

# **Intergenerational Justice: Rights versus Fairness**

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*Philosophy Study*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2011, pp. 237–246.

## **Abstract**

Among various views on intergenerational justice, the most widely accepted theory invokes the rights of future generations. However, the rights theory seems to suffer from the non-identity problem addressed by Derek Parfit. Some rights theorists attempt to circumvent the problem by examining causal links between actions taken by preceding generations and their effects on succeeding ones. Others try to do so by replacing future individual rights with such collective rights. This paper argues that both individualist and collectivist versions of the rights theory fail to supply grounds for intergenerational concern. The paper then offers an alternative theory that refines the idea of duty of fair play developed by John Rawls and applies it to the context of intergenerational relationships.

To begin with, I identify several characteristics of posterity and explicate the adverse implications these characteristics have for other major theories of intertemporal concern than the rights theory. Next, different versions of the rights theory are closely examined from the perspective of the non-identity problem. Then, I offer an alternative argument for caring about future people, which is founded on the idea of intergenerational fair play. This paper concludes by noting that the fairness theory, unlike its rivals, does not face the non-identity problem or any other problems stemming from the features of posterity previously identified.

**Keywords:** duty of fair play, non-identity problem, resourcism, rights of future generations, sufficientarianism