The article by Professor Van Parijs presents a large number of theoretical issues also discussed in the articles concerned with intergenerational social policy. To examine the demands of intergenerational justice Van Parijs considers first, justice between cohorts and thus the question of “just heritage” and second, justice between age groups as envisaged through the question of “just transfers”. A non-utilitarian, Van Parijs is of the opinion that justice is not aiming at the maximisation of the well-being or happiness of individuals but to ensure “to all as much as possible (…) the rights and means allowing them to pursue the realization of their conception of what a successful life is” (p. 42). His conception of justice relies on the “lexicographic maximin”. It follows that the heritage that a cohort should leave to the next is not one in which the latter receives exactly the same stock of natural resources but one in which it inherits a “productive potential” at least as high as the one the former generation had received. It is thus indispensable that generations invest sufficiently and foster technical progress to preserve the productive potential necessary for the future to be in a position to “promote the real liberty of the least well-off within itself” (p. 49).

With respect to justice among age groups, Van Parijs underlines that two major difficulties in the theory of commutative justice are that it does not specify any minimal level of transfer and is sensitive to life expectancy in a counter-intuitive way. Van Parijs seems to be more favourable to indirect reciprocity. If the productive potential increases or decreases for an age group, the surplus or the deficit should be proportionally born by all, under the constraint of maintaining subsistence for all. The solution to the current pension system crisis resulting from demographic change lies in the increase of the productive potential for the future generation such as partly financing pensions through capitalization, but also greater investments in infrastructures, R&D and training. In his conclusion, Van Parijs suggests that a coexistence of the demands of intergenerational justice between cohorts and between age groups implies “an obligation of the financing of a basic pension at the appropriate normative level” (p. 59). Thus, “what matters from the perspective of justice, is the absolute level of basic revenue in each age group and the potential left for each cohort of adults to the next so as to fulfil its obligations.” He can consequently conclude that the benefit ratios are particularly inappropriate as a method of discussing intergenerational justice. Unfortunately, it is not always obvious how Van Parijs reconciles justice between generations and justice between age groups. One other problem is the absence of a criterion to define when the demands of justice start and end for each age group as the model does not allow progression of the adult age group through time. Besides, the author does not explain how the demand from current generations to bequeath an at least as high productive potential could constrain the demand to ensure to all and as much as possible the rights and means allowing them to pursue the realization of their conception of what a successful life is.

Professor Bichot’s article on pensions contests the use of indirect reciprocity to evaluate the dues and payments that each age group should receive from and provide others with. Citing a study by Marcilhacy (2009) aimed at assessing the level of reciprocal transfers, he evaluates that the benefits and expenses devoted to younger generations (infants and children) are much larger than what pensioners will receive from them by a ratio possibly as high as four. The benefits that are taken into account to calculate what children have received from their parents seems however re-
restrictive. Education, family benefits and the cost of raising children are not the only expenses that will benefit the youth. They will also reap the fruits of research in new technologies, of infrastructure building or even of the efforts to improve the democratic political system. It seems understandable that Bichot may not want to adopt such a methodology given the major accounting difficulties such a definition would entail. A historical comparison of these ratios would also prove most useful, as it would allow us to ask whether the exchanges between different age groups are shifting, and, if that were the case, which age groups are being favoured.

That intragenerational justice can be affected by the demands stemming from intergenerational justice is a crucial issue addressed in Dr. Girard’s article. According to him, measures taken in the name of future generations will have strong redistributive effects within current generations. In the case of pensions, capitalization could possibly increase inequalities between individuals of the same age groups and of the same cohort. We can confidently state after reading Girard’s article that theories of intergenerational justice theory should be wary of assuming homogeneity within each ‘generation’. Group disaggregation can show more clearly the redistributive effects of public policies favourable to future generations. Although this possibility needs to be seriously considered, Girard does not provide empirical data, a detailed analysis of the size of the effect of intergenerational policies on increased intragenerational inequalities or a theoretical justification that intergenerational justice will necessarily lead to greater intragenerational inequalities. Such a conflict between inter- and intragenerational justice may not be necessarily the case.

The question of when the adult age group has fulfilled its obligations towards other age groups and the extent to which such obligations are influenced by group size are key questions that remain after reading the article by demographer Professor Légaré. Légaré seems to believe that greater longevity implies redefining what we understand by ‘vieillesse’ (old age), possibly by setting it at a certain number of years. However, Légaré may not want to adopt such a methodology given the major accounting difficulties such a definition would entail. A historical comparison of these ratios would also prove most useful, as it would allow us to ask whether the exchanges between different age groups are shifting, and, if that were the case, which age groups are being favoured.

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With Future People – A Moderate Consequentialist Account of our Obligations to Future Generations, Prof. Tim Mulgan has given us a book of profound worth on the subject of our duties to future generations and, indeed much more besides. His earlier book The Demands of Consequentialism (2002) was described as “powerful and impressive” (Chappell, 2002, p. 897) and “a formidable achievement” (Eggleston, 2009, p. 125). The same can be said for this methodical work, which attempts to show that a ‘Combined Consequentialism’ can offer a superlative account of what we owe to those not yet living. The author exhibits scholarly patience, an openness to acknowledge limitations and a willingness to tirelessly search out difficult problems to confront his own ideas with.

Establishing moral obligations is complicated by the fact that “our actions have little impact on those who are dead, considerable impact on those currently alive, and potentially enormous impact on those who will live in the future” (p. 1). In consideration of this, Mulgan presents three basic intuitions ‘The Basic Wrongness Intuition’, ‘The Basic Collective Intuition’ and the ‘The Basic Liberty Intuition’, which are, in a sense, the launch pad for the remainder of the book. The first is that it is wrong to gratuitously create a child whose life contains nothing but suffering. The second is that the present generation should not needlessly cause great suffering to future generations. Finally, the third is that reproductive choice is morally open. Accept these plausible claims and one is set to begin mapping out the moral terrain in this area. Yet, as Mulgan is only acutely aware, placing emphasis on intuitions is fraught with danger. Certainly, the use of intuitions, to make “the journey from the familiar to the familiar” as John Wisdom (in Strawson, 1949, p. 259) put it, is unavoidable in moral philosophy.