



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Care for the Future: Exploratory Award

Generating Justice: The social, legal, political and ethical issues of ensuring justice across generations

Findings

Classical theories of justice struggle to cope with the issues of intergenerational justice, even whilst those who use the theories in question readily recognise the need to address these issues.

It is important to acknowledge the commonalities (shared normative principles such as that of desert) that may underpin the nevertheless distinctive senses and spheres of application of justice - social/distributive; reparative/corrective; criminal. At the same time the differences between these senses and spheres must be properly acknowledged.

Central to the research is the question of responsibility – individual and collective – for wrongdoing. Yet its precise normative weight and evaluative role still needs to be understood. Equally, there is an on-going difficulty in bringing together the question of responsibility for past wrongdoing (and being a victim or beneficiary of such wrong) with that of responsibility for the future.

A full and proper understanding of the issues broached in the project benefited from interdisciplinary research. Nevertheless, whilst philosophy is disposed to attend to the question of what *is* just and unjust other disciplines, especially those in the social sciences, are more disposed to attend to the quite different, if still very interesting, question of what is *viewed* as just and unjust, and by whom.

There is a fundamental asymmetry in respect of the way in which the core normative principles and precepts – justice, responsibility, desert – apply in respect of the past and present. Understanding this asymmetry requires attending to important normative and non-normative, metaphysical issues: persons in the past had a particular existence but no longer

exist, and, arguably, have no interests; future persons do not yet have a particular identity, and it is unclear what interests merely future persons can have.

The precise ways in which we might balance the claims of past persons, present persons, and future persons remains unclear and needs further work. Much may depend on the temporal scope of claims by the different groups.

Lessons learnt

Whilst there is research undertaken by different disciplines on justice across time, and on both the past- and future-oriented demands of justice, there is little or nothing that has thus far brought everything together in a systematic manner.

Moreover, whilst interdisciplinary research is valuable in this area, clarity about the key normative issues benefits from the disciplinary insights of philosophy.

Whilst there is a significant body of literature on questions of forgiveness, amnesties and reparation, it was beneficial to have papers on each of these topics side-by-side. The intergenerational theme of the larger project also helped to lend thematic unity to the workshop on this topic and to shed light on some important, if neglected, questions.

The existence of a core team of researchers drawn from different parts of a single institution, Queen's University, proved invaluable. Working within a single University facilitated informal contact and networking beyond the more formal workshop and conference arrangements.

The role QUB plays within the local community of Northern Ireland, and the status of N.I. as a transitional, post-conflict society, gave the discussions of intergenerational justice an immediate and significant practical focus.

Future Plans

Fabian Schuppert will apply to the Early Career Researcher 'Care for the Future' workshops to do something on natural resources and intergenerational justice, which will tie in with many of the themes discussed during the exploratory grant. Also, together with Chris Armstrong he will organise a workshop on the same topic at the next European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions.

David Archard is Principal Investigator, and Fabian Schuppert and Peter Shirlow (both of whom convened workshops within this project) are Co-Investigators on an AHRC Care for

the Future Large Grant proposal 'Moral Duties Across Time: Past, Present and future Wrongdoing', submitted for consideration in October 2013. This will broaden and deepen the research themes broached in the 'Generating Justice' project.