



7th century icon of Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus. Were they lovers?

Sex and Gender in the Early Church

A talk by Dr George Askwith

Saturday 14th September 2.00-4.30pm
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW. Please RSVP via Meetup or email.

This engaging talk will explore how early Christian communities understood and navigated issues of sex, gender roles, and identity. George will shed light on the theological, cultural, and social influences that shaped early Christian views and practices. We will discover how these historical perspectives continue to influence contemporary discussions on sex and gender within the church.

George Askwith is a former committee member of Dorset Humanists. She takes a leading role in Humanist UK's *Faith to Faithless* community group which provides support to people leaving high control religions.

Free Thought: History and Future

Wednesday 25th September, 7.30pm at West Cliff Hotel 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS. Please RSVP via Meetup.

A talk by Dr Emma Park

This talk will delve into the evolution of intellectual freedom, tracing its roots from ancient philosophy through the Enlightenment to modern times. Our speaker will illuminate the pivotal moments and key figures who challenged prevailing norms, championing reason, scepticism, and secularism. We will discover how free thought has shaped contemporary society and its enduring significance in promoting critical inquiry and human rights. Perfect for history enthusiasts, philosophy buffs, and anyone interested in the ongoing quest for intellectual liberty. Dr Emma Park is former editor of *The Freethinker* magazine, first published in 1881.





Photo: John Kingston

Garden Party raises £194 for Appeal

Prime Minister sold off for fifty pounds

John Hubbard and David Warden hosted a cream tea in their garden on Saturday 10th August. The event raised £194.50 for our Appeal in aid of Hope for Food foodbank and the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust. We were fortunate with the weather – bright and warm. There was only one bid for our cardboard Prime Minister but he did well to reach fifty quid. He has gone to a caring new owner.

Please give more to our Appeal

You can donate at any time to our appeal until the closing date of 31st December. Please have a word with David or our treasurer Daniel. Or look out for events when we donate the collection to the appeal.

Chris Smith, who was at the Garden Party, is a trustee of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust. <https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/>

Dates for your diary

Saturday 14 th September 2pm	Moordown	Sex and Gender in the Early Church - Dr George Askwith
Wednesday 25 th September 7.30pm	West Cliff Hotel	History of Free Thought – Dr Emma Park, former Editor of the <i>Freethinker</i> magazine
Saturday 12 th October 2pm	Moordown	Understanding conflicts big and small, and how to manage them - Jon Nicholas
Wednesday 23 rd October 7.30pm	West Cliff Hotel	Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion - David Warden

Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.



Photo by Aaron

The Philosophy of Intergenerational Justice

Around thirty people attended Barry Newman's in-depth discussion on the topic of "intergenerational justice". Barry stimulated a lot of thoughtful contributions from the room. This report has been generated by AI from Barry's talk notes. A full copy is available on request or you can watch the entire discussion on Dorset Humanists YouTube.

I want to begin by emphasising that this is not intended to be a formal lecture but rather an open discussion. Many aspects of intergenerational justice are often assumed to be self-evident. However, as humanists, we are committed to questioning and critically examining these assumptions, seeking rational justifications for our actions and beliefs.

While we may often act on instinct, it is important for us to understand the origins of these instincts, particularly when addressing complex ethical issues like intergenerational justice. Throughout this discussion, I may raise difficult questions or present challenging perspectives. Please understand that this does not imply that I hold radical views on these matters. Rather, this is an exercise in humanist inquiry—a rigorous examination of a challenging subject that requires thoughtful consideration.

A useful analogy

Imagine coming across an uninhabited mountain refuge hut and you see a sign that reads:

"Please leave the premises clean" or
"...as clean as you would have liked to find it on arrival" or
"...as it was when you arrived" or even
"...in better condition than you found it" or
"...just use it - someone else will clean up the mess".

This analogy captures the essence of IGJ. If we are all temporary users and occupants of the resources, environment, and societal structures we inherit, do we have an ethical or rational obligation to leave the world in a condition that is at least as good, if not better, than how we found it? ►



Definitions

Intergenerational Justice (IGJ) can be defined as a form of distributive justice that concerns the **capital of well-being** which is owed by one generation to another. In this context, “generation” is not strictly defined by a specific number of years, but generally refers to a span of 20-30 years. Let’s break down this definition to clarify its components:

- **Justice:** At its core, justice is about fairness—a kind of balance in human affairs. In the case of IGJ, this fairness extends across time, from one generation to the next.
- **Capital of Wellbeing:** This phrase raises important questions—what exactly constitutes this capital? How much of it is necessary, and can its different elements be ranked in importance? It may include the resources, opportunities, and conditions that contribute to overall quality of life, such as a healthy environment, economic stability, social equity, access to education and healthcare, and cultural and societal values that contribute to the flourishing of future generations.
- **Owed:** Is IGJ something that future generations have the right to demand, or is it a moral duty that the current generation must fulfil? This is a key question in discussions of IGJ. It suggests that we have a responsibility not only to maintain but also to enhance the capital of well-being for those who come after us.
- **Which Generations?:** Which generations owe this duty to which other generations? IGJ typically involves the present generation and all those that will follow. However, it can also involve considering the debts or benefits inherited from previous generations, making it a complex, multi-directional concept.

Quantifying the “capital of wellbeing”

Is there a minimum level or standard of well-being below which future generations should not fall? If so, how do we set this threshold? What constitutes a “good enough” standard of living that we are morally obligated to

bequeath to future generations? When discussing IGJ it must be accepted that there is “no free lunch”. Allocating resources or efforts to improve the future may mean reducing consumption or changing behaviours today. How much should the current generation be willing to limit its own happiness or convenience for the sake of those who come after us? Should the capital of well-being passed to the next generation be equivalent to, greater than, or less than what we inherited? This question echoes the analogy of the mountain hut: should we leave the world in the same condition, better condition, or simply not worse than we found it?

The Sufficientarian Principle

One influential philosophical approach is the Sufficientarian Principle for establishing the scale of our duties toward future generations. This principle is closely related to John Rawls’ “Just Savings Principle”, which asserts that current generations have an obligation to save resources and create conditions that will allow future generations to enjoy at least the same level of well-being that we have received from previous generations. It is rooted in the idea that each generation should act as a trustee for future generations, ensuring that the social, economic, and environmental conditions they inherit are no worse than those enjoyed by the current generation. This is related to the principle of sustainable development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. A key question for us to consider is “How do we differentiate between *needs* and *wants* (consumption vs consumerism)?”

To whom does intergenerational justice (IGJ) apply?

The most obvious recipients of IGJ are future generations. The concept traditionally focuses on ensuring that the resources, opportunities, and environmental conditions we pass down do not disadvantage those who will live after us. ►

Some philosophers argue that future generations, being potential people, do not yet have rights because they do not yet exist. According to this view, we cannot owe a duty to those who do not yet have lives. However, most ethical frameworks still recognise a moral responsibility to future generations, grounded in the idea that they will exist and have the same basic rights to well-being as the current generation. IGJ should also consider the youngest members of our current society. This includes responsibilities related to education, living standards, healthcare, and opportunities for personal development. The younger generation is the bridge between the present and the future, and investing in their well-being is crucial for ensuring a just legacy. IGJ must also address the needs and rights of the elderly, including pensions, healthcare, and considerations for life extension. This raises the question of what the younger generations owe the elderly—whether it is a duty of care, respect, or the preservation of resources that the elderly have a right to after contributing to society for many years. The generations that are neither young nor old often bear the most significant responsibilities. They are typically the ones working, paying taxes, and raising families. Their role in IGJ is crucial, as they are often the ones making decisions that will impact both the elderly and the future generations. Must they do all the giving?

The question of whether the dead have rights is deeply philosophical. While the dead do not have the ability to experience harm or benefit, there is a moral question about how we treat their legacy, reputation, and contributions. Is it just to re-interpret their actions through the lens of present-day norms (a concept known as presentism)? Does this approach do an injustice to their memory, or is it a necessary part of moral progress?

Philosophers are paid to come up with weird ideas...

When discussing the rights of future generations, we are often confronted with



The Darwinian elephant in the philosophy room

profound ethical questions, particularly whether future generations have a right to life and, if so, whether they have the right to a life that meets a certain standard of well-being. This inquiry touches upon the nonidentity problem: Can an act be morally wrong if it does not directly harm any specific individual because the potentially affected person does not yet exist and may never exist? Conversely, a provocative question arises: Do future peoples have the right to nonexistence if their lives are predicted to fall below a certain threshold of well-being? This leads us to consider whether the living have a procreational duty of omission—the moral duty not to bring individuals into existence if their lives are likely to be filled with suffering or deprivation. John Stuart Mill suggested a criterion for procreation: we have a duty not to bring a person into existence unless that person will have “at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence.” But what do we mean by “ordinary” or “desirable”? These terms are subjective and can vary widely depending on cultural, economic, and personal factors. Antinatalists take this idea further, arguing that these conditions apply universally—that is, bringing any new life into existence is morally questionable because all lives inevitably involve some degree of suffering. From this perspective, the ethical ►

Choice is to refrain from procreation altogether, thus avoiding the imposition of life's inherent hardships on future generations.

Justice and reciprocity

Having discussed what the capital of well-being is and who should receive it, we now turn to a crucial question: Is it just? This question lies at the heart of the debate over intergenerational justice and challenges us to consider the ethical foundations of our obligations to future generations. A way of focussing on this problem is to consider the maxim: "The current generation owes the next generation the capital of wellbeing." Is this true or false? And, if true or false, why?

The principle of justice is often tied to the idea of reciprocity: when a wrong is committed, there is an expectation of redress or compensation. However, this model becomes problematic when applied to non-contemporary generations.

There is an intrinsic asymmetry of power between non-contemporary generations. The present generation can make choices that disadvantage or advantage the future generation – the most obvious current example being global warming and climate change. But these choices have very unpredictable outcomes.

Why should we make sacrifices in our lives for the unborn when some of the living have lives of very poor quality – a deficiency of the "capital of wellbeing". Should theoretical future people have priority over the living?

Three approaches to the justification of intergenerational justice

1) Indirect Descending Reciprocity. The idea here is that receiving benefits from a previous generation invokes a duty to pass on similar benefits to the next generation, creating a one-way cascade of duties and benefits. Unlike direct reciprocity, where both parties benefit contemporaneously, this approach acknowledges that the giver (the current

generation) receives no direct benefit from the recipient (the future generation). This duty arises from our obligations to the dead. But this duty is only valid if the dead exist in a morally relevant way. And if they do – what else do we owe them?

2) Justifying IGJ through the lens of private law. Aphorism: "The environment was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you by your children." This poetic view suggests that the environment is effectively on loan from future generations, implying a stewardship role. Does this mean future generations own the environment? IGJ can be viewed as a joint ownership contract among past, present, and future generations, requiring the current generation to use resources wisely and responsibly.

3) Justifying IGJ by applying utilitarianism. This approach suggests that the goal is to maximize the total historically aggregated utility—the greatest good accumulated across generations, not just for the living. But if maximizing utility across generations is the objective, a key question arises: why shouldn't the present generation take the lion's share of resources? Alternatively, should we ensure that future generations have a greater per capita share of well-being, and if so, why?

4) The Darwinian elephant in the philosophy room. From an evolutionary biology perspective, the primary instinct is to promote the well-being of one's offspring to ensure the continuation of one's genes into the future. This instinct is strongest toward one's immediate descendants and weakens with more distantly related or non-related individuals. In today's interconnected world, this instinctive behaviour may be poorly adapted, as actions that promote one's own immediate interests can compromise the future of everyone. Our biological instincts may not be sufficient to justify IGJ in which case we need to appeal to higher moral principles to ensure that our actions today do not jeopardise the future for all. But the future is uncertain and making sacrifices for future generations is a gamble.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Aaron Darkwood on intergenerational justice, riots and our sense of community

Barry's talk definitely got me thinking. As one of many gay men who do not have children, what motivates us to think about future generations? Do those of you with offspring consider creating trust funds for your 'as yet unborn' great-great-grand-children? Or do you only care about descendants already born?

I felt that the 'responsibility' section of Barry's talk could be boiled down to the question: 'Who is currently holding the ball?' The dead have passed the ball to us and we can do nothing about them, for them, or on behalf of them. We can look after the ball if we wish and pass it on in good condition. But do we do this for the benefit of future generations out of duty, love, desire, choice... or are we looking after the ball for our own selfish benefit? I'm inclined to go with the latter.

Barry's talk stimulated a lot of discussion in the bar afterwards, including whether current generations are responsible for the crimes of their ancestors and whether everyone from a particular country can held responsible for the crimes of their elected leaders.

We also discussed the latest riots and what they say about our sense of community. Those involved may or may not have been 'far right', fighting for a political cause, or waving anti-immigration flags. It may have been more a case of 'stamping their feet' which, in some cases, led to violence and law-breaking. Those involved may feel that they don't fit in, that they are not part of society. They could be the 'Why don't they do this?' kind of

people, as opposed to feeling part of the community and finding solutions for themselves. As in Barry's mountain refuge hut analogy, the attitude is 'Other people can clean that up'. Do we as humanists also blame the state and other people for social and economic? Our sense of community and responsibility is definitely a topic we need a deep dive into. What is it that makes some people want to build and contribute to the community to make it a better place whilst others do not – or even want to vandalise and destroy their community?

From Heather quoting E.O.Wilson

In deciding our responsibilities to other generations, the crux of the matter to my mind is deciding where we, in the here and now, stand in the continuum of generations. I stand firmly behind the renowned American biologist E.O. Wilson when he said: 'We have created a Star Wars Civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and god-like technology. Despite all of our pretenses and fantasies we always have been and will remain a biological species tied to this particular biological world. Millions of years of evolution are indelibly encoded in our genes. ... Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the sources of human sensibility and acquire the knowledge on which an enduring enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction, can be built.'

From Brian Vickery on Meetup

Thank you Barry for a thoughtful presentation. I have to be honest and say I was pleasantly surprised. I feared that I was going to be told of the need for a 'children's parliament' to secure the rights of future generations or something along those lines. What Barry discussed covered many of the issues that those of us of a certain age start to ponder as we increasingly consider our legacy.

Kate Domaille

Non-religious funerals, memorials, civil partnerships, weddings and namings Southampton/S Hants

Welcome to humanist celebrant Kate

Humanist
Ceremonies™
by Humanists UK

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to Kate Domaille who has recently joined Dorset Humanists. Kate is an accredited Humanist celebrant living in Southampton. She performs ceremonies all over Hampshire, Dorset and beyond including Naming ceremonies, Weddings, Renewal of Vow Ceremonies, Funeral Services, memorial services and scattering of ashes.

Kate writes:

"Because I believe firmly that we should live life well, I have been concerned to find the best ways for individuals, for couples and families to celebrate the key events in their lives. This has meant using my experience and skills to assist in writing and delivering ceremonies that best capture what matters most to them.

For more than 30 years I have worked in education, firstly as a teacher, now as a lecturer in film. My day job is lecturing in British and European Cinema to visiting undergraduates. This has developed from a longer career that started out teaching English and was later about training English teachers for schools. I read widely, love literature and music and am happy to advise

or support the needs of those who have come to ask for my assistance. Standing in front of a room of people is part of what I do all the time so I have good communication skills."

Kate is part of a network of Humanists UK celebrants who operate in the south of England. They support each other to provide a high quality, reliable and professional service in tune with your needs.

We also have excellent links with **David Hewitt** who conducts Humanist ceremonies in Christchurch, the New Forest, south Hampshire, East Dorset and beyond.

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Feedback

Feedback forms show that 97% of clients rate our celebrants' performance as 5/5 or 'excellent'. HUMANIST CEREMONIES™ is a network of humanist celebrants trained and accredited by Humanists UK.



View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

Barry did an excellent job taking us through the philosophy of intergenerational justice. But I couldn't help feeling that the language of justice and rights is a bit abstract. What was missing for me was an emphasis on the humanist principle of *living a good life*.

This means living in accordance with familiar virtues including moderation and temperance as opposed to gluttony and excess. One of the reasons I joined Dorset Humanists is that I was weary of the perennial culture of hedonism and materialism in the gay community. I am not completely averse to a bit of gay hedonism, but I was looking for something more. Dorset Humanists is a humanist society where people are not judged by looks, income or material possessions but whose members are interested in knowledge and human development. In terms of values and virtues, moderation rather than excess should come naturally to humanists and this can be our contribution to preserving the planet for future generations. Of course, what is moderation to one may look like excess to another. But the basic principle is woven into the fabric of humanism.

It also occurred to me that one of the reasons we may wish to be good ancestors to generations as yet unborn is our desire to be honoured by them. To live recklessly in the present is to court dishonour from future humans. Being a humanist means caring about humanity and all life on Earth in the present, and it also entails an awareness that we are links in a chain of being from our earliest human ancestors about two million years ago to our distant descendants. We do not have to tie ourselves in knots about justice and rights to appreciate this. Instead, we can be grateful for our lives, appreciative of the fantastic civilisation bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and have some sense of being good ancestors to future generations ourselves. We may even find religious metaphors useful in this regard. We may have a 'spiritual' awareness of these intergenerational links and maybe a sense of 'sacred' bonds. Humanists do not take such metaphors literally, but they can help us tap into our deepest moral intuitions about what it means to be human. Humanism is about humanity and the human story – past, present, and future.

Most humanists probably want to give Sir Keir Starmer a chance. But his recent performance in the Rose Garden at No. 10 reminded me of a character from a Dickens novel. Mr. Smallweed in *Bleak House* is known for his extreme gloominess and pessimism. He's a bitter, miserly old man who constantly complains and harbours a deeply negative view of life. He is entirely lacking in empathy, often using harsh language to express his discontent with everything around him. *Things will get worse. The budget will be painful. There are financial and societal black holes to be dealt with.* Contrast this with Mr Micawber from *David Copperfield*. Micawber is famous for his boundless and unwavering optimism. He refuses to be beaten down by circumstances, always looking for new opportunities, even if they are unlikely to succeed. His positivity and resilience make him one of Dickens' most memorable characters. I rather miss the Micawber days.