the distinction between a relational and an individualist account of obligations and entitlements.
5. Parents can, of course, give their children to others if they cannot care for them themselves, but this too is a way of fulfilling their responsibility. It should be noted that consent or commitment as an explanation for why relational duties exist is often inappropriate in the case of intergenerational relationships. Duties of children to ageing parents is an obvious case where consent is irrelevant.
6. In classical accounts the social contract is made by representatives of families, who presumably have obligations as representatives. But in the process of making the contract they mysteriously change into individuals concerned only with their interests as individuals.
7. Rawls's later (1996, Lecture 4) view that requirements of justice are an overlapping consensus reached by individuals from different perspectives is close to the position I am advocating.

8. For discussions about how to adjudicate between the partiality required by special relationships and impartial moral requirements see, for example, Wolf (1992), Archard (1995).

Notes on contributor

Janna Thompson is a professorial fellow in the Department of Politics and Philosophy at La Trobe University in Melbourne Australia. She is author of *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Injustice*; *Intergenerational Justice: Rights and Responsibilities in an Intergenerational Polity*; and other books and articles about historical justice, global justice, environmental ethics and social philosophy.

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