

Call for Abstracts

University of Hamburg, Institute of Philosophy

Workshop: *Vulnerability and Intergenerational Justice: Obligations to States*

Date: May 9, 2025

Submission Deadline: January 20, 2024

States face several pressing policy issues that involve significant intergenerational components: the impact of energy policies on pollution and climate change, the use of non-renewable resources, the management of public debt, and the consequences of housing and environmental policies on future individuals' health, such as the rising risk of pandemics. We are also witnessing constant loss of biodiversity, degradation of natural landscapes, and threats to artistic heritage, languages, and immaterial traditions.

Policy decisions taken by states on these issues profoundly impact the well-being and lives of future generations. Worryingly, many decisions have and will continue to negatively affect future generations, often causing irreversible changes or imposing costs that will be challenging to mitigate. As a result, future generations are particularly vulnerable to decisions made by current policymakers. Despite the growing literature on intergenerational justice, the vulnerability of future people has received relatively little attention. Framing the analysis of intergenerational justice in terms of vulnerability offers an opportunity to shed new light on states' duties toward future generations.

Future generations' vulnerability raises normative concerns for several reasons. First, future individuals cannot take preventative measures to avoid or mitigate the negative effects of past policies. This distinguishes their vulnerability from that of individuals, such as aging people or those at risk of developing medical conditions, who can often act preventively to reduce their future vulnerability. Second, future individuals cannot hold policymakers accountable for harmful decisions made in the past or seek compensation, either materially or symbolically. In this respect the relationship between current and future individuals differs from other relationships of vulnerability, such as between contemporaries, or partially overlapping generations, where some form of redress may be possible. Third, future individuals' existence and identity depend on present procreative choices and on those policies that influence those choices. While future wild animals are also vulnerable to current policies, their identity is less directly shaped by them compared to that of future humans. These considerations raise interesting questions at the intersection of procreative ethics, population ethics, and intergenerational justice.

This workshop seeks to explore the role and significance of future generations' vulnerability in intergenerational justice. We invite abstracts addressing topics including, but not limited to:

- What duties do states have to prevent or mitigate future generations' vulnerability?
- How should relationships of vulnerability between temporally distant groups be conceptualized?
- Is future generations' vulnerability relevant for long-termism?
- Does vulnerability to past policymakers raise specific relational concerns, and what duties might these concerns ground?
- Can there be value in future generations' vulnerability, for example, as a reflection of enduring political institutions or shared history?
- Do future state officials have special responsibilities to address the vulnerability caused by their predecessors' policies?

- Are democratic states especially responsible for future generations' vulnerability because their citizens democratically authorize policies with long-term effects?
- How does the non-identity problem affect the vulnerability of future generations?
- Do current procreators have special responsibilities concerning future generations' vulnerability, and if so, how should the state enforce these?

Confirmed Participants:

- Simon Caney (University of Warwick)
- Julia Mosquera (Institute for Future Studies, Stockholm)
- Andreas Schmidt (University of Groningen)

We have space for two further speakers in the program. If you are interested in participating, please submit an anonymized abstract of around 1,000 words, along with an email including your name, title, and affiliation, to riccardo.spotorno@uni-hamburg.de. The format of this workshop is pre-read. Participants will give a brief presentation of their paper during a one-hour discussion session.

Abstract Submission Deadline: January 20, 2025

Paper Submission Deadline: April 24, 2025

For any questions regarding the workshop, please contact Riccardo Spotorno at riccardo.spotorno@uni-hamburg.de.