

Equality and the Future

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This project examines the role of *equality* in our duties towards future generations.

We clearly have moral obligations towards the future—for example, we ought to mitigate climate change. However, despite the centrality of egalitarianism in contemporary moral and political philosophy, standard egalitarian views face serious difficulties when extended across generations. For example, telic egalitarianism seems to imply that if future people will be *better* off than us, then this gives us a reason *against* creating new people—after all, the existence of better-off future generations makes the history of humanity as a whole more unequal. Relational egalitarianism, on the other hand, struggles to justify any duties towards the more distant future, since we do not seem to stand in the relevant social relationships with people living centuries from now. And yet, we clearly have at least some duties towards the further future: for example, we may not simply disregard the fact that if we cause the polar ice caps to melt, this may lead to rising sea levels hundreds of years from now.

In my view, a central problem with the existing literature on egalitarianism and future people is its near-exclusive focus on *equality between generations*. I argue that a more promising approach focuses instead on *equality among future contemporaries*. On this view, we have duties to promote a future in which people relate as equals rather than through relations of domination. This reorientation, I argue, can dissolve the problems that standard egalitarian views face, while securing several further, intuitively appealing results.

After articulating the problems that existing egalitarian views face and defending my novel proposal, I apply my view to three areas of practical concern: the moral assessment of population size, reparations for historical injustice, and the permissibility of eating animals.