

The Right to Create Future Generations

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Full draft available upon request

Abstract:

When discussing our future-facing obligations, we tend to assume that future generations will exist. We then consider what duties we owe to future people—that is, what future people demand from us. This paper takes a different approach by exploring our future-regarding obligations while neither taking future generations' existence for granted, nor claiming that our obligations arise from duties owed to future people themselves. I argue that we (existing people) have a right to create future generations—and that this right entails duties, owed to ourselves, to devote resources to promoting the welfare of future people.

First, I argue that we have a strong interest in creating future generations. Specifically, our reasons for creating future generations can be derived from currently existing people: we have a love for humanity, future generations confer value on our activities, and creating future generations allows us to avoid psychological harm. Second, I argue that the interest in creating future generations plausibly grounds a collective right to do so. This right is held by the current generation and is distinct from individual procreation and parenting rights. Third, I argue that the right to create future generations entails a duty to establish conditions conducive to human flourishing, particularly via securing human rights for future people. This duty, though future-regarding, is not owed to future people, but is instead owed to the current generation. Fourth, I defend my view against the objection that it leads to implausible judgments about the actions of past generations.

Ultimately, my account reveals a novel source of strong intergenerational duties intended to supplement the standard approach to intergenerational ethics.