

The Strings Attached to Bringing Future Generations into Existence

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ABSTRACT Many people believe that we have moral duties towards those we bring into existence in the short term: our children. Many people also believe that we have moral duties towards those we bring into existence in the long term: future generations. In this article, I explore how these beliefs are connected. I argue that the present generation is morally responsible for future generations in virtue of bringing them into existence. This responsibility entails moral duties to ensure that future people have adequate life prospects. These duties are held directly towards future generations. I argue that this direct argument can overcome challenges that indirect arguments, which justify moral duties concerning future generations via moral duties towards present children, face. The upshot is that considerations from procreative ethics help to illustrate that the present generation stands in a morally relevant special relationship to future generations, a fact that is often overlooked in intergenerational ethics.

1. Introduction

Imagine the following, hypothetical scenario: we know that, 500 years from now, humanity will go extinct. We also know that, 1000 years from now, space travellers fleeing their own planet will come to Earth to settle here. Now, many people think that, in the actual world, we have duties towards our future descendants to leave Earth behind in a decent condition. Intuitively, we do not have (comparably strong) duties towards the space travellers in the hypothetical scenario. The arguments that I explore in this article can explain this intuition.

I address the question whether the present generation¹ has *pro tanto* moral duties to provide future generations with adequate life prospects. I argue that the present generation stands in a special relation towards those they bring into existence. This relation is morally relevant and can justify moral duties towards future generations. In exploring this special relation, I draw on considerations regarding the morality of procreative choices. Many people think that we ought to care about the interests of our children and grandchildren. Such concern for our immediate offspring should motivate concern for our grandchildren's grandchildren (and their descendants). In other words, because we ought to care about the interests of our children, we ought to care about the interests of future generations more generally.

We can distinguish two ways to spell out this idea. According to the *indirect* argument, the present generation acquires duties concerning future generations indirectly, via direct duties towards the next generation. According to the *direct* argument, the present generation acquires duties concerning future generations directly, in a similar way in which it acquires duties towards the next generation. While several versions of the indirect

argument have been proposed in the literature, the direct argument has received much less attention.²

In this article, I show that a version of the direct argument based on the special relation of bringing into existence can overcome challenges that the indirect argument faces. In doing so, I relate debates in procreative ethics and intergenerational ethics that have been pursued largely separately in the literature. In Section 2, I discuss Anca Gheaus' version of the indirect argument and raise two objections. In Section 3, I present my own direct argument. I argue that the present generation brings future generations into existence (Section 3.1), which puts them in a special relationship with future generations that generates moral duties (Section 3.2) and that these moral duties entail requirements to ensure adequate life prospects (Section 3.3). The upshot is that we should consider a new perspective on our responsibility for future generations.

The moral duties that I consider here are special duties in the sense that they arise from the special relation between the present generation and their descendants. They are collective duties³ in the sense that the responsibility for ensuring that future generations have adequate life prospects lies with the present generation.⁴ Throughout this article, I will be concerned with moral (not e.g. legal) *pro tanto* duties, but I will omit the 'moral' and 'pro tanto' for readability.

2. Two Problems for the Indirect Argument

For the purpose of this article, I focus on Anca Gheaus' version of the indirect argument:⁵

P1: Each child has a right, against all, to adequate life prospects.

P2: For each child who has the potential, as an adult, to be an adequate parent, adequate life prospects require enough resources to justly raise children. [...]

P3: The right to enough resources to justly raise children includes the right to enough resources to provide one's children with enough resources to justly raise children. [...]

The argument continues *ad infinitum* because P3 is recurrent—it can be reiterated for any number of future generations.

C3: Thus, each child who has the potential, as an adult, to be an adequate parent has a right, against all, to enough resources to provide an indefinite number of successors with enough resources to justly raise children.⁶

Gheaus justifies moral duties concerning future generations by appealing to the right of *already existing* children to adequate life prospects which includes the right to enough resources to justly raise children, and to provide their children with enough resources to justly raise children, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Gheaus argues that her argument sidesteps the nonidentity problem⁷ that emerges in cases in which an action is a necessary condition for the existence of the very same people that it seems to harm.⁸ A famous example is Derek Parfit's 'Risky Policy' case,⁹ in which a community can choose between the Risky Policy, which will likely lead to a catastrophe in the far future, and the Safe Policy, which is costly, but safe. Both policy choices will, over time, affect people's procreative choices and thereby the identity of future people.

The nonidentity problem is the problem of explaining how the Risky Policy can wrong future people, even though it does not make them worse off (after all, they would not have been born had the Safe Policy been chosen).¹⁰ Gheaus attempts to sidestep the nonidentity problem by deriving duties concerning future generations via obligations towards those who already exist. Presently existing adults have duties towards presently existing children to provide them with enough resources to justly raise children. Imagine, for simplicity, that those affected by the Risky Policy are our grandchildren. Gheaus might imagine our children complaining to us: ‘If you choose the Risky Policy now, our children will not have adequate life prospects. You put us in a position where we cannot fulfil our duties to provide adequate life prospects for our children (or alternatively have our fundamental interest to justly rear children frustrated). This is objectionable.’

However, *pace* Gheaus, her argument does not conclusively show that our choice of the Risky Policy is wrong, unless we appeal to an independent solution to the nonidentity problem. Suppose we respond to our children: ‘It is true that your children’s life prospects will not be adequate in all respects if we choose the Risky Policy. However, the Risky Policy will not make your children any worse off than they would have been, because these children would never have existed under a different policy.’ The nonidentity problem resurfaces: if our grandchildren are not worse off than they would have been, had we acted differently, then why have we wronged them? In response, an appeal to the rights of our grandchildren is not sufficient. In the course of developing the original nonidentity problem, Parfit argues that future generations would waive their rights if the alternative is non-existence.¹¹ This line of argument would suggest that our grandchildren would waive their right to enough resources to rear children justly, to ensure they exist. To show that our children nonetheless wrong our grandchildren is to solve the nonidentity problem directly. So, we need a direct solution to the nonidentity problem to show that our children wrong our grandchildren.

The first problem for the indirect argument, then, is that the indirect argument does not succeed in sidestepping the nonidentity problem. If our children do not wrong our grandchildren, then the indirect argument does not get off the ground. If the Risky Policy does not prevent our children from justly raising children, then our children’s right to enough resources to justly raise children does not give us a reason against choosing the Risky Policy. (To be clear, defenders of the indirect argument can appeal to an independent solution for the nonidentity problem. My point is merely that the indirect argument, by itself, is still vulnerable to the nonidentity problem and thereby loses its distinct advantage.)

There is a second problem for the indirect argument. Tim Mulgan suggests that the indirect argument, or ‘zipper’ argument, as he calls it, gives the right result for the wrong reasons, illustrating this with the following case (assume that G1, G2, and G3 refer to consecutive generations, and the lifetimes of G1 and G3 do not overlap):¹²

Suppose G1 has the power to create an undetectable threat to G3, such that G2 will never know of the existence of this threat. Any moral theory adopting the principle that “ought implies can” will say that G2 have no obligations with respect to this threat, either to disarm it or to compensate G3 for its effects. Accordingly, the construction of the bomb has no impact on the obligations of G2. [...] If we are relying on the zipper argument, G1 cannot have any moral reason not to construct such a bomb.¹³

In response, the defender of the indirect argument might say that G1 wrongs G2 by withholding morally relevant information. Presumably, G2 has a right not only to justly rear children but also to be given information that is morally relevant to their decision whether to exercise this right. This seems to be true especially in cases where acquiring this information would change the moral duties that G2 is bound by.

However, such a response does not solve what I take to be the underlying worry behind Mulgan's objection. The worry is that G1's behaviour is impermissible because it has bad effects on G3, not because of how it affects G2. Surely, it is wrong to impose threats on future people *because* it is bad if these future people suffer. For example, polluting the planet is bad because it will likely lead to disease, malnutrition, lost livelihoods, and the like. But according to the indirect argument, such actions are bad because they violate the rights of the parents of those who suffer.

Mulgan's argument points to a more general worry: namely, that the indirect argument can only ground rather weak duties. Gheaus argues that the duty against choosing the Risky Policy is grounded in the frustration of the right to rear justly. A duty based on the right to rear justly would seem to be rather weak. This stands in contrast to the common assumption that we have strong duties not to bring about severe suffering in future generations. If we accept this assumption, the indirect argument does not get us far enough. In order to justify strong enough duties towards future generations, a different approach is needed.

I conclude that the indirect argument faces two significant worries. We should therefore look into alternative ways to justify moral duties regarding future generations. In the next section, I explore such an alternative.

3. The Direct Argument

The indirect argument explains our special relationship with future generations with recourse to our special relationship with our children (and our children's special relationship with their children, and so on). In contrast, the direct argument explains our special relationship with future generations directly. We incur moral duties towards future generations in a way that is similar to how we incur moral duties towards the next generation, namely by bringing them into existence.¹⁴

Elizabeth Cripps proposes a version of the direct argument, which focuses on the special relationship between present *individuals* and their future descendants. Cripps argues that parents have direct duties towards their descendants to prevent and mitigate climate change, assuming that parents have an initial responsibility towards their children in virtue of bringing them into the world. She then argues that by procreating, parents are likely to bring into the world a line of descendants. The initial responsibility towards their children extends to these further descendants.¹⁵

However, Cripps' argument seems to have a counterintuitive implication. It implies that people whose descendants are more likely to suffer climate harms have greater duties to avert them. Imagine a wealthy couple living in an area that climate change will not affect and a poor couple living in an area that will be severely affected. The wealthy couple can reasonably assume that their descendants will cope. The poor couple cannot. Cripps' argument seems to imply that the poor couple, but not the wealthy couple, has a duty to prevent and mitigate climate change. This is implausible.

Here is a possible reply on behalf of Cripps: parents have a duty to ensure not only that their children are well off, but also that their children do not live in an unjust world (because living in an unjust world is intrinsically bad, or because this would give them the burden of moral duties to help the worse off). However, this argument would be subject to the wrong-kinds-of-reasons objection that I have raised against Gheaus' argument. Surely, we should prevent climate change because it will cause future people to suffer harm, not because compensating for those harms might burden their better-off contemporaries.

Moreover, Cripps' argument, too, is vulnerable to the nonidentity problem. Assume that the mitigation efforts of today's parents will change the identity of their descendants. These descendants would not have been better off had today's parents failed to mitigate climate change, as they would never have existed.

Despite these worries, I think that Cripps is correct in pointing out that the special relationship of bringing into existence obtains between the present generation and future generations. However, I suggest that this relationship is not fully captured if construed as a relationship between individuals. It is better understood as a relationship that obtains between collectives.

In the remainder of this article, I aim to develop and discuss a version of the direct argument based on the relationship between present and future generations. Here is my argument in a nutshell:

P1. The present generation freely and foreseeably causes future generations to exist.

P2. If the present generation freely and foreseeably causes future generations to exist, the present generation has special moral duties towards future generations.

P3. Special moral duties towards people that one freely and foreseeably causes to exist entail duties to ensure that they have adequate life prospects.

C. The present generation has moral duties to ensure that future generations have adequate life prospects.

3.1. *The Present Generation Causes Future Generations to Exist*

The first premise might seem odd at first sight. Causing to exist, one might think, is something that individuals do, not collectives. In this section, I explain how we might make sense of the idea that the present generation causes future generations to exist.

To begin, it seems clear that but for the present generation, future generations would not exist. The present generation sets causal chains in motion that influence the existence, identity, and number of future people. Bringing future generations into existence in this way, and raising and shaping the next and future generations, also happens on a collective level, in institutionalised or traditionalised form. Bringing future generations into existence, then, can be characterised as a collective endeavour.

In most of today's societies, there is a shared cultural, social, and political context around raising children and envisioning a future society. Such an understanding can be shaped by tradition, religious and cultural habits, beliefs and ideals, and social and political systems. It is expressed in the way in which, for example, long-term policies are

decided and communicated or the way in which the young generation is raised and educated.

The present generation actively contributes to the continuity of long-term social and political systems and institutions. Recently, with growing awareness of the long-term impacts of our actions, the extent to which governments are concerned about the long-term effects of their actions has increased.¹⁶ A considerable literature is developing ideas for new political institutions that represent the interests of future generations in present policymaking,¹⁷ some of which have been put in practice, for example, in Hungary, Finland, Israel, and Wales.¹⁸ It is worth noting that the present generation can also ensure that they causally contribute to the existence of future generations by actively reducing the risk of human extinction.¹⁹

Of course, the present generation never literally makes an explicit choice whether to bring future generations into existence (say, by having a vote on the matter). However, this does not preclude them from being causally responsible for the existence of future generations. Agents can be causally responsible for effects of their actions, even if the action was not the result of an explicit choice (e.g. if performing the action is a habit).

In sum, bringing future generations into existence is a collective endeavour that requires the active involvement of the present generation through performing actions that contribute to the creation and continuation of long-term institutions and practices.

This understanding solves the worry that Cripps' account faces. The worry was that people might have different duties towards future people because the likelihood of being affected by current actions is different for their respective descendants. This worry only arises if we understand these duties as duties that parents have exclusively towards their own descendants. Moreover, because the special relationship between present and future generations gives rise to direct moral duties towards future generations, the wrong-reasons problem that Gheaus' account faces does not arise. This is because obligations are owed directly to future generations, not merely indirectly via the overlapping generation.

3.2. *From Causal Responsibility to Moral Responsibility*

The second premise is that bringing future generations into existence gives rise to special moral duties towards future generations. Bringing future generations into existence is by no means a trivial endeavour. It is an endeavour that comes with strings attached: it fundamentally and crucially changes facts about the present generation's moral relations.

The key claim here is that placing others in a position of need and vulnerability gives rise to special moral duties towards them.²⁰ This claim is familiar from causal accounts of parenthood. For example, Jeffrey Blustein writes that causing a 'helpless and vulnerable being to exist is sufficient [...] for moral responsibility'.²¹ While the vulnerability of an abandoned child might well ground moral duties upon strangers, primary moral responsibility should fall on those who are responsible for the existence of the child. Thus, David Archard notes that 'the central idea motivating the causal theory is that it is reasonable to hold liable for the provision of care to the child those who have brought it about that there is a child in need of such care'.²²

A similar argument can be made about future generations. To begin with, future generations are in a position of need or vulnerability. Robert Goodin illustrates this nicely:

In many respects they [future generations] are completely dependent upon us for providing help or for averting harm. Whatever we destroy or use up will be unavailable for future generations to enjoy. Indeed, the only way they will have anything at all (beyond that which they can create for themselves out of thin air) is for us to leave it to them.²³

As I have argued above, the present generation places future generations in this position of need by causing their existence through a collective endeavour. In line with causal views of parenthood, I argue that bringing future generations in a vulnerable existence gives rise to primary moral responsibility for providing for them. A full defence of the causal view would require defence of a full theory of causation. This is beyond the scope of this article. However, the following comments support the view that the present generation causes the existence of future generation in a way that gives rise to moral duties.

Since future generations would not exist but for the actions of present generations, the present generation causes future generation's existence in a counterfactual sense. One might object that counterfactual causal responsibility is not sufficient for moral responsibility. In particular, agents are not always morally responsible for outcomes when the causal chain leading to outcomes runs through *someone else's agency*. Clearly, the causal sequence that leads to the existence of future generations runs through the voluntary actions of the next and intermediate generations. However, agents can be morally responsible for causal upshots that run through other's agency. If Annie gives Bonnie the hammer so that Bonnie can smash Chris's toy car, it seems plausible that Annie is at least partly responsible. In a similar way, it is plausible that the fact that the existence of future generations is contingent on the choice of the next generations does not absolve the present generation of responsibility for the existence of future generations. (I discuss whether the present generation only bears partial responsibility and whether this weakens their duties below.)

Another objection might be that agents do not bear responsibility for outcomes that are not *reasonably foreseeable*. However, it is reasonably foreseeable (perhaps intended²⁴) that future generations will exist, because the next generation is unlikely to refrain from procreating.²⁵

This view on the responsibility for bringing into existence also opens up a new and interesting perspective on the nonidentity problem. The nonidentity problem says that because the identity of future people depends on our actions, it is unclear why our actions wrong these future people. However, if my argument is correct, then the fact that the existence and identity of future people depends on our actions *gives rise to* duties towards future people, rather than weakening them. Since we cause these people to exist, we have special responsibilities towards them (this is the case regardless of whether existence is a benefit for those created).²⁶ I suggest that this new perspective on the nonidentity problem aligns with intuitions in future-generation cases. Recall the space travellers from my introductory example: the identity of the space travellers does not depend on our actions, and yet, our duties towards them seem *weaker* than the duties we have towards our own descendants. The nonidentity problem counterintuitively suggests that duties towards the space travellers should be stronger.

3.3. On Being Responsible for Future Generations

I suggest that special moral duties towards people that one freely and foreseeably causes to exist entail duties to ensure that they have adequate life prospects. A full account of the

scope of duties towards future generations would need to say more about what constitutes 'adequate' prospects. For the purpose of this article, I want to make only the minimal claim that such moral duties would require the present generation to refrain from acts that cause significant harm to future generations and to take some measures to prevent foreseeable future catastrophes. Even on these minimal assumptions, moral duties towards future generations would require the present generation to take urgent action, for example, to protect biodiversity or to ensure responsible development of artificial intelligence technology.

One might object that the scope of such duties is too narrow. In procreative ethics, causal accounts of parenthood face the objection that the duties they give rise to are simply not strong enough to explain the far-reaching moral responsibilities that we ascribe to parents. For example, Elizabeth Brake notes: 'Bringing children to self-sufficiency – repairing their neediness – does not include the warmth and affection until late adolescence which parents morally owe to children'.²⁷ However, I think that the worry does not translate to the intergenerational context. After all, the moral duties that we seek to establish in the intergenerational context *are* weaker than what we commonly take parental moral duties to be. Duties of love, support, and care are not duties that we take ourselves to have towards future generations. (However, I do not take a stance on whether there are *other* arguments, compatible with the direct argument described here, that strengthen our duties. For example, perhaps we have moral duties of beneficence towards future generations based on impersonal welfare considerations.²⁸)

Another worry is whether the direct argument is overinclusive. A well-known difficulty with causal accounts of parenthood is that all kinds of actions (such as medical procedures or saving lives) can in the short or long term cause future people to come into existence.²⁹ If that is true, then moral responsibility for the existence of future people lies not just with their parents and more distant ancestors, but also with doctors, policymakers, and match-making friends. However, again, this point underlines, rather than threatens, my point in the intergenerational context. It illustrates that the present generation (and the next generations) together bring future generations into existence through many different decisions that influence the existence, number, and identity of future people – and these decisions are not strictly limited to decisions to become parents.

A worry here is that intermediate generations share causal responsibility for the existence of future generations and that this weakens the moral responsibility of present generations. I argued that we incur duties towards future generations collectively in virtue of bringing them into existence. However, the present generation only plays a small part in the causal chain leading to the existence of future generations. It seems plausible, perhaps, that those who are closer in the causal chain to far-future people bear stronger obligations towards them.

However, while near-future generations undoubtedly have moral duties towards far-future generations, the present (and, perhaps, the next few) generations have particularly strong duties towards future generations. This is because they are in a unique position to prevent or remedy harm and compensate for burdens that have been placed on future generations. It will likely be too late for later generations to do this.

For example, as we become increasingly reliant on digital technology in the public and private sphere, it is important that high-risk technology is developed, used, and regulated sustainably and responsibly. As Carissa Véliz writes, the 'task of our generation is to make sure that whatever rights we are owed offline are also respected online. Digital

technologies can only constitute progress if they serve the well-being of citizens and the flourishing of democracy'.³⁰ Action is needed now to ensure that the development of digital technologies does not run counter to these goals. For another example, climate change is predicted to have a huge impact on future generations³¹ which is why the stated aim of the Paris Agreement is to limit global warming to 1.5°. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, action is required now, as limiting global warming 'would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems'.³² In both cases, the need for action seems urgent: we likely do not have the time to wait for the next generations to do their fair share.

I would like to end with some remarks about the practical relevance of my discussion. The main upshot of this article is that we stand in a special moral relationship to future generations in virtue of bringing them into existence. The nature of this relationship and its consequences are underexplored. Future research in intergenerational ethics should draw on debates in proactive ethics regarding duties towards those who we bring into existence.

With more possibilities to influence the future of our descendants, we might face important choices about whether we have the right to put them on a certain trajectory or otherwise exercise authority over them. This is a question about whether generations possess *sovereignty*, and what it means to respect this sovereignty.³³ Generational sovereignty raises many fascinating questions. I suggest that it is important to view generational sovereignty from the perspective of the special moral relationship between the present and future generations. If we recognise the existence of such a relationship, then future generations are not like faraway strangers or the space travellers. Our responsibility for bringing future generations into existence plausibly gives us greater responsibility to act in certain ways, for example, to ensure that future generations have the means for making sovereign decisions. However, this special relation might also give us rights to shape the lives of future generations to some extent.³⁴

Another upshot of this article is that the strength of our moral duties towards future generations does not only derive from our relationship with those we bring into existence, but also from empirical circumstances: that we are today in a crucial position to influence the welfare of humanity, and the course of democracy, over the far future.

I think that my argument for duties towards future generations (in virtue of our special relationship) supports reforms to make society, politics, and business more long-term oriented. This might include reforms to strengthen the voice of future generations in policy-making, for example, through institutional change,³⁵ research into long-term risks for democracy and the flourishing of future people,³⁶ and efforts to embed long-term thinking in business and society. I also argued that bringing future generations into existence and shaping their lives is a collective endeavour. It is therefore crucial that reforms are debated in the global community.

Another upshot is that the special relation to far-future generations is not limited to those who exist today. Assuming that the next generation (and the ones after that) will also contribute to bringing future generations into existence, moral responsibility does not lie with the present generation alone. Even if the burden of taking action with regard to pressing issues lies largely with the present generation, further research might address the question whether, and if so, how, it might be permissible to share the cost of ensuring adequate life prospects for future generations between generations. For example, investing in

reshaping today's economy to make it more sustainable long term might result in higher debt and taxation levels in the nearer future, and a question that arises is whether this imposition on the next generation can be justified. While I cannot answer these questions here, I hope to have illustrated that the direct argument for moral duties towards future generations provides interesting new perspectives on issues of topical relevance.

4. Conclusion

I argued that bringing future generations into existence comes with strings attached. The present generation stands in a special relationship with its future descendants. This gives rise to direct moral duties to ensure that future generations have adequate life prospects. The direct argument can overcome problems that the indirect argument faces. While I have not given a comprehensive account of the strength and scope of moral duties towards future generations, I suggested that the strength of duties might depend on the impact that the present generation has on future generations and the extent to which it is permissible to share the burden of fulfilling these duties with the next generations.

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Acknowledgements

The main research on this article was conducted at the University of Southampton, supported by a Arts and Humanities Research Council PhD studentship (Grant number [AH/L503939/1]) and a Royal Institute of Philosophy Bursary. Final revisions were made at the Technical University of Munich. I had the idea for this article during my time as a PhD fellow at the Centre for Moral and Political Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2018, and I thank the Centre, and especially Avner de-Shalit, for discussion. I am very grateful to Anca Gheaus, Ben Saunders, Teresa Baron, and Sigmund Schilpzand for extremely helpful written comments on earlier drafts of this article and audiences at the Graduate Conference in Political Theory 2019 at the University of Oxford and the Graduate Conference in Political and Legal Theory 2019 at the University of Warwick for discussion. I thank anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* for their insightful comments, which have significantly improved the article.

NOTES

- 1 I remain neutral on whether the present bearers of collective duties are sets of individual agents (e.g. society at large) or sets of institutional agents (e.g. nation-states) or both.
- 2 A notable exception is Elizabeth Cripps, 'Do parents have a special duty to mitigate climate change?', *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 16,3 (2017): 308–325, at pp. 316–318.
- 3 We can understand the claim that 'the present generation' is the bearer of moral duties in two ways. First, presently existing individuals can hold a joint duty. On an individual level, this could entail duties to work towards institutional arrangements that ensure joint duties are fulfilled, similar to what Collins calls 'collectivisation'

duties in Stephanie Collins, 'Collectives' duties and collectivisation duties', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91,2 (2013): 231–248.) One might worry that a group as big and dispersed as humanity cannot form a joint goal or coordinate their efforts, as it seems necessary for a duty bearer (Anne Schwenkenbecher, 'Joint duties and global moral obligations', *Ratio* 26,3 (2013): 310–328, at p. 323.) However, I suggest that global movements, such as the climate movement, show that large-scale joint action and coordination is possible. Second, present group agents such as nation-states or corporations can hold moral duties. For a comprehensive account of group agency, see Christian List & Philip Pettit, *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). I wish to remain neutral with regard to whether our duties towards future generations are better understood as a set of individual duties (to contribute to a joint goal) or as duties that we hold collectively in the first instance. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

- 4 A full account of special collective duties would need to spell out what taking responsibility for future generations would look like in practice. Rather than developing such an account, this article makes the more fundamental point that such further investigation would be worthwhile, and indeed mandated, if we take the moral relevance of the special relation that we stand in to future generations seriously. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.
- 5 I focus on the argument in Anca Gheaus, 'The right to parent and duties concerning future generations', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24,4 (2016): 487–508. This is because Gheaus' argument grounds general duties, rather than being limited in scope to e.g. climate change. Moreover, it relies on a clearly spelled out notion of the rights that are infringed (the right to rear) which provides a response to the objection that future people's procreative choices are not present people's business and therefore ought not to be taken into account when determining moral obligations. Other indirect arguments have been presented by Richard B. Howarth, 'Intergenerational justice and the chain of obligation', *Environmental Values* 1,2 (1992): 133–140; Steve Vanderheiden, 'Conservation, foresight, and the future generations problem', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 49,4 (2006): 337–352; Joseph Mazon, 'Liberal justice, future people, and natural resource conservation', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38,4 (2010): 380–408; Cripps op. cit., and Gerhard Bos, 'A chain of status: Long-term responsibility in the context of human rights' in Gerhard Bos & Marcus Düwell (eds) *Human Rights and Sustainability: Moral Responsibilities for the Future* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 107–120.
- 6 Gheaus op. cit., pp. 487–488.
- 7 Gheaus op. cit., p. 490.
- 8 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 351–379. See also Derek Parfit, 'Energy policy and the further future: The identity problem' in Stephen Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson & Henry Shue (eds) *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 112–121.
- 9 Parfit 2010 op. cit., p. 112.
- 10 I assume with Parfit 2010 op. cit., p. 113 that the future generations subject to the Risky Policy still have lives that are overall worth living.
- 11 This argument is given in Parfit 1984 op. cit., p. 364.
- 12 Tim Mulgan, *Future People: A Moderate Consequentialist Account of Our Obligations to Future Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 31.
- 13 Mulgan op. cit., p. 32.
- 14 I assume that existence is not inherently bad for future generations. This assumption can be challenged. If existence is inherently bad, then it would be wrong to bring future generations into existence. See also note 25. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to make this explicit.
- 15 Cripps op. cit., pp. 316–317.
- 16 House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, 'Governing the Future, Second Report of Session 2006–07', Report, together with formal minutes (London: The Stationary Office, 2007), p. 6. Online at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubadm/123/123i.pdf>. accessed 06/06/2020.
- 17 See, e.g., Iñigo González-Ricoy & Axel Gosseries, *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 18 For a description and analysis of case studies, see Michael Rose, *Zukünftige Generationen in der heutigen Demokratie. Theorie und Praxis der Proxy-Repräsentation* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), pp. 227–405. See also Michael Rose & Jonathan Hoffmann, 'Seven Building Blocks for an Intergenerationally Just Democracy', Position Paper (Stuttgart: Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations, June 2020). Online at: <https://www.>

- intergenerationaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/EN_PP_Building-blocks-for-intergenerationally-just-democracy.pdf. accessed 02/06/2021.
- 19 According to the Stern Report, the risk of human extinction in the next century might be as high as 10%. U.K. Treasury, 'Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change' (2006), p. 47. Online at: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100407172811/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/stern_review_report.htm. accessed 01/06/2020.
 - 20 Elizabeth Brake & Joseph Millum, 'Parenthood and procreation' in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), sect. 4.4. Online at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/parenthood/>. accessed 02/06/2021; James Lindemann Nelson, 'Parental obligations and the ethics of surrogacy: A causal perspective', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 5,1 (1991): 49–61.
 - 21 Jeffrey Blustein, 'Procreation and parental responsibility', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 28,2 (1997): 79–86, at p. 79. See also David Archard, 'The obligations and responsibilities of parenthood' in David Archard & David Benatar (eds) *Procreation and Parenthood: The Ethics of Bearing and Rearing Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 110. See also Nelson op. cit., p. 57.
 - 22 Archard op. cit., p. 111.
 - 23 Robert E. Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable: A Re-analysis of Our Social Responsibilities* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 177. Goodin suggests that the vulnerability of future generations gives rise to moral responsibilities to provide for them. However, this idea is vulnerable to the nonidentity problem and might be rejected by those who believe that we do not have strong duties to aid. The direct argument avoids both problems.
 - 24 I suggest that the collective endeavour of bringing future generations into existence is intentional in the sense that the present generation takes on an active role in creating and adapting long-term policies and institutions in order to influence procreative choices. For example, most governments provide support for family planning, and many governments have policies in place to help their citizens balance work and family obligations. See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Government Policies to Raise or Lower the Fertility Level', Population Facts (December 2017). Online at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2017-10.pdf. Last accessed 07/09/2019.
 - 25 It is controversial whether existence is overall beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Some philosophers have argued that having children is morally wrong, because existence is overall harmful, e.g. David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). If this is true, then perhaps we *should* collectively decide not to bring future generations into existence. In this case, it would still be true that we are morally responsible for those we bring into existence, even if we should not have brought them into existence.
 - 26 This point is similar to an argument given by K. Lindsey Chambers, 'Wronging future children', *Ergo* 6,5 (2019): 119–141. Chambers discusses cases of individual procreation, in particular cases in which procreators select for genetic traits, arguing that parents have role-based duties towards their children to provide them with adequate life prospects, regardless of the children's identity. Note that an appeal to role-based duties does not help the indirect argument. After all, it seems plausible that parents do not violate their role-based duties towards their children if they fail to avert harm that they could not have averted. If we implement the Risky Policy today, future parents cannot avert harm. If future parents do not act unjustly towards their children, then according to the indirect argument, the present generation does not have duties concerning future generations.
 - 27 Elizabeth Brake, 'Willing parents: A voluntarist account of parental role obligations' in David Archard & David Benatar (eds) *Procreation and Parenthood: The Ethics of Bearing and Rearing Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 160.
 - 28 See Hilary Greaves & William MacAskill. 'The Case for Strong Longtermism'. Global Priorities Institute Working Paper 7 (2019). Online at: <https://globalprioritiesinstitute.org/hilary-greaves-william-macaskill-the-case-for-strong-longtermism/>. accessed 02/06/2021.
 - 29 Blustein op. cit., p. 82.
 - 30 Carissa Véliz, 'Privacy and digital ethics after the pandemic', *Nature Electronics* 4,1 (2021): 10–11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41928-020-00536-y>.
 - 31 According to the WHO, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year. WHO. Climate Change and health. (1 February 2018) <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

- 32 IPCC, 'Summary for policymakers' in V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea *et al.* (eds) *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (Geneva: World Meteorological Organization, 2018), p. 15.
- 33 Axel Gosseries, 'Generational sovereignty' in Iñigo González-Ricoy & Axel Gosseries (eds) *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 98–112.
- 34 Regarding the limits of such rights and responsibilities, it might be interesting to connect this with discussions about children's right to an open future, see Joel Feinberg, 'The child's right to an open future' in Randall R. Curren (ed.) *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 112–123. The idea that we should respect the autonomy of future generations and their right to an open future might also help to counter another worry. The worry is that the direct argument might permit us to bring the next generation into existence under the condition that they do not procreate and use up Earth's resources ourselves. The moral duties towards those we bring into existence go beyond mere provisions for their welfare and plausibly include duties to respect their autonomy. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this worry.
- 35 Iñigo González-Ricoy & Axel Gosseries (eds) *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 36 See Toby Ord, *The Precipice. Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). It might be another upshot of my view that the risk of being locked into an undesirable future is different from the risk of human extinction, since causing an undesirable future would violate relational duties to future people.