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What motivates us to care for the (distant) future?

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What motivates us to care for the (distant) future?

Dieter Birnbacher

1. The "motivation problem"

"Motivation problem" is not a well-established term in future ethics, or, for that matter, in any other branch of ethics. It is taken here as a convenient label for an inquiry into the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to make a recommendation, norm, prescription or any other action-guiding statement effective in the sense of making the addressee of such a statement behave in conformity with it. Normative statements, whether in ethics, aesthetics, or technology cannot, by themselves, compel conformity. All they do is to prescribe, or recommend, a certain course of action. In order to make someone act accordingly they have to rely on further factors. In each case the rules formulated by the system appeal to certain dispositions of the addressee of these rules: self-interest, rationality, sensibility, and moral attitudes. Even if the prescription, or recommendation, is categorical, their addressee is in principle free to follow it or not.

Attempts to deal with the "motivation problem" in ethics date back to the beginnings of moral philosophy. The question what factors are necessary and sufficient to act in conformity with a given rule has been extensively discussed in the ethical systems of Plato, Spinoza, Hume and Kant, and these discussions keep reverberating through the recent debate between internalists and externalists about moral reasons. Internalists like Bernard Williams¹ thought that having moral reasons for an action is inseparable from being motivated to act in accordance with it, even though not necessarily to the extent that the action is actually carried out. Externalists like H. A. Prichard² claimed that having moral reasons for an action and being motivated to carry it out are distinct items, so that a psychological mechanism independent of the acceptance of the moral rule is needed to explain action in conformity with it.

¹ cf., e. g., Williams 1981, ch. 8

² cf. Korsgaard 1986, section II

Though the problem of moral motivation is mostly formulated in terms of bridging the psychological gap between the *acceptance* of a rule, on the one hand, and of *acting* in accordance with it, on the other, a finer-grained analysis might distinguish two further steps in the transition from acceptance to action so that get a quadruple of items: *acceptance*, *adoption*, *application* and *action*. In morality, a necessary condition of acting in accordance with a rule is that the addressee *accepts* the rule, in the sense of judging it to be right and justified. Second he must *adopt* the rule as a principle by which to guide his behaviour, to incorporate it, as it were, into his own identity. Third, he must *apply* it to situations of the appropriate kind, i. e. identify situations to which the rule is relevant, which, in the case of consequentialist rules, can require considerable effort. Fourth and finally, he must *act* as the respective rule says he should act in the given situation or, in cases where the rule commands a series of actions, to decide on a strategy reaching from the present into the future.

It is a moot question whether all four of these motivational steps are logically distinct. It is unclear, for example, whether the distinction between *acceptance* in the sense of judging a rule to be justified and *adoption* of a rule can coherently be upheld. Moral psychologists tend to insist on this distinction because empirical evidence strongly suggests that the capacity to make, for example, moral judgements is largely independent of the readiness to act in accordance with them.³ In philosophy, internalists about moral motivation will dispute the distinction between accepting and adopting a moral rule and maintain the impossibility of purely intellectually accepting a moral rule without integrating it into one's moral outlook, at least to a certain extent. From this point of view, even accepting a rule cannot be conceived as a purely cognitive act but involves at least a modicum of affective identification. This, again, is taken to imply a motivation to act in accordance with the rule, if only to an extent that leaves it open whether the rule is actually followed. Some meta-ethical prescriptivists like Hare have even gone so far to maintain that only action in conformity with a rule is sufficient proof that it has been accepted. Though they do not want to deny the reality of weakness of will, they insist that at least continued non-conformity is incompatible with saying that a rule has been accepted.⁴ On this view, the motivation problem is not the problem of closing the gap between accepting a rule and following it but the problem of merely asserting that one accepts a rule and really accepting it.

It is less controversial that as far as these four motivational conditions are logically distinct, they are empirically interdependent and that, partly in consequence of this, there can be considerable problems in attributing a failure to act in accordance with a rule to any one of these in particular. A strongly internalised moral or prudential conviction will, as a rule, be accompanied by a more reliable conformity in action than a weaker moral or prudential belief. On the other hand, a moral or prudential principle will be more easily accepted if it corresponds to an already established way of acting. This interdependence is, however, far from perfect. Rule competence in the sense of

³ cf., e. g., Montada 1993:268 and Baumgartner 2005:114

⁴ cf. Hare 1963:82 f.

being able to make valid normative judgements need not go together with rule competence in the sense of being able to rightly identify the situations in which these have to be applied. Even less does it imply moral performance in the sense of acting in conformity with these judgements. In cases where there are strong motives to deviate from an accepted rule, the empirically well-established theory of cognitive dissonance⁵ predicts that even the capacity to identify the situations in which it should be applied will be considerably weakened. We not only fail to observe the principles we have adopted but even fail to see that we do so by unconsciously, or half-consciously, misrepresenting the situation to ourselves. The same motives that make us act in ways incompatible with our principles blind us about the nature, and, given the case, the consequences of our actions.

All this contributes to the complexities of attributing a failure to act in conformity with a professed rule retrospectively. In principle, a failure to follow one's practical beliefs can be attributed to weakness of will, to an insufficiently developed capacity to identify situations for which these beliefs are relevant, or to the fact that these beliefs are only asserted and not fully internalised. The fact that these factors are interdependent does not make it easier to pinpoint the exact source of defection.

2. Why motivation to care for the future is a special case

Future ethics poses more stringent problems of motivation than other branches of practical philosophy because there is a more striking discrepancy between the motivation to accept principles of future ethics and the motivation to act in accordance with them than in other areas of ethics. Furthermore, future ethics poses special difficulties in rightly identifying situations to which its principles are relevant. I will comment on these points in turn.

The motivation to *accept* future ethical principles is much less problematic than the motivation to *adopt* such principles because it is more or less natural to extend the principles relating to our dealings with present people to our dealings with future people. We live in a moral culture deeply impregnated with the universalistic moral tradition of the Enlightenment. Most people who accept a fundamental moral maxim like *neminem laede* as a rule of behaviour (Schopenhauer's "principle of justice") will hardly object to generalising this maxim in such a way that not only present but also future beings susceptible of being harmed are included in its domain. There does not seem to be a big difference between what motivates the unextended and what motivates the extended maxim. Once a maxim of non-harming is accepted it seems plausible to include potential future "moral patients" in addition to potential present "moral patients". The point made by Henry Sidgwick at the end of the 19th century, that the temporal position of who is harmed by a present action cannot be relevant to its moral evaluation,⁶ can be expected to seem compelling to most moralists.

⁵ Festinger 1957

⁶ Sidgwick 1907:381

Within the universalistic paradigm of morality, the irrelevance of the temporal position of a moral patient is indeed obvious. Though moral principles containing temporal relations (such as the principle to treat one's children better than one's grandchildren) are not - *pace* Hare⁷ - incompatible with the meta-ethical principle of universalisation, discrimination against future persons by excluding them from the range of moral principles seems incompatible with the ideal of impartiality characteristic of the universalistic paradigm. It is part and parcel of this paradigm that actions and their consequences are judged from a standpoint of maximal impartiality, a standpoint beyond personal preferences and the limited horizon of personal sympathies. One of the reasons for this is that only evaluations of a sufficiently impartial kind have a chance of making true the claim to universal assent, which is a condition equally characteristic of the universalistic paradigm. Given that the *moral* point of view is a point of view beyond all particular perspectives, the "view from nowhere", any attempt to defend a privileged treatment of present people (and, perhaps, people of the near future) over against people in the more distant future, seems systematically misguided. It is no accident that for Kant, who endowed the universalistic paradigm of morality with his own metaphysical emphasis, it was more or less a matter of course that whoever is motivated to accept moral principles in his dealings with present people is thereby also motivated to accept these principles in his dealings with future people, and to judge the good and bad of people in the future as no more and no less morally considerable than the good and bad of people in the present. In one of his late essays on the philosophy of history, he boldly asserted that "human nature is so constituted that it cannot be indifferent to goods and bads that happen at the most distant epoch, if only they happen to our species and can be expected with certainty".⁸

Roughly the same, however, holds at least for some variants of the particularistic, or communitarian, paradigm of morality for which the range of moral norms is restricted to the members of a certain group or community.⁹ Though the moral norms recognised in such communities have only a limited range and do not extend to members of different communities, they generally include the future members of the community along with its present members.¹⁰ Since the motivation to accept the norms of the community is, in this paradigm, not their plausibility judged from an impartial and rational perspective but group loyalty and adherence to the group's customs and traditions, these motivations extend as naturally to the future members of the community in question as the universalistic motivations to future mankind. Temporal universalisation is, therefore, no exclusive feature of universalistic morality, despite the fact that

⁷ Hare 1981:100 ff.

⁸ Kant 1912:27

⁹ For an early elaboration of this contrast combined with a speculation as to their psychological origins see Bergson 1932:27 ff.

¹⁰ An early example of such a theory is Golding 1981 who writes: "Future generations are members of our moral community because, and insofar as, our social ideal is relevant to them, given what they are and their conditions of life." (68) A more explicit conception of "transgenerational communities" on the basis of what he calls "moral similarity" is developed by De-Shalit in De-Shalit 1995, ch. 1.

intergenerational moral responsibility has always been a theme more prominent in universalistic systems of ethics such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism. The crucial difference, it seems, between the universalistic and the particularistic paradigm is not its tendency to go beyond temporal but to go beyond ethnic, social and cultural limits.¹¹

Universalists and particularists in ethics, then, go together in including future generations into the scope of their principles. Nevertheless, the "motivation problem" tends to be more acute for universalists because of their indifference to psychological distance based on ethnic, social or cultural differences. In successively extending the range of "moral patients" that have to be taken into consideration in judging the morality of action, the Enlightenment has deeply challenged the anthropological drive towards keeping morality within the limits of emotional bonds. There can be no more conspicuous contrast than that between what universalistic ethical systems such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism expect of moral motivation and the evolutionary origins of morality in the low-distance-morality of the family, the clan and the tribe. While this origin is deliberately disavowed in the *principles* of these moralities, it stubbornly reappears in the limits of *motivation* documented by moral psychology. Moral emotions such as love of humanity, a sense of justice and international solidarity are readily affirmed in the abstract but rarely lived in the concrete.¹² Their motivational force is throughout inferior to competing low-distance emotions such as egoism, family bonds, group solidarity and patriotism. It has even to be doubted whether the whole of humanity, spread out in past, present and future, can at all be a proper object of love. Taken all in all, experience confirms Hume's sceptical view that

*“in general, it may be affirm'd, that there is no such passion in human minds, as love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. 'Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind, since this concern extends itself beyond our own species.”*¹³

Though the high-minded principles of a universalistic morality include the totality of peoples, cultures and generations, the limited possibilities of practised solidarity make our practical morality focus on small islands within an ocean of moral indifference. Even if, in theory, we recognise the rights of those most distant to us along with those nearer to us, this is rarely sufficient to make them

¹¹ It may be, of course, that it is not really possible to go beyond temporal limits without at the same time going beyond these other limits, so that the long-term ethnic, social and cultural identity presupposed in such a view is an illusion.

¹² Cf. Baumgartner 2005: 26 with relation to environmental values. See also Bierhoff 1990:63 ff. and Bierhoff 2002:160 on the importance of sympathy for altruistic behaviour.

¹³ Hume 1888:481 f.

effective. Even those who heroically postulated the universal brotherhood of men usually restricted the solidarity they demanded to an in-group of the Righteous and excluded the unbrotherly, the tyrants, the heathens, or the capitalists. In the same Sermon of the Mount in which Jesus postulates the love of our enemies (Mt. 5, 44), he invokes the fire of hell on those who offend their brother by calling him a fool (Mt. 5. 22).¹⁴

Despite these differences in the problems of motivation facing universalistic and particularistic moralities, the motivational problems posed by obligations towards the future, and especially towards the distant future (i. e. those generations that we have no chance to get into direct contact with during our lifetimes) are more or less alike, at least to the extent that particularistic moralities include distant future people as persons to whom the present generation owes moral concern. In our days, the moral imperative of taking the interests of future generations into account is firmly established in most parts of the industrialised world. Only few people in the more well-to-do countries of the world would deny that the present generation has responsibilities towards future generations. The diagnosis given by Tocqueville in the 19th century about North America that "people want to think only about the following day"¹⁵ is no longer true, neither of North America nor of Europe. On the contrary, the long-term preservation of the natural conditions on which human life depends and the preservation of a satisfactory quality of life seem to be widely recognised values, and the same seems to hold for what Hans Jonas has called the "first commandment" of future ethics¹⁶, the imperative not to endanger the future existence of mankind.

Evidence for that comes from the international treaties on environmental protection and nature conservation that have been concluded in the last decades such as the CITES convention of 1973, the Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer of 1987 and the Kyoto protocol of 1997. It is further evidenced by empirical data. In a recent empirical study of attitudes to anthropogenic climate change Russell et al. found that imposing climate changes on future generations by present energy use is predominantly judged to be morally unjust to these generations. They also found a clear correlation between the feeling of injustice and the expressed readiness to act in ways appropriate to reduce the risk of long-term climate change.¹⁷ Similar results were found in a study of attitudes to the environment conducted by the American ecologists Minter and Manning. The primary aim of this study, which was based on a representative sample of the population of Vermont, USA, was to find out about what matters to people in policies of environmental protection.¹⁸ One of the results was that there is a considerable pluralism of environmental values even within the relatively closed New England population. Not surprisingly,

¹⁴ There may be other kinds of gap between the motivation to accept moral principles and the motivation to act accordingly which do not result from the fact that our principles are stricter than human nature allows but from the fact that they are less strict than human nature dictates. A pertinent case is the incest taboo.

¹⁵ Tocqueville 1961:156

¹⁶ Jonas 1999:186

¹⁷ Russell et al. 2003:167

¹⁸ Minter/Manning 1999

values with a religious background are more important to some than to others. The most interesting result was, however, that the three values which were the most often nominated and on which there is the highest degree of agreement were also the three values with the highest values in relative importance, namely "future generations" (with the representative statement "Nature will be important to future generations"), "quality of life" (with the representative statement "Nature adds to the quality of our lives (for example, outdoor recreation, natural beauty)") and "ecological survival" (with the representative statement "Human survival depends on nature and natural processes"). This points to the conclusion that a justification of environmental protection can be expected to be the more successful the more it invokes anthropocentric but unselfish values of a roughly "prudential" sort: the values of stewardship and of keeping nature intact for future generations.

However well-established such future ethical principles are, they compete with other, more present-oriented motivations, and it is far from guaranteed that the high-minded future ethical principles expressed by respondents are given priority in concrete practice. Empirical data strongly support the "low cost hypothesis"¹⁹ according to which moral principles concerning nature conservation will be the more easily observed the less this creates costs or opportunity costs for the individual. The difficulty is illustrated by the problems of keeping greenhouse emissions within the narrow limits of the Kyoto protocol. It must be doubted whether a tax on fossil fuels high enough to curb the further expansion of motorised traffic would be politically feasible except under conditions of acute crisis such as the oil crisis of the 1980s. An empirical study of a representative sample of the population of Baden-Württemberg in 2001 showed that though 50% of the people interviewed associated the climate problem with a "high" or even "very high" catastrophe potential and 54% saw great or very great societal dangers in it, this does not correlate with the willingness to find the causes for this problem in one's own behaviour. Only 11% associated the responsibility for climate change with their own ways of acting.²⁰ If long-term objectives require changes in the habitual behaviours and consumption patterns of a society, we should be pessimistic about their prospects of being translated into action under non-critical conditions. Any attempt to change the fundamental behaviour patterns in a society by political initiatives seems doomed to failure if the necessity of these changes is only motivated by possible or future rather than by present dangers.²¹

In the following, I will focus on temporally distant generations of humans and leave aside the question of temporally distant animals and other non-human beings. I will also leave aside

¹⁹ Baumgartner 2005: 87

²⁰ Zwick 2001:302

²¹ These data suggest that the "discounting" of future utility accepted in most economic models should be understood to refer to a motivational problem rather than to a valuational one. A person who discounts the gains or losses he expects for the future does not underrate the true size of these gains and losses, in the way a mountaineer underrates the height he has to climb in order to reach a shelter, but is less motivated to act in accordance with his or her expectations (cf. Birnbacher 2003:45). This is obscured both by the expression "myopia" and by Pigou's (1932:25) metaphor of the defective "telescopic faculty".

overlapping generations for which the "motivation problem" is less acute. There seem to be two principal factors to explain this relative weakness of motivation to act on one's own principles in the context of future ethics as far as temporally distant generations are concerned. The one is that actively taking responsibility for the distant future is more exclusively dependent on genuinely *moral* motives than other kinds of responsibility. The other is that the effectiveness of present action in altering the future course of events to the better is, in general, less *certain* than in other kinds of responsible behaviour.

3. Moral and quasi-moral motives to care for the (distant) future

In principle, there are three kinds of motives from which a morally required act can be done: from moral motives, from quasi-moral motives, and from non-moral motives (or any combination of these). A morally required act is done from *moral* motives if it is done precisely because it is morally required, i. e. from conscientiousness or a feeling of duty. It is done from *quasi-moral* motives if it is done from altruistic motives such as love, compassion, solidarity, generosity or spontaneous impulses to care for others, i. e. from motives that often lead to the same courses of action as genuinely moral motives, without being dependent on the adoption of a particular system of morality. (Indeed, some systems of moral philosophy, like those of Hume and Schopenhauer, rely heavily, or even exclusively, on quasi-moral motivations in this sense.) Non-moral motivations comprise both self-centred and non-self-centred motivations that result in morally required action accidentally, such as the desire for self-respect, social integration and recognition and the pursuit of personal ideals from which others happen to profit. (These are only the ideal types. In reality, there may be all kinds of combinations of these kinds of motive.)

According to psychological internalism, not only the adoption of a moral principle as a personal maxim, but even the judgement that a certain principle is right and proper implies a certain motivation to act in accordance with it. This is a rather strong position. Nevertheless, it seems more plausible than the externalist one that construes acceptance of a moral principle as a purely cognitive act. To accept a moral principle means more than to accept a descriptive statement of fact. It implies that the principle in question is introduced, to a certain extent, not only into one's system of beliefs but also into one's system of motivation. Whoever accepts a moral principle has a reason to act in certain ways rather than in others. However, the internalist position is perfectly compatible with maintaining that the acceptance of moral principles is insufficient to motivate action in conformity with these principles in cases where competing motivations can be assumed to be present. Since this latter condition is fulfilled more often than not, pure acceptance of a moral principle is rarely sufficient for its practical observance. Even on internalist premises there are reasons to think that there have to be additional motivations, of another kind, to make moral principles effective.

This gives us at least part of an explanation for why there is a *special* "motivation problem" in future ethics. Moral motives are usually too weak to effect appropriate action unless supported by quasi-moral and non-moral motives pointing in the same direction. Moreover, the quasi-moral motives potentially supporting moral motivation such as love and sympathy are significantly absent in this field because they essentially depend on face-to-face relations with their objects. Apart from some of the members of the generations of our children and grandchildren, future generations are faceless and invisible. Future people are objects of thought and calculation. They come into view only as abstract recipients of goods and potential victims of harms, as anonymous items, and do not offer themselves as concrete and experientially accessible objects of attitudes such as love, friendship, reverence, or solidarity. But it seems that our moral sensibilities are primarily attuned to "identified" and not to "statistical" beneficiaries and victims. As Calabresi and Bobbitt have shown, emotions are aroused primarily by people who are threatened by death or other harm under our eyes (the victims of mining accidents, the victims of earthquakes, the patient needing immediate help), and these emotions make us act for their survival and good health even in cases in which cold calculation would tell us that it would be more rational to use the resources for preventive measures.²²

Our spontaneous quasi-moral motives are primarily directed to what lies next to our own person in terms of temporal, spatial and social distance. A bad conscience is much more likely with someone who behaves in a way harmful to people in his or her vicinity than to someone who behaves in a way harmful to people in the distant future. In this respect, Nietzsche's polemical concept of *Fernstenliebe* (love of the most distant), the verbal opposite of *Nächstenliebe*, the love of one's neighbour, points to a real paradox.²³

One important aspect of the necessary abstractness of future generations is that it is more difficult to present a vivid and realistic picture of future situations than of present situations in the media.²⁴ TV reports about disasters can be expected to stimulate a quite remarkable willingness to give money for their alleviation, provided these disasters are perceived as caused by external factors such as uncontrollable natural forces or military attacks from foreign states. It is much more difficult to present potential future disasters such as a rapid progress of desertification by changes in the global climate with a vividness and credibility that stimulates preventive action with comparable effectiveness.

²² Calabresi/Bobbitt 1978. Cf. also the list of conditions influencing the extent to which people are prepared to give money to alleviate distant needs in Unger 1996:73. The most important of these conditions are also satisfied by situations in the distant future.

²³ Nietzsche 1980:77. A similar paradox is involved in Schopenhauer's attempt to extend the concept of compassion to cover an indefinite multitude of potential moral patients in the context of the *Mitleidsethik* (cf. Birnbacher 1990:30 f.). The more abstract the objects of compassion or pity become, the more the specific meaning of these concepts is lost.

²⁴ The importance of vivid representation as a precondition of sympathy with remote victims was already clearly stated by Hume, see the quotation above.

4. Non-moral motives to care for the future

Roughly the same holds for non-moral motivations potentially supportive of moral responsibilities to the distant future. There is not very much the future can do for a present moral agent, and those few things it can do lack motivation potential. Later generations can erect monuments for "great men of the past"; they can cultivate their memory by commemoration services, by re-editions of their works, or by naming streets, buildings or scientific discoveries after them. These manifestations of retrospective recognition and gratitude, however, are necessarily symbolical and do not actually effect the agent during his lifetime. Though there may be some motivating potential in the hope for posthumous fame (as in the notable case of Horace who prided himself of having created a work *aere perennius*), this is relevant only for a small elite, mainly for those occupying important positions in society, politics, religion or culture already during their lives. I personally doubt whether a less exclusive future-directed motivation such as the thought of being remembered by one's descendants is a particularly strong motivation to act for their benefit.

An even more important factor in weakening the motivation to act for the distant future is the impossibility of direct and indirect negative sanctions. While children and grandchildren are in a position to claim their legitimate share and to protest against future burdens (such as the burden of paying back international debts over a long period of time in the future), our grand-grandchildren necessarily remain silent. If they have a voice, then only vicariously, by the advocacy of people who protect their interests and rights against the short-sighted loyalties of the present.

This, however, is only one of the obstacles lying in the way of future ethical motivation. The other is the *uncertainty* about which actions will have morally significant effects in the future. Though the general direction of future-oriented action may be clear (as, for example, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases in the case of the problem of global warming), there is more than one dimension of uncertainty to create doubts about whether future-oriented behaviour will really make a difference to future people. First, there is the uncertainty about the validity of the theories and scenarios on which the prognosis of future risks is based. Second, there is the uncertainty about whether and, if so, at what point of time alternative ways will be found to neutralise or to reduce future hazards. A third factor of uncertainty is the synergistic and cumulative nature of most long-term conservation strategies, both synchronically and diachronically. Potential impacts of present action are threatened by the potential lack of co-operation of present agents as well as by the potential lack of co-operation of future agents. The impact of present energy saving by one agent on future resources may be seen as negligible without the certainty that others join in. In order to attain their goal long-term strategies have to be undertaken by a series of successively co-operating generations. No single individual and no single collective can be sure, however, that its descendants will honour their efforts by carrying on the process into the distant future. There can be, in the nature of the case, no certainty that countervailing interests of later generations will not annul the beneficial effects of the efforts of the first generation.

Given these uncertainties (which apply especially to the distant future), the causal relevance of present action on future conditions is much less open to empirical control than the causal relevance of present action on spatially distant regions of the world. Acting for the future is inherently more risky than acting for the present or for the immediate future. It essentially involves the risk of squandering moral resources on projects that fail to achieve their intended aims by factors beyond the agent's control. That these risks have a considerable psychological impact on behaviour has been shown in several relevant areas. One of the preconditions for action motivation seems to be a relevant "control belief", i. e. the belief that appropriate action will be effective in attaining the desired goal. Without relevant "control beliefs", the motivation to enter upon a course of action can be expected to be unstable.²⁵

Each of the factors listed above contributes to weaken the practical effectiveness of moral beliefs about obligations to the future. Some of these factors are specific to future ethics: Future ethics has to do without the help of most of the quasi-moral and non-moral motivations that support the effectiveness of moral beliefs about obligations to present people. It further faces the problem that identifying actions by which the benefit of future generations can be secured is much more riddled with uncertainties than identifying actions by which the benefit of present people (or people in the near future) can be secured.

5. Indirect motivations

This pessimistic picture is, however, too pessimistic to be realistic. It leaves out what, in future ethics, may be a far more potent motivational resource than the motivations discussed so far, *indirect* motivations. The distinction between direct and indirect motivations cuts across the distinction between moral, quasi-moral or non-moral motivations introduced above. Indirect motivations can be moral, quasi-moral or non-moral. Their distinctive mark is that they produce a certain value or good as a side-effect. In an intergenerational context, indirect motivations do not aim at the production of goods or the prevention of evils befalling future people, but aim at objectives in the present or in the near future. They are nevertheless indirect motivations to act for the distant future in so far as they can be assumed to work for the good of people in the long term and to contribute to the realisation of the same ends as those underlying the principles of future ethics.

The advantage of indirect motivations from a practical point of view is their more reliable emotional basis and their potentially greater effectiveness in guiding behaviour. Differently from direct motivations, indirect motivations are supported by a broader range of emotional factors. This is not to say that a purely moral motivation to act responsibly towards the future is without emotions. These emotions, however, are necessarily abstract and impersonal. The future individuals

²⁵ Cf. for the case of air pollution Evans and Jacobs 1982:116 f.

figure in them only as blanks. Indirect motivations, on the contrary, are able to make use of the full scope of quasi-moral motives, such as love, compassion, care and solidarity, directed to objects accessible to experience.

The most well known construction of an indirect motivation in future ethics is Passmore's idea of a "chain of love". "Chain of love" means the intergenerational concatenation of each generation's love for its children and grandchildren. According to this model, each generation cares exclusively for the generation of its children and grandchildren, with the result that the sequence of limited responsibilities has the same or even better effects on the whole series of generations than postulates of a more future-oriented responsibility.²⁶ These advantages are both cognitive and motivational. Each generation is in a better position to judge what serves the well-being of the next generation than of what serves the well-being of the second or third generation coming after it. And each generation pursues the well-being of the next generation with higher intensity than that of the second or third generation coming after it because of the presence of stronger quasi-moral and non-moral motives.

The model can be interpreted and filled out in various ways, differing in the explanation given for why each generation cares for the generation of their children. One is to assume a natural and inborn propensity on the part of parents to make provisions for their children's future and to make sacrifices for their good. In this case, each generation is assumed to be motivated to care for its children independently of whether the generation of its own parents has similarly cared for itself. In a second variant the motivation is made to depend on a process of social learning. The motivation of the children's generation to care for their children is acquired by a process of model learning: each generation takes over the future-directed behaviour of their parents (and possibly grandparents) in their relations to their children (and grandchildren). The only external motivation necessary for triggering the concatenation of sympathies is the initial motivation of the first generation. Everything else follows, as it were, by chain reaction.

The chain of love-model is a quite powerful one. This is evident from the fact that even future disasters like a potential running out of a fundamental (non-substitutable) exhaustible resource such as energy can be modelled in such a way that even generations with a limited "sympathy horizon" extending over no more than the two following generations have a reason to act so as to prevent or at least mitigate the future calamity. Even a generation not covered by the altruism of the first generation, such as the third generation coming after it, can be better-off, in this model, than under the assumption that it is covered by the altruism of the first generation. This result essentially depends on the condition that though the aim of each generation's intergenerational sympathy is only the welfare of the directly following generations, this welfare is a compound of its own egoistic welfare and the altruistic welfare resulting from the anticipation of the welfare of subsequent generations. By aiming at the welfare of the directly following

²⁶ Passmore 1980: 88 f.

generations each generation thereby unintendedly sympathises with the welfare of the generations with which its directly following generations sympathise and therefore, by concatenation, with all future generations. Each generation aims at the welfare of no more than the two following generations. But in fact, as an unintended result, it promotes the welfare of the whole chain.

Assume, for example, that the compound welfare $U_{tot s_n}$ of each generation s_n is the sum of three utilities, its egoistic welfare $U_{ego s_n}$, a part of the compound welfare of the generation of its children, $U_{tot s_{n+1}}$, and a part of the compound welfare of the generation of its grandchildren, $U_{tot s_{n+2}}$.²⁷ Let the compound welfare of generation s_n , $U_{tot s_n}$ be defined as $U_{tot s_n} = U_{ego s_n} + 0,5 U_{tot s_{n+1}} + 0,25 U_{tot s_{n+2}}$ -with 0,5 and 0,25 as "sympathy factors" representing the degree to which the welfare of each generation depends on the welfare it perceives or anticipates subsequent generations to enjoy. It is easily shown that under these assumptions foreseen negative developments starting only during the lifetime of generation 4, which lies beyond the "sympathy horizon" of generation 1, nevertheless have an impact on the welfare of generation 1.

Let us assume that after an initial period of growth, a foreseeable shortage occurs during the adult years of generation 4 leading to a decline in welfare of all subsequent generations (with generation 6 as the last generation):

generation	1	2	3	4	5	6
net welfare	2	3	3	1	1	1

As a consequence, the welfare of all earlier generations is affected:

generation	1	2	3	4	5	6
compound welfare	5.938	5.688	4.375	2	1,5	1

This distribution compares unfavourably with a an alternative scenario in which generation 1 sacrifices part of its net welfare to invest in the prevention of the foreseeable shortage so that the

²⁷ For a generalised model of iterated sympathy relations between subsequent generations see Dasgupta 1974:413 ff.

level of net welfare rises instead of falling during the lifetime of generation 4. Think, for example, of heavy investments in the development of energy production from nuclear fusion in generation 1, resulting in a substitution of fossil fuels from generation 4 on.

generation	1	2	3	4	5	6
net welfare	1	3	3	4	4	4

In this case, the corresponding values for the compound welfare are

generation	1	2	3	4	5	6
compound welfare	7.75	9.25	8.5	8	6	4

What makes the "chain-of-love" model attractive is the weakness of the conditions on which it is based. It demands neither moral heroism nor dramatic sacrifices but only foresight and the effort to make each generation's sympathies for subsequent generations effective in future-oriented strategies. The motive of parents to see to the future of their children is a reliable motive mainly for two reasons: first, because it in fact seems "natural" that parents have an interest in the future well-being of their children, and second, because many parents can be assumed to have an interest in securing assistance from their children in case they have to depend on them in old age.²⁸

Furthermore, the model incorporates the empirical findings on the importance of model learning for intergenerational behaviour. How a generation behaves toward its immediate descendants seems to a large extent determined by the behaviour of the previous generation toward this generation. In a series of experiments on the distribution of a given quantity of resources between oneself and subsequent subjects (representing subsequent generations), Wade-Benzoni impressively showed that the preparedness to generosity toward future subjects heavily depends on the generosity experienced or attributed to the previous owner of the resource.²⁹ In conformity with

²⁸ See Becker/Murphy 1988:5 ff.

²⁹ Wade-Benzoni 2002

Bandura's theory of social learning in moral contexts³⁰ the generosity or non-generosity of the previous owner from whom the initial stock of the resource has been inherited is interpreted as a social norm and mimicked by one's own preparedness to make sacrifices for the future. There is empirical evidence that even the form in which parents provide for the future of their children (i. e. by bequest, financial assistance, investment in a child's education etc.) is closely correlated with the kind of provisions their own parents made for them.³¹

At the same time, the chain-of-love model is hopelessly unrealistic as far as it construes whole generations as homogeneous, whereas, in reality, agency lies with politicians, economic planners and the heads of families and dynasties with highly diverse possibilities of determining the welfare of subsequent generations. Well-to-do family heads usually bequeath their wealth to children who would be well-to-do even without the bequest, whereas older people with modest means usually have little to spare. The parts of the world in which future shortages are most likely to have an impact on the overall welfare of subsequent generations (and in which they do so already now) are also the least likely to have the means to make the investments necessary to prevent shortages in the future.

A second model of indirect motivations to care for the distant future was adumbrated by Passmore and then elaborated by Visser 't Hooft.³² In this model, indirect motivation is not aimed at *persons*, but at *goods* valued for their own sake, either natural or cultural. The idea of the model is that the long-term conservation of a certain good is best assured by establishing a tradition of valuing this good. This is plausible, first of all, for environmental goods such as beautiful landscapes and wilderness areas. It does not come as a surprise that, in an empirical study, Kals et al. found that emotional affinity toward nature proved to be an important predictor of the willingness to protect nature.³³ This is plausible, however, also for cultural goods such as forms of art, music, literature, philosophy, science, social virtues and political institutions. Valuing these goods is closely linked, psychologically, to motivations to contribute to the conservation of these values and their manifestations. Whoever loves, e. g., the music of Bach can be expected to have an interest in preserving this music from being lost or forgotten. That implies that he must be interested in conserving or even strengthening attitudes likely to respect the integrity of these values. He must be a conservative in respect to a certain form of life. It is hardly imaginable to subscribe to a cultural value like classical music, scientific truth or the democratic state without the hope that they will "never die". Indeed, Nietzsche's line according to which "alle Lust will Ewigkeit" (all pleasure wants eternity)³⁴ seems to apply more to the objects of pleasure, satisfaction

³⁰ Bandura 1969

³¹ Arrondel/Masson 2001:417 ff.

³² Visser 't Hooft 1999:122

³³ Kals et al. 1999

³⁴ Nietzsche 1980:404

and valuation than to pleasure itself. It is not pleasure that we want to exist forever, but the objects of pleasure.

An anticipation of this model with respect to natural values is one of the pioneering conceptions of ecological ethics, Aldo Leopold's "land ethic". Leopold proposed the "land ethic" because he was convinced that direct motives of nature conservation based on future ethical considerations are insufficiently effective in motivating ecologically right action. Therefore, he thought, a functional substitute was needed, in his own words, "a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual."³⁵ Leopold's "land ethic", though designed for ultimately anthropocentric purposes, has an ecocentric orientation. It expects the agent to see himself not as a conqueror but as part of nature and to define his role as serving nature instead of dominating it. It furthermore includes the cultivation of emotions such as love, respect and admiration of nature for its own sake.³⁶

This characteristic indirectness of motivation is also present in some attempts within the communitarian school of social thought to incorporate future ethics into the communitarian framework. Philosophers in the communitarian tradition like De-Shalit have drawn attention to the close relations between the fact of being firmly embedded in a social group and the motivation to care for its future.³⁷ Concern about the future well-being of a group to which one has a close emotional relationship can be expected to be more reliable than the interest in the well-being of abstractions like humanity or future generations. Caring for the future of one's reference group can even be part of one's own moral identity. Whoever defines himself as German, Christian, or as a scientist, can hardly be indifferent to the future of the group to which his identity refers, though, with a plurality of identities and loyalties, there may be conflicts between the future-directed motivations associated with each. In a pioneering paper on the "motivation problem" in future ethics, this source of motivation was called "community bonding".³⁸ The essential motivational factor in community bonding is the "sense of belonging to some joint enterprise with others". One's own contribution to the future is seen as a contribution to a common cause which one expects to be carried further by an indefinite number of subsequent generations of members of the same community.

Future-oriented motivations by specific loyalties are further supported by the fact that quite a number of collectives are either defined by a certain long-term project, as, e. g., "movements" for x where x is a value or good of an intergenerational kind, or are so efficient in inculcating long-term objectives in their adherents that these have no room for long-term projects and ideals of their own. From the perspective of future ethics, such collective objectives are, however, a mixed

³⁵ Leopold 1949:203

³⁶ Leopold 1949:204, 209, 223

³⁷ De Shalit 1995

³⁸ Care 1982:207

blessing. They are too often directly averse to the well-being of future mankind, rationally conceived, as has been shown by the projects of imperialism, colonialism, and the world revolution.

This does not close the list of indirect motivations relevant to actively pursuing the good of future generations. There is one further indirect motivation to act for the future that can be expected to become even more important in the future, the motivation to give meaning to one's life by embedding it in a transgenerational context of solidarity. In the developed world, a spiritual vacuum has made itself felt that can be traced back both to the continuing historical process of secularisation and to saturation with purely economic private and collective objectives. There is a high degree of preparedness to contribute to causes or projects that reach further than one's own person, one's own personal context and one's own lifetime. Ernest Partridge has called such motives motives of "self-transcendence".³⁹ Future orientation and responsibility to the future offer themselves as the natural candidates for the longing for existential meaning in a secularised world. Acting for the future fits such motives most neatly because a commitment to the future makes the individual feel his own value and makes him feel embedded in a wider context of meaning which reaches from the past into the far future. By acting for the future, the individual is given the chance to see himself as an element in a chain of generations held together by an intergenerational feeling of community, which combines obligations in the direction of the future with feelings of gratitude in the direction of the past. However modest his contribution, he thereby situates himself in a context transcending the individual both in personal and temporal respects.

This motive will gain particular momentum when it is combined with the communitarian motive and supported by the feeling that one's own contribution is part of the objectives of a larger community. The best term to characterise the way such a feeling of transcending the bounds of one's existence seems *elevation*, a word characteristically used by Stendhal when he wrote, in an age more given to enthusiasm than ours: "... sacrifice du présent à l'avenir ; rien *n'élève* l'âme comme le pouvoir et l'habitude de faire de tels sacrifices" (... sacrificing the present to the future; nothing elevates the soul like the power and the habit of such sacrifices).⁴⁰ Of course, at least part of the robustness of this motivation depends on the fact that it cannot be disappointed by experience. In this respect, motivations to act for the future resemble religious commitments of a more literally transcendent kind. Both are, for the present agent, unfalsifiable. Partly in consequence thereof, they are liable to be abused. Whether there will in fact be the temporally overarching community with shared objectives and values and shared feelings of solidarity implicitly assumed to exist in this motivation is highly uncertain. It is an open question whether our descendants will recognise, or honour by acting in accordance with them, the present generation's principles of intergenerational responsibility and visions of intergenerational justice. The more remote in time a later generation is situated and the more its principles are shaped by a long series of intermediary generations coming between ours and theirs, the less certain we can be that they

³⁹ Partridge 1980:204

⁴⁰ Stendhal 1959:246 f. (my italics)

will in fact be, as this motivation presupposes, part of the same moral community.⁴¹ As historical examples of powerful ideologies like Marxism have shown, however, the risk of illusion does not necessarily detract from the strength of this motivation.

It should be mentioned that all four models discussed, though potentially quite effective in stimulating actions and omissions with long-term impact, have serious limits. The most important limit is the risk of wasting moral energies on the world's future that might more profitably be invested in solving the world's present problems. Each of these models might mislead the present generation in making provisions for the future that the future will not in fact need. It may, e. g., be doubted whether future generations will really suffer from not having the chance to see live members of those biological species that would go extinct now unless kept alive by the present generation's efforts. It is an open question whether the libraries of classical literature we try to preserve now will be of much use for the people of a distant future in which people's interests might have radically changed. On the other hand, there is a substantial risk that we are wasting resources now that will prove to be much more vital for the basic needs of future people than we can possibly expect.

6. Self-binding as a supportive device

Hope for long-term policies does not only come from indirect motivations but also from *self-binding*. Self-binding functions either by raising the threshold to deviate from the road of virtue defined by one's own principles, or by limiting one's freedom to deviate from these principles. In either case, an attempt is made to control in advance the extent to which future motivations deviating from one's principles result in behaviour, either by deliberately making deviations more difficult or less attractive, or by deliberately restricting future options. In the first case, the motivational mechanism is similar to the replacement of direct motives by indirect motives: Whoever binds himself by a long-term contract and precommits himself to a certain course of action complements the direct motivation for long-term provisions or long-term beneficence by the indirect motivation to escape the undesired short-term consequences of breaking or changing the contract.

The paradigmatic field of operation of self-binding mechanisms is the field of prudential maxims like paying one's debts, saving a portion of one's income or not resuming smoking after having given it up. The agent precommits himself to live up to his maxims by delegating control to an external personal or institutional agency, thus protecting himself from his own opportunism. Self-binding must be attractive to anyone who thinks that he is inclined to impulses by which he risks jeopardising his long-term objectives.

⁴¹ cf. Auerbach 1995:79 f.

Self-binding can take various forms. *Internal* self-binding consists in self-binding relying on mechanisms internal to the agent. In the case of the individual, internal self-binding can assume the form of adopting maxims by which internal sanctions are activated to avoid opportunistic deviations from one's principles, so that deviations are "punished" e. g. by feelings of guilt or shame. Feelings of guilt or shame are mobilised whenever the person does not live up to the obligations of his moral identity. Once these internal sanctions have been established, even the most extreme egoist has a reason to take these sanctions into account. In the case of collectives, internal self-binding can consist in establishing institutions within a society by which collective decisions are controlled and potentially revised. *External* self-binding consists in delegating these sanctions to an external agency, either by making it raise the threshold for deviations or by restricting the options open to oneself. Delegating the power to make one follow a rule according to the Ulysses-and-the-Sirens pattern can be thought of as a kind of self-paternalism, which, however, is without the moral problems characteristic of other forms of paternalism since subject and object of paternalistic intervention are one and the same.

Self-binding is clearly relevant to future-oriented action. Given the psychological facts about time preference and the limited intergenerational sympathy horizon (which rarely exceeds the generations of children and grandchildren), self-binding is, in principle, a potent device in effectively caring for the future. A case for introducing such self-binding mechanisms in the context of future ethics was recently made by Baumgartner.⁴² According to this author, future-oriented moral values can play the role of internal self-binding mechanisms if they are sufficiently firmly embedded in an individual's moral identity. The individual's moral identity is not a given. It can be modelled by morally significant experience and by a process of reflective working through of this experience. Self-binding is effected by moral experiences that are intense enough to have an impact on a person's moral identity.

The problem with individual self-binding, however, is that it is difficult to manipulate one's moral experience at will. Changes in fundamental value orientation do not usually occur deliberately. It must be doubted, therefore, whether internal self-binding on the level of the *individual* is a good candidate for compensating for other kinds of future ethical motivation wherever these are lacking. A further problem is that even a conscience reliable enough to constitute a moral identity is not immune to corruption. Internal moral sanctions are often too weak to overcome temptation. On the whole, delegation of control to an external agency seems more effective.

This is true, however, only on the level of the individual. On the social level, internal self-binding might serve as a potent instrument of protecting collective long-term concerns from being weakened by myopic temptations, both by formal and informal means. The most important formal means are legal and constitutional safeguards; the most important informal means are educational

⁴² Baumgartner 2005:283 ff.

policies. By educating the young generation in the spirit of sustainability and by creating an atmosphere in which foresight, cautious use of resources, nature conservation and the long-term stability of social security are strengthened against countervailing short-term interests, society deliberately builds up pressure from below to keep its own opportunistic tendencies under control. This pressure then might act as a kind of "social conscience" against the temptations of politicians to serve themselves or their constituencies at the cost of the future. This is not to say that social self-binding mechanisms are by themselves supportive of sustainability and long-term objectives. On the contrary, in many welfare states the legal realities are such that long-term political objectives (such as lowering the national debt) are made more difficult by legally established social rights.

Compared to legal safeguards against social myopia, constitutional safeguards are clearly more reliable. They are not only less easy to change than simple laws, they can also be expected to precommit future generations of politicians and other decision-makers, thus contributing to the continuity in the pursuit of transgenerational objectives.⁴³ Though there can be, in the nature of the case, no guarantee that they will remain in force during the next generations they provide as much certainty that the projects of today are carried on in the future as one can possibly hope for. Besides that, constitutions usually provide a certain degree of protection against politics being excessively dominated by short-term objectives, both by procedural and material safeguards. One of the procedural safeguards designed to control short-term orientation in political decision-making is the institution of indirect democracy, which requires that the members of the legislative organs are bound exclusively by their own conscience and/or party discipline and not by an imperative mandate. By assigning the control of the executive not to the constituencies themselves but to their elected representatives, potential pressure from the basis to prioritise short-term objectives over long-term objectives of preservation and development is effectively reduced. Again, this assignment of control will work in favour of long-term orientations only to the extent that the decisions taken by political representatives are in fact less myopic than those hypothetically taken by their constituencies. Whether this is so, is open to doubt.

Another procedural safeguard is the institution of an independent constitutional court with the power to control government policies by constitutional principles. Most constitutions contain material principles limiting the extent to which governments may indulge in "obliviousness of the future". In the German *Grundgesetz*, there are two articles to that effect, article 115 which limits the national debt to the sum total of national investments, and the recently introduced article 20a, which contains an explicit commitment to care adequately for the needs of future generations, especially by preserving resources and by protecting the natural environment.

There are other hopeful developments in establishing self-binding mechanisms by which collective agents keep their own myopia under control. In a number of political areas, such as

⁴³ cf. Elster 1979:95

economics, science, technology, environment, medicine and social security, there is a growing number of independent bodies whose counsel is heard, and often respected, in practical politics. Examples of such independent bodies are, on the one hand, research institutions, think tanks and foundations designed to exist over longer periods of time and wholly or partly financed by the state, and, on the other hand, committees and commissions expected to work on more limited tasks. The intention in setting up these bodies is, partly, to make them act as a kind of collective "future ethical conscience", a role which politics is often unable to play because of pressures of lobbying, party politics and election campaigns. Of course, there is no guarantee that the advice of these committees and commissions (even where it is unanimous) is respected. The advice coming from these bodies binds those to whom it is addressed as little as advice from a friend binds an individual. The alternative of endowing these bodies with executive or legislative powers, on the other hand, would not be compatible with basic democratic principles. The sovereignty of the people, or of its representatives, must not be usurped by experts.

Experience shows that it may take quite a long time until the warnings of experts from these bodies about future dangers have an impact on politics. In some cases, it takes twenty or thirty years until the warnings about long-term hazards are taken seriously by politicians, as, for example in the case of climate changes by the emission of greenhouse gases. (One may well wonder how long it will take that the dangers inherent in the dramatic changes in the distribution of age groups will be fully recognised by political planners.) In part, these delays are not unreasonable given the fact that not every warning is well founded and not every catastrophe scenario realistic (think of such insufficiently founded warnings as the *Waldsterben* or the potentially fatal erosion of the oxygen content of the atmosphere). In part they are due, however, to the reluctance of politicians to meet new challenges and to confront their constituencies with truths they do not like.

7. External self-binding mechanisms

On the level of the individual, self-binding by an external agency is the more attractive the more firmly an individual wants to act on its long-term principles and the higher its risk of impulsiveness. An extreme case is the situation of gambling addicts, some of whom have gone so far as demand legal possibilities to make gambling casinos restrict access to them on an international scale. A milder form of self-restraint by external self-binding would be to make one's decision to quit smoking and to expose oneself to the mockery of friends in case of defection (cf. Bayertz 2004, 172).

Since time preference is a universal phenomenon, delegating responsibility for long-term provisions to an external agency like the state is often rational even for those who are less prone to succumb to their impulses. For one, control costs are shifted to an external institution. Self-restraint is wholly or partly replaced by restrictions coming from outside. Second, the individual can be more certain that his individual investment has an effect on the future in all cases where a

cumulative effort is needed to make a difference. Third, it is more probable that the burdens of realising long-term objectives are fairly distributed and that free riding on the idealism of others is ruled out. Fourth, there are advantages of a moral division of labour made possible by institutional solutions. Instead of each individual making its own provisions for the future, those with an intrinsic interest in the class of objects to be protected can be assigned the task of keeping them in good order, with environmentalists caring for the conservation of nature, and economists caring for the conservation of capital. Empirical surveys repeatedly show that a large proportion of citizens is interested in the conservation of nature but that very few are willing to actively contribute to it by voluntary work. In all such cases it is rational to lay these widely shared aims into the hands of those who are intrinsically motivated.

On the level of the collective, several external self-binding mechanisms with a clear relevance to future ethics are already in operation, some of them taking the form of international law and international contracts, others taking the form of transnational organisations and authorities. A model of an internationally effective agency able to give not only advice to national governments but to implement their future directed policies independently of national politics is the European Central Bank. It functions independently of national governments and is bound exclusively by the criteria of the European Union Treaty. Important functions of an external control of government policies in the sphere of future objectives are international contracts like the Maastricht Treaty (concerning the limits set to the national debt) and the Kyoto Protocol (concerning the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere). However, given the fact that governments are the key agents of most future hazards such as the destruction of large parts of tropical rain forest, the reduction of biodiversity and the degradation of soils by intensive agriculture, there is still much to be done. There are quite a number of proposals how this may be effected. One option that should be taken into consideration is the global court for future issues proposed, together with other options, by Weiss.⁴⁴ Such a court, even if it lacks the authority to check the "obliviousness of the future" of national governments by issuing sanctions, would at least be able to scandalise policies that endanger the interests of future people and to encourage the search for sustainable alternatives.

8. Conclusion

The "motivation problem", the problem of bridging the psychological gap between the acceptance of a rule and acting in accordance with it is not only a practical challenge to politicians and educators, but also a theoretical challenge to moral psychology and moral philosophy. The challenge is to identify factors that might help to motivate an agent not only to accept responsibility in the abstract but also to adopt it as a part of his moral identity and to take appropriate action. Though internalists about moral motivation are probably right in thinking that accepting a moral

⁴⁴ Weiss 1989:121

rule is more than a purely intellectual act of assent and involves some motivation to act in accordance with it, this motivation by itself is, in general, too weak to resist the temptations of more immediate and more controllable objectives.

Motivation to make provisions for the more distant future is a particular challenge for any theory of moral motivation. Moral norms to care for the distant future do not only share the problems of motivation common to all moral norms but face particular difficulties resulting from the facelessness of future people and the inevitable abstractness of obligations to act for the future. Moreover, the motivation to act responsibly toward the future tends to be weakened by a number of uncertainties, among them the uncertainty about what our descendants will value, the uncertainty about whether present sacrifices will have an effect on future well-being, and the uncertainty about whether subsequent generations will co-operate in the long-term effort to preserve essential natural resources (such as energy resources) and important cultural resources (such as the democratic state).

The picture resulting from an exclusive consideration of direct motivations to act for the future is unduly pessimistic, however. It leaves out the important role of indirect motivations. In the context of future ethics, indirect motivations, whether moral, quasi-moral or non-moral, can be expected to have a more reliable emotional basis than direct motivations and to be more effective in guiding behaviour. Taking indirect motivations into account makes the prospects of future-oriented action appear much less gloomy. Among these are the love of one's children and grandchildren (and the expectation to get from them something in exchange in a later period of life), group loyalties, the high valuation of transgenerational projects and ideals for their own sakes, and the satisfaction gained by embedding one's own limited existence into a "self-transcending" chain of contributions to a transgenerational cause. These motivations hold at least a limited promise of effectively shaping the decisions of the present generation in a way compatible with widely shared principles of future ethics, especially if these motivations are supported by mechanisms of external self-binding on the level of the individual and by mechanisms of internal and external self-binding on the level of collectives like states and companies.

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