

On the Scope of Institutions for Future Generations: Defending an Expansive Global Constitutional Convention That Protects against Squandering Generations

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I believe that we are in the early stages of a new “intergenerational turn” in political philosophy.¹ This turn comes after the international turn of the last thirty years or so, with its explorations of global distributive justice, humanitarian intervention, migration, international trade justice, the ethics of global health, and so on. The intergenerational turn is largely motivated by the threat of global climate change, which has pronounced intergenerational dimensions affecting both those alive now (us, our children, and our grandchildren) and those still to come (over the next few decades, centuries, and beyond).² Nevertheless, in my view there is an unfortunate and indeed dangerous mismatch between the prominent invocation of climate change as an inspiration for

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intergenerational political philosophy and the kinds of approaches usually proposed, both theoretical and institutional.

My focus in this essay is on the need for institutional reform. This topic has become increasingly popular in recent years, giving rise to numerous innovative proposals. These proposals are dominated by plans for issue-specific bodies (such as a world climate bank, a world commission on solar radiation management, or a common heritage fund) and recommendations for structural reforms within domestic politics (such as introducing ombudsmen for the future, youth quotas, or new legislative chambers to represent future generations).³ Unfortunately, I believe there is a lack of fit between such remedies and the nature of the underlying problem. In my view, what is needed is a genuinely global approach that treats intergenerational questions as a foundational concern, and advocates for new permanent institutions with ongoing responsibilities to act on intergenerational threats.

This essay proceeds in three parts. I begin by summarizing my diagnosis of the problem that we face: a serious intergenerational collective action problem that I call “the tyranny of the contemporary.”⁴ Next, I sketch my proposal, originally made in this journal in 2014, for a global constitutional convention focused on future generations.⁵ I then develop some of these ideas further through responses to objections from fellow advocates for reform who nevertheless consider my proposals to go too far. In particular, I reject a counterproposal made by Anja Karnein, who argues that reforms should address only threats whose negative impacts would cross a very high threshold. Among other things, I argue that this proposal would leave future generations vulnerable to what I call “squandering generations.” These intergenerational squanderers violate appropriate relationships between past, present, and future generations. In my view, a central task of defensible intergenerational institutions is to protect the future against such abuse.

DIAGNOSIS: THE TYRANNY OF THE CONTEMPORARY

There is no one, single problem of intergenerational political philosophy, any more than there is just one problem of domestic or international political philosophy. Still, some challenges are more central than others. One of these is “short-termism.” However, there are also numerous forms of short-termism, and many are not intergenerational. Hence, we must ask what kinds of short-termism are most concerning in intergenerational ethics.

The problem that I believe is the most severe, and most relevant to climate change, is the tyranny of the contemporary. Here I will illustrate the basic idea by outlining a paradigm case. Consider the following idealized model.⁶ Imagine a sequence of temporally distinct groups (G₁, G₂, G₃, G₄, and so on) spread out over distinct time periods (T₁, T₂, T₃, T₄, and so on). For simplicity, assume that each member of a given group belongs only to that group, so there is no overlap in group membership; that each group is concerned only with what happens within its own time frame (for example, G₁ cares only about T₁, and G₂ about T₂); and that each group can only affect later groups, not earlier ones (that is, G₂ can affect G₃, G₄, and so on, but not G₁). Next, suppose that each group has the opportunity to engage in “front-loaded activities”: practices that benefit that group but whose burdens (for example, economic costs, physical harms, and so on) come later, to groups further along in the temporal sequence.⁷ More specifically, let us focus on a subset of front-loaded activities, where the benefits to each group (for example, to G₁) are modest, while the burdens imposed on later groups (G₂, G₃, and so on) are severe. Moreover, let us assume that there are no confounding factors (that is, as-yet-unspecified features of the situation that would undermine its basic shape as I have presented it).

The idealized scenario just sketched is grim. By assumption, any given group in the model is concerned only with the modest benefits arising during its own time frame and is indifferent to the wider burdens, even though they are severe; hence it is to be expected that each group will engage in these front-loaded activities.⁸ Moreover, since (by hypothesis) each group imposes severe burdens on *every one* of its successors, there is a multiplier effect over time, resulting in a dramatic accumulation of impacts in the further future. For example, whereas G₂ experiences only the negative impacts caused by G₁, G₄ incurs the burdens passed on by each of its predecessors, G₁, G₂, and G₃. Given that each of these burdens is already severe, this accumulation threatens more distant groups with genuine catastrophe.⁹

I believe that the tyranny of the contemporary has a particular status. First, it seems likely that, other things being equal, this kind of “intergenerational buck-passing” would be prohibited by any reasonable ethical theory, including theories of justice.¹⁰ Indeed, I would go further and say that the fact that a given theory would condemn such behavior should function as a *condition of adequacy* for that theory. In other words, approaches to ethics that license this kind of intergenerational buck-passing should be rejected for that reason. Thus, to take a more familiar example, I am proposing that avoiding clear cases of the tyranny of the

contemporary functions in a similar way in intergenerational ethics to the idea in democratic theory that for a normative account of democracy to be acceptable, it must deliver the result that, other things being equal, all adult persons of standard cognitive abilities should have the right to vote.¹¹

Second, as a matter of political philosophy, I believe that the status of the tyranny of the contemporary is such that it ought to be understood as *a basic standing threat* in human affairs, and one that social systems—including political institutions, ethical norms, community conventions, and so on—should be designed to neutralize. In this way, it is akin to the threat totalitarian dictatorship poses to liberty, and the threat the tyranny of the majority presents to minority groups within a democracy.

The idealized model provides a stark example of the tyranny of the contemporary. Elsewhere, I call it “the pure intergenerational problem,”¹² since it illustrates the fundamental problem of distinctively *intergenerational* ethics, understood as the ethics of *relations between* different generations as opposed to broader questions involving future people. I also argue that the challenge of the tyranny of the contemporary is already with us. The basic dynamic is manifest in the real world in various impure forms, including in many of our most severe social problems, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, nuclear waste, intensive agriculture, and similar issues.¹³ In addition, I suspect that opportunities for severe intergenerational tyranny are on the rise. We are now a global species, leaving an immense ecological footprint on the planet. Left unchecked, the influence of each successive generation is likely to increase over time, often in ways that will shape the basic prospects of future generations.

Unfortunately, the threat posed by the tyranny of the contemporary has been largely neglected both in contemporary social life and in the associated political philosophy. As a result, current institutions are failing in ways that risk severe and potentially catastrophic consequences, especially for the young and future generations. One obvious driver of neglect and failure is that existing institutions were not designed with the intergenerational threat much in mind. However, these problems may also have other, more sinister roots. In particular, those engaged in intergenerational tyranny have strong incentives to obscure what they are doing in ways that are self-serving.

One notable strategy is to distort the very terms in which problems are discussed. So, for example, one can promote ways of thinking and talking about the issues where the threat of intergenerational tyranny is assumed away,

minimized, or otherwise made less visible. I believe that this problem is widespread when it comes to climate change (see my discussions elsewhere of “the problem of moral corruption”).¹⁴

One example I have discussed extensively involves *misdiagnosing* the nature of the climate problem. For instance, traditional analyses in public policy typically present climate change as a prisoner’s dilemma (or tragedy of the commons) played out between nation-states. On this diagnosis, all countries prefer to avoid dangerous climate change and so favor global cooperation over global non-cooperation; however, each country also prefers to defect from a cooperative strategy in order to avoid the costs of action (to “free ride”). Ultimately, the second incentive leads to a tragic outcome: since defection dominates, noncooperation is to be expected, where all are worse off by their own lights. This, the story goes, is what explains the woeful lack of international action on climate change. As a commentator in the *Financial Times* recently put it: “Prisoner’s dilemmas do exist. The most pressing example today is climate change. Every nation and every individual benefits if others restrain their pollution, but we all prefer not to have to restrain our own.”¹⁵

Notice, however, that the traditional analyses appear blind to the intergenerational dimensions of climate change in general, and to the possibility of a tyranny of the contemporary in particular. Climate change involves substantial time lags, such that many of the negative impacts of current and past emissions, including perhaps the most serious ones, are likely not to arise for decades, and some not for centuries. For example, breaching the 2.0° Celsius threshold for dangerous climate change is likely not to occur until the second half of this century, and higher benchmarks still later.¹⁶ Strikingly, traditional analyses seem to presuppose that national institutions (and the current generation of political leadership, in particular) are so constituted that they are strongly motivated to avoid such long-term negative impacts of climate change.¹⁷ In other words, they appear to *assume*, implicitly and without defense, that nation-states already are *effective intergenerational stewards*: that they adequately represent the interests of their citizens far into the future, so that the future is protected in major decisions.

Sadly, I believe that this aspect of the traditional analyses is deeply implausible. Consider the two implicit claims that current national institutions are (1) (in general) effective intergenerational stewards, and (2) (more specifically) strongly motivated to avoid long-term negative climate impacts (that is, those occurring decades, centuries, and millennia into the future). Both seem to me unmotivated

and unreasonable in the existing geopolitical climate. More importantly for current purposes, in making such assumptions traditional analyses appear to *conceal* the threat of the tyranny of the contemporary, and in ways that would suit any temporal group intent on pursuing unethical front-loaded activities. Again, the basic idea is that many in the current generation, and especially the most affluent, are incentivized to *obscure* what is going on by encouraging ways of thinking and talking about the climate problem that are seriously distorted and self-serving. Arguably, the assumption of effective intergenerational stewardship is part of this distortion, since simply assuming away the tyranny of the contemporary appears to be a highly effective way of encouraging moral corruption.

Alas, misdiagnosis (of the climate problem or other issues with strong intergenerational dimensions) is far from the only way to prepare the ground for, or otherwise facilitate, a tyranny of the contemporary. Another worrying strategy would be to recognize the intergenerational dimension (at least officially) but then promote institutional solutions that are structurally inadequate to the task. It is to the threat posed by this strategy that I now turn.

REMEDY: A GLOBAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

To meet the tyranny of the contemporary, I have proposed calling for a global constitutional convention focused on future generations (GCC). The GCC would be a global deliberative forum charged with representing humanity in its primary relations, political and moral. Its task would be to provide institutional recommendations for protecting against the tyranny of the contemporary, paying special attention to manifestations at the global scale and over the very long term. In doing so, it might propose the creation of new institutions, modifications of existing institutions, or (most likely) both. Although the GCC would target climate change, it would have a much broader remit. Importantly, pursuing such a convention is justified *independently* of global climate change or any other specific intergenerational problem. Recall that the tyranny of the contemporary is a basic standing threat. Its status as such is what justifies a firm institutional response, not any particular instantiation of the threat.

Exactly how the GCC would come to be, how it would be constituted, and how precisely it would understand its role and aims are matters that need to be discussed, especially among those sympathetic to intergenerational institutional reform. In the spirit of advancing such a discussion, I have suggested several initial

guidelines.¹⁸ For current purposes, let me highlight four. The first two recommend that the GCC should seek to establish institutions with a broad remit and ongoing responsibility to act on intergenerational threats:

- *Comprehensiveness*: the global constitutional convention should be under a mandate to consider a very broad range of global, intergenerational issues; to focus on such issues at a foundational level; and to recommend institutional reform accordingly.
- *Standing authority*: the focus of the global constitutional convention should be on establishing permanent institutions with standing authority over the long term (though it may occasionally also recommend the creation of some temporary and issue-specific bodies).

Two further guidelines of the GCC recommend generational representation across an indefinite number of generations:

- *Generational representation*: those expected to live during different time periods, as members of different birth cohorts, should receive distinct representation.
- *Indefinite time horizon*: representatives should be provided for a suitably long time-horizon of at least centuries, and probably millennia; special provision should also be made for longer-term representation for issues that merit it.

Here, I will not try to explore the guidelines further, or to develop a more specific vision of the GCC.¹⁹ Instead, I want to make a more limited point: even in a bare form, such guidelines already contrast markedly with mainstream discussions of how to address climate change and related problems. In particular, conventional proposals overwhelmingly consist in problem-specific approaches, or are focused on reform at the domestic level (often both). Consider, for example, ideas such as: (on the political side) the Paris Climate Agreement, the Green New Deal, or a special parliamentary ombudsman for the future; and (on the intellectual side) a world climate bank, youth quotas in parliaments, or additional legislative chambers.²⁰ Such proposals are normally seen as (highly) ambitious. Yet, from my point of view, in the face of the basic standing threat of the tyranny of the contemporary, and its manifestation in climate change and other emerging global problems, these responses are strikingly limited and piecemeal. Most notably, while each of the piecemeal proposals may have some merit in its own limited sphere, it is surprising that the idea of a genuinely global institutional response,

and especially the creation of institutions with standing authority and a wide remit, is rarely even mentioned, let alone mainstream. In addition, even those who may be sympathetic in principle seem remarkably tentative, and typically see global institutions as emerging only indirectly, in a bottom-up way, out of more local, regional, and national level initiatives.²¹ In short, for almost no one is global institutional reform either the focal point or the immediate priority; at best, the hope seems to be that, if necessary, it may gradually emerge over time, *if we get there at all*.

In my view, this contrast, between what seems most natural and what is actually being suggested, even at the radical end of the spectrum, suggests a mismatch between diagnosis and solution. Many admit that climate change shows up “countless weaknesses in our institutional architecture,”²² and specifically that a serious governance gap exists where future generations are concerned, especially when it comes to global environmental problems and other severe threats. Nevertheless, hardly anyone appears willing to either draw or perhaps foreground the natural conclusion: that the most straightforward aim of reform should be to fill the governance gap with appropriate intergenerational institutions, focusing on the global level.²³

Let us pause to underline this point. The case for the GCC has a firm grounding, such that there is a strong presumption in its favor. One cornerstone of this case is that our argument provides a rich and compelling account of our core intergenerational problem. First, the tyranny of the contemporary appears to be a genuine standing threat. Second, there is a clear institutional gap: the intergenerational realm is a distinct and legitimate sphere of concern that does not yet have institutions to protect it, or indeed many natural champions. Third, there is a smoking gun. Despite often claiming to have jurisdiction and competence over intergenerational affairs, contemporary institutions are manifestly failing to deal with the most pressing issues, often in spectacular fashion. In the case of climate change, they have been doing so at least since the 1990s (and arguably since the mid-1960s), as we can infer from continued increases in emissions, rising global temperatures, and so forth.²⁴

Another cornerstone of the case for the GCC is that it provides a relatively straightforward solution to our core intergenerational problem. There are two main reasons. The first is that the GCC is a *direct and holistic response* to the basic standing threat. It aims to put in place an ongoing system that will confront the tyranny of the contemporary as such, at various levels. Moreover, this seems

the natural default response.²⁵ By contrast, most rivals to the GCC are more piecemeal and indirect. Consider, for instance, Broome and Foley's World Climate Bank and the Green New Deal. These focus on the climate problem, deal only with specific aspects of it, and tend to underestimate the intergenerational dimensions (perhaps even to the point of encouraging intergenerational tyranny).²⁶ They also bring on substantial problems of their own.

One central issue is of adequacy. The various piecemeal approaches are, by definition, of restricted scope and limited ambition. Thus, even the complete success of each in its own sphere seems unlikely to address the tyranny of the contemporary writ large. Consequently, we reach the important result that the piecemeal approach faces a *higher burden of proof* than the GCC. Let me illustrate this idea with a more specific point. One reason for skepticism about the piecemeal approach is that it seems likely that rivals to the GCC would ultimately need to find ways to reproduce both genuinely global institutions and the GCC itself, and so to replicate my proposal, albeit in a different, indirect way. (Call this "the replication challenge.") Take, for example, an otherwise ambitious proposal such as establishing a third chamber for intergenerational affairs within domestic legislatures or above them.²⁷ To tackle global threats effectively, such chambers would need to be implemented in each country around the world and then coordinated at the global level. Yet this process starts to look very much like trying to establish a GCC, albeit in a specific way, through, first, demanding domestic intergenerational institutions and, second, sending delegates to a global forum. Given this instance of the replication challenge, it seems doubtful that the third chamber proposal is actually a genuine alternative to the GCC at all; instead, at best, it appears to presuppose a specific approach to organizing a GCC.

The second reason that the GCC approach provides a relatively straightforward solution to our core intergenerational problem is the way in which it confronts the institutional gap. The GCC performs necessary tasks in intergenerational reform that other proposals sometimes appear to forget. Consider three points. The first point is that the GCC plays a crucial procedural role in justification. If any particular proposal for addressing the governance gap is actually chosen, it needs to be authorized in some way by an appropriate body. The GCC performs that task, both by setting up a system for developing such a body and by seeking to be an appropriate forum for doing so that itself has standing. How it acquires that standing is, of course, part of the debate about how the GCC should be developed. But the need to have that debate is made salient by the bare proposal for a GCC.

Notably, rivals to the GCC face another instance of the replication challenge here: any other proposal for reform must also confront the issue of appropriate justification and how to construct a suitable procedure to achieve it.

The second point is that, functionally, the GCC is set up to play a coordinating role. Notably, the GCC is not adversarial; instead, it provides room for other proposals. Thus, other suggestions (such as for third chambers, ombudsmen, and so on) are all proposals that might be considered by the GCC, assessed against one another, and perhaps appropriately integrated. The GCC is an overarching vehicle to make all of that happen and provides an appropriate venue for doing so. It adjudicates conflicts between genuine rivals; it then sets up new institutions to resolve any residual conflicts between those piecemeal proposals that are eventually implemented.

The third point is that, unlike other suggestions, the proposal for the GCC recognizes, and then sets out to confront, one of the thorniest issues surrounding intergenerational reform; namely, how to reconcile new intergenerational institutions with other legitimate bodies. This reflects another of my guidelines for the GCC:

- *Mutual accountability*: Any GCC should be to some extent accountable to other major institutions, and these institutions should be accountable to it.²⁸

How should we understand this task of reconciling institutions? There seem to be two main aspects. On the one hand, a central role of the GCC is to design new intergenerational institutions that do not overreach. Existing institutions have failed to protect future generations adequately. Nevertheless, as the GCC steps in to fulfill the intergenerational governance gap with more appropriate institutions, it must honor, to a suitable extent, the *other* legitimate functions of existing institutions (such as making decisions about national, regional, or local matters that do not affect the future). In doing so, the GCC will help mark out appropriate boundaries between current institutions and new intergenerational ones.

On the other hand, the GCC cannot be complacent about existing institutions and their purviews. It has its own fundamental task, and it must perform it well. Notably, a further guideline requires:

- *Functional adequacy*: The GCC should be constructed in such a way that it is highly likely to produce recommendations that are functionally adequate to the task.²⁹

At first glance, this guideline may appear trivial. However, I believe that making it explicit is useful, since in practice it appears to have bite. Some evidence for this is that some early institutional proposals appear likely to violate any reasonable expectation of functional adequacy. Consider, for example, the Royal Society's proposal in 2009 that we should refer governance of solar geoengineering to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, or the move to confront the intergenerational governance gap with a new United Nations high commissioner or special envoy for future generations.³⁰ While such proposals are no doubt well meaning, and may have some use as interim measures, the GCC would reject them as woefully inadequate for the scale of the challenges before us. If the guideline on functional adequacy helps to expose institutional complacency, then it plays an important role.

By contrast, the proposal for a GCC is not at all complacent. Instead, it is motivated in part by the deep, widespread failure of existing institutions, and the thought that some things will have to change at a more foundational level. Most notably, it seems likely that conventional national institutions will have to accept serious constraints on their remit, which will involve a lowering of their status within the global political system. Naturally, some will resist this, as powerful actors often resist change. Such resistance is a central issue for the GCC to consider. Nevertheless, the GCC must also keep in mind that the ongoing supremacy of nation-states is not preordained. Instead, it is a legitimate question for the future of humanity whether they should be the sole or preeminent sources of authority over the long term. That the GCC raises this issue is not in itself an objection to the GCC. The question has already been raised by the failure of states to address existential threats such as climate change, and, arguably, also other issues, such as global poverty. Again, any other proposal must find a way to raise such issues and confront them. To prevent them even from being considered would be a serious defect. Notably, the GCC at least provides an appropriate venue within which the core questions and associated concerns can be discussed and addressed head on.

OPPOSITION

There are powerful arguments for the GCC. What can be said against it? Naturally, objections arise concerning practicality and political feasibility, particularly from defenders of existing institutions. Some of these objections are serious,

and I have offered preliminary responses elsewhere.³¹ In this essay, I want to address a different set of criticisms, coming primarily from other intergenerational reformers, who otherwise share my belief that some kind of institutional gap exists, and that change is needed to fill it. These critics differ from me mainly in their visions of the scope and extent of change required, and on strategies for achieving the change. Here I address a series of interrelated objections to the GCC offered by Anja Karnein.³² These worries reflect concerns I have often heard informally from other critics, and so can be seen as representative of a more general kind of resistance to the GCC.

Objection 1: Dysfunction and Bias

My guidelines suggest that the GCC should seek to establish intergenerational institutions with standing authority and a broad purview, including generational representation, indefinitely into the future. One preliminary objection is that this approach encourages dysfunction. Karnein says:

Open-ended mandates are vulnerable to losing focus entirely or to giving current generations' interpretations of future generations' interests—the genuine and the not-so genuine—a too prominent and powerful place in the democratic system, thereby possibly eclipsing some genuine and important interests of present citizens.³³

In my view, such worries are reasonable, but not decisive. Most notably, risks of bias and overreach are common to all institutional proposals, and indeed political proposals of any form. Still, there are familiar strategies to mitigate them, such as institutional checks and balances, transparency requirements, and so on. Moreover, the GCC has an advantage over other proposals since considering and addressing such issues is part of its essential mandate. In light of these points, the mere existence of the common challenges (such as bias and overreach) ought not to constitute a decisive reason to reject approaches like the GCC out of hand. (If it were, we would reject most other institutions. Yet almost no one does; there are very few true anarchists.) In addition, if the familiar worries were treated as decisive *only* when it comes to protecting future generations, then this would suggest an inherent bias on the part of the current generation that may amount to moral corruption. In particular, within a tyranny of the contemporary, it is easy to see how *selective* skepticism about institutions applied *only to intergenerational institutions* may be self-serving on the part of the current generation.³⁴

Worries about moral corruption also arise when addressing a further reason for prioritizing the current generation. In the sentence immediately following the quotation above, Karnein says:

Unlike future citizens, those currently living only have the present to make themselves heard, so it is important that they get as much of their chance as possible.³⁵

The claim here is that the current generation should get as much consideration as possible in intergenerational governance since it will not have the opportunity in the future, after it is gone, whereas future generations will. My first response is that this concern is surprising in the context of my worry about the basic standing threat of the tyranny of the contemporary. Indeed, prioritizing the voice of the current generation seems to make such tyranny more, rather than less, likely. My second response is that, in any case, the risk to the current generation is probably overblown. Crucially, the current generation of decision-makers (and those living at a given time more generally) have an asymmetric advantage over the future in being able to overturn any practices that threaten their legitimate concerns. Future generations typically lack this ability (being either not yet born or too young to have an impact on policy). As a result, it seems highly likely that the need to protect against abuse of the future is a more salient task of intergenerational institutions than protecting against abuse of the present. Notably, while both are legitimate concerns, we might expect the current generation to stress the latter over the former in a tyranny of the contemporary, and for this to encourage moral corruption.

Objection 2: No Need

A second objection to proposals like mine maintains that there is no need for democratic inclusion in new institutions because issue-specific concern is adequate and appropriate. The problems that arise with respect to future generations are, it is said, about particular kinds of large, negative impacts in the future—presumably, of death, disease, poverty, displacement, and so on—and threats of these bad effects are readily identified. Consequently, there is no need to establish new institutions with standing authority and a wide remit; proposals with specific goals are more promising.³⁶ For instance, Karnein says:

Open-ended proposals directly aimed at the future would appear to be the answer only if it was genuinely unclear which current choices threaten future generations with detrimental circumstances to the point of disenfranchising them. But . . . that is arguably

not the case. It seems pretty clear which of our policies may have permanently devastating effects and which are likely to be temporally and geographically much more limited. And if it is roughly clear what the problem to avoid is, then proposals directly aimed at the future with specified goals seem more promising.³⁷

In my view, one problem with this approach is that it appears to leave too much to chance. For one thing, the claim that such issues are readily identified without the need for specific future-directed institutions seems historically dubious. For example, the threat to the ozone layer was identified largely through luck;³⁸ the risk of major climate change was suggested fairly early (and was politically salient by the mid-1960s) but took a long time to be thoroughly investigated;³⁹ and extensive research into existential risks is a comparatively recent phenomenon that may not develop at the same pace as the risks themselves.⁴⁰ Moreover, some risks may be difficult for existing structures to discern, and dedicated institutions might do better. For example, current elites may face epistemic barriers that more diverse and democratic intergenerational institutions could overcome.

Another, more important problem concerns shirking responsibility. Advocates of intergenerational justice typically believe that we have serious responsibilities to identify, research, and then address threats to future generations. By contrast, maintaining that it seems pretty clear which policies need to be confronted and what our specific goals should be seems highly complacent. Indeed, I would argue that institutions that encourage and secure a future-oriented research agenda are warranted, rather than the current tendency to rely on either luck or the personal efforts of a few academics or practitioners. In my view, anything less violates appropriate duties of care. Notably, the worry about shirking responsibility is especially salient in a context where there is a significant threat of structural bias against future generations, given the tyranny of the contemporary and the problem of moral corruption.

A further problem may be even more significant. We should question the claim that serious impacts are the only salient concern given the tyranny of the contemporary.⁴¹ It is to this that I now turn.

Objection 3: “They will have their time”

A third objection to proposals like the GCC maintains that, as Karnein puts it, “there really is no reason to include future generations as such since they will be able to govern themselves and take all of their interests into account when their time comes.”⁴²

Taken literally (and uncharitably), this objection assumes away the tyranny of the contemporary. As stated, the claim “they will be able to . . . *take all of their interests into account* when their time comes” strongly suggests that the interests of the future are affected *only* by what happens when future generations exist and can govern themselves. Yet cases such as the paradigm ones of the tyranny of the contemporary show that this is not so. For instance, part of the reason why climate is an intergenerational threat is that decisions made earlier—say in the 1990s (in Kyoto), in 2009 (in Copenhagen), in 2015 (in Paris), or in 2021 (in Glasgow)—make negative effects *unavoidable* for the people in the future living through those effects. So, for example, those living in the early twenty-first century can decide to commit the planet to the melting of the West Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets. The resulting sea level rise (of up to fifteen meters) would take place over the following centuries, inundating coastal cities across the globe. At the point that future generations in Florida or coastal China experience this (say in 2200, 2400, or further out), they will *not* be able to effectively “take all of their [own] interests into account,” since it will no longer be in their power to avoid the rising tide.⁴³ Or so I would argue.

A more reasonable form of the “they will have their time” complaint holds that future generations require protection (and presumably, institutional reform) only to the extent that their interests are threatened in an extreme way. This, I take it, is Karnein’s actual view. For example, she suggests:

Some policies with irreversible, detrimental, and long-term effects threaten to cross a threshold of permissible bad effects. This threshold is reached, I propose, when future generations are left to inherit a world that forces them to permanently exert most of their creative energies on trying to avoid disaster that previous generations are responsible for.⁴⁴

I have sympathy with this concern, and have expressed it myself elsewhere. For instance:

Presumably we should not say that international climate policy had achieved its sole, or even central, ethical aim . . . [in] a future in which humans are able to enjoy their key human rights only because they devote almost all of their time, energy and resources to defending against severe climate change, and so have little left for anything else.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, I think Karnein’s attempt to make something like this the threshold for when intergenerational institutions are needed sets the bar too high, and in ways that may encourage less severe but still important violations of

intergenerational justice and ethics. Before addressing that central issue more directly, let me first state two specific worries.

First, I am not sure what is meant by “creative energies” in Karnein’s threshold, nor whether it signals a distinction between creative and noncreative energies. If it does, we might ask: Why is there an issue of intergenerational justice only if creative energies are threatened? What about other energies? Is it okay to impose severe noncreative burdens, so long as creative space is preserved? For example, consider a generation that is forced to live a meager existence, but has sufficient food and shelter to survive under conditions akin to a fairly strict lockdown in a pandemic. This generation may have plenty of time for creative endeavor—for example, to write or build or paint—if they can find the motivation. Nevertheless, if earlier generations inflict such a world on them for no good reason, this appears to be a clear case of intergenerational injustice.

Second, we might wonder about the term “permanently exert” in relation to the creative energies future generations will be forced to expend. For instance, does it excuse earlier groups if the restrictions are episodic? For example, suppose the next generation is forced to endure lockdowns that come in two- to three-month spurts throughout the year, but with brief periods off in between. Other things being equal, inflicting such things on future generations seems to be another clear case of intergenerational injustice. Yet, the threshold view does nothing to rule them out.

These worries already make the point that Karnein’s threshold seems too permissive. However, they also point to a third, more central problem: the threshold view fails to recognize core cases of intergenerational injustice. One class of cases involves what I call “intergenerational extortion.”⁴⁶ However, let us focus here on another set of cases. Consider the following example:

Squandering generation: A given generation inherits a thriving society. This society has very substantial infrastructure that provides the basis for a thriving economy. The society also boasts a high-quality environment, both in terms of the opportunities it provides for humans (such as support for health, recreation, aesthetic and spiritual experiences, living a life in close relation with nature, and so on) and in terms of the extensive protections it provides for nonhuman life (including by respecting intrinsic value, places of spiritual and cultural importance, ecological value, and so on).

The new generation could continue forward on this trajectory comfortably, and at very little cost to itself. However, it prefers to live off the advances of the past and use up existing capital rather than to maintain, let alone build on, the achievements of its predecessors. So, it decides, self-consciously and in full awareness of what it is doing, to

adopt a strategy of running down the assets, despoiling the environment, and changing the trajectory of the country such that the expectations of future generations are dramatically reduced. It chooses this because it can, for the sake of consumption and leisure for itself. There is not, for example, some threat that it is trying to confront, or some ideological basis for its approach, such as a wish for simplicity. Instead, the new generation simply cannot be bothered. Many would say this is a lazy, self-satisfied, and self-indulgent generation.

Nevertheless, the squandering generation is not completely beyond the pale, ethically speaking. It recognizes that there are some limits on what it can legitimately inflict on future generations. Unsure of what these limits are, it consults the threshold view and decides to set the limits there. It will degrade assets, despoil the environment, and diminish the expectations of its successors dramatically. Nevertheless, it will stop short of inflicting a situation on future generations where the latter will be “forced to spend all their time and creative energy” on dealing with the situation bequeathed to them. The new generation will, for instance, leave future generations a reasonable opportunity to put in place a society where human rights are not widely compromised, and where the effort required is not such as to crush all other creative endeavors. Its successors will be much poorer, have a more polluted environment, have many fewer opportunities, and their lives will be much less connected with the past (such as with the previous history of the nation). Still, with effort, future generations will be able to scrape by materially, and will have space to pursue their own projects to some minimal extent—specifically, the extent to which the squandering generation thinks it can get away with under the threshold account. If challenged, the squandering generation will respond: “How can you say we are not doing enough? How can you expect more? The future is up to the future. They should make their own way in life. Their successes and failures are up to them. We owe them no more than the threshold concern.”

In my judgment, the behavior of the squandering generation is ethically outrageous. Generational squandering constitutes a clear violation of intergenerational ethics and a prime (if not quite paradigm) example of the tyranny of contemporary. Naturally, a full version of this complaint would invoke a theory of intergenerational ethics to explain more precisely why what the squandering generation is doing is beyond the pale. I will not attempt that here. Instead, I simply state that I believe (and suspect that most readers will agree) that the *pro tanto* case that the squanderers are ethically beyond the pale is strong, so the example has standing. It is one against which an intergenerational theory should be tested.

In my view, the threshold view fails this test. The case of the squandering generation suggests that future generations are owed more than protection against only the most detrimental impacts on their time, resources, or physical well-being.

For instance, one plausible lesson is that aspects of the *relationship* between the future, the present, and the past must also be protected. The squandering generation violates or abuses that relationship, and in doing so it betrays the future and the past. If this is right, we should resist not only Karein's specific threshold but also the basic idea of an exclusively impact-driven approach. Much more is at stake in intergenerational ethics.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I recounted the basic standing threat of the tyranny of the contemporary and sketched why a global constitutional convention for future generations is the natural default response. In particular, I claimed that the GCC plays important procedural roles in intergenerational reform, and that more piecemeal approaches face instances of the replication challenge. I also defended the idea that the GCC should aim at institutions with standing authority and a broad remit against an alternative issue-specific, impact-driven, and threshold-limited strategy. I emphasized that the alternative underestimates the challenges and responsibilities inherent in avoiding the tyranny of the contemporary. Most notably, it indulges the squandering generation, and so (among other things) betrays central intergenerational relationships.

NOTES

- ¹ Stephen M. Gardiner, "The Intergenerational Turn in Moral and Political Philosophy," in Stephen M. Gardiner, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics* (Oxford University Press, in press).
- ² See, for example, Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: the Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for Our Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ³ Representative works include the otherwise-excellent Inigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries, eds., *Institutions for Future Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Jonathan Boston, *Governing for the Future: Designing Democratic Institutions for a Better Tomorrow* (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Group, 2015). The former contains many chapters offering specific proposals: Ludvig Beckman and Fredrik Uggla, "An Ombudsman for Future Generations: Legitimate and Effective?," ch. 7 in González-Ricoy and Gosseries, *Institutions for Future Generations*, pp. 117–34; Simon Caney, "Political Institutions for the Future: A Fivefold Package," ch. 8 in *ibid.*, pp. 135–55; John Broome and Duncan K. Foley, "A World Climate Bank," ch. 9 in *ibid.*, pp. 156–69; Dennis F. Thompson, "Democratic Trusteeship: Institutions to Protect the Future of the Democratic Process," ch. 11 in *ibid.*, pp. 184–96; Marcel Szabó, "A Common Heritage Fund for Future Generations," ch. 12 in *ibid.*, pp. 197–213; and Juliana Bidadanure, "Youth Quotas, Diversity, and Long-Termism: Can Young People Act as Proxies for Future Generations?," ch. 16 in *ibid.*, pp. 266–81. See also Tyler M. John and William MacAskill, "Longtermist Institutional Reform," in Natalie Cargill and Tyler M. John, eds., *The Long View: Essays on Policy, Philanthropy, and the Long-Term Future* (London: First Strategic Insight, 2021), pp. 44–60. The call for a world commission on solar radiation management is made in the Forum for Climate Engineering Assessment's report *Governing Solar Radiation Management* (Washington, D.C.: Forum for Climate Engineering Assessment, American University, 2018).

- ⁴ See Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, which develops Stephen M. Gardiner, “The Pure Intergenerational Problem,” *Monist* 86, no. 3 (July 2003), pp. 481–500; and Stephen M. Gardiner, “The Real Tragedy of the Commons,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 2001), pp. 387–416.
- ⁵ Stephen M. Gardiner, “A Call for a Global Constitutional Convention Focused on Future Generations,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2014), pp. 299–315; and Stephen M. Gardiner, “Motivating (or Baby-Stepping toward) a Global Constitutional Convention for Future Generations,” *Environmental Ethics* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2019), pp. 199–220.
- ⁶ The next few paragraphs are largely drawn from Stephen M. Gardiner, “Future Ethics,” in Armin Grunwald and Rafaela Hillerbrand, eds., *Handbuch zur technikethik* [Handbook for ethics of technology and engineering], 2nd ed. (Berlin: Springer, 2021), pp. 203–7.
- ⁷ The activities need not be overt actions. They may be omissions or other forms of neglect.
- ⁸ An anonymous reviewer asked what sense of the verb “will” is operative here, and specifically whether I mean that “it is *rational* for each group to engage in these front-loaded activities.” I believe at least two senses of “will” are in play. The first concerns *motivation* rather than rationality. Within the model, each group has only temporally generation-relative motivations, and there are no confounding factors. Thus, the model is set up so that each group *will*, as a matter of fact, act on those motivations. Under this sense of “will”, the background principle that is operative is a predictive one, something like: “If *X* has a positive motivation to do *Y*, and there are no other operative motivations or confounding influences, then *X* will, as a matter of fact, do *Y*.” The second sense of “will” involves a further claim about *rationality* that one might easily add to the model. Thus, for example, one might say: “If *X* has a positive motivation to do *Y*, and there are no other operative motivations or confounding factors, then it is instrumentally rational for *X* to do *Y*.” Adding this claim about rationality often seems reasonable, and I have sometimes done so myself. Nevertheless, it is not critical for understanding the problem of intergenerational tyranny, which can take many forms.
- Although straightforward, the above points may be useful for understanding how to resist some objections to the tyranny of the contemporary analysis. In my view, intergenerational tyranny poses an ethical problem, whether understood in terms of motivation or rationality (or both). One upshot is that it would be a mistake to dismiss the analysis simply on the grounds that it rests on an (allegedly) problematic account of rationality. It does not—in fact, one form of the ethical problem arises prior to any concern for rationality. Similarly, it would be another mistake to dismiss the tyranny of the contemporary simply on the grounds that it rests on an (allegedly) problematic account of motivation, such as a narrow economic conception of self-interest. Crucially, the idea of temporally generation-relative motivations is broad. Although some forms of generation-relative motivation may be narrowly economic and/or self-interested, others may have neither characteristic. For example, some forms of generation-relative motivation may include, or even be dominated by, profound generation-relative altruism. Lastly, it would be a further mistake to object that the analysis fails to recognize the importance of ethical motivation or reasoning. On the contrary, recall that a primary aim of deploying the tyranny of the contemporary analysis is to identify and expose a distinctive kind of ethical problem, and so reveal how important such motivations and reasons are. (For related discussion, see Marion Hourdequin and David B. Wong, “Confucianism and Intergenerational Ethics,” in Gardiner, *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*; and Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, ch. 2.)
- ⁹ This point is about the model itself, assuming no confounding factors. In real-world cases, there is always the chance that the situation will evolve or has been misunderstood. However, that is true for most analyses, and not special to the tyranny of the contemporary.
- ¹⁰ For instance, utilitarians will decry the infliction of severe costs for the sake of modest benefits; deontologists will suspect that the behavior involves a profound failure of mutual respect and concern; and virtue ethicists will worry that it is the behavior of self-indulgent, indifferent, or even callous generations.
- ¹¹ An anonymous reviewer suggested to me that the nonidentity problem may challenge this idea (Thomas Schwartz, “Obligations to Posterity,” in R. I. Sikora and Brian Barry, eds., *Obligations to Future Generations* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978], pp. 3–14; and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985]). My personal view is that this is a bigger problem for the nonidentity problem than for the condition of adequacy, but I cannot pursue that thought here. For some discussion, see Rahul Kumar, “Who Can Be Wronged?,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 99–118; Caspar Hare, “Voices from Another World: Must We Respect the Interests of People Who Do Not, and Will Never, Exist?,” *Ethics* 117, no. 3 (April 2007), pp. 498–523; and Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, ch. 5.
- ¹² Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*; and Matthew Rendall, “Nuclear Deterrence: Another Perfect Storm,” in Gardiner, *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*.

- ¹⁴ See, for example, Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, part E.
- ¹⁵ Tim Harford, "Climate Change and the Prisoner's Dilemma: The Problem Demonstrates the Tension between Selfishness and Personal Co-Operation," *Financial Times*, January 24, 2020. Harford is an economist, journalist, and broadcaster who writes the long-running *Financial Times* column "The Undercover Economist."
- ¹⁶ The lower threshold of 1.5° Celsius is likely to be breached much earlier, and probably in the next couple of decades. However, many analysts believe that preventing this breach is by now virtually impossible in practice, given the social, economic, and political constraints. For discussion of some relevant issues, see Stephen M. Gardiner, "Climate Change and the Intergenerational Arms Race," in Byron Williston, ed., *Environmental Ethics for Canadians*, 3rd ed. (Ontario: Oxford University Press, in press); and Stephen Gardiner, "Is the Paris Climate Agreement Another Dangerous Illusion?," in *The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters Yearbook 2021* (Oslo: Novus forlag, 2022).
- ¹⁷ For instance, some claim that climate change is, by the lights of existing political entities, a clear "public bad" that should obviously be avoided. See Robert O. Keohane and Michael Oppenheimer, "Paris: Beyond the Climate Dead End through Pledge and Review?," *Politics and Governance* 4, no. 3 (2016), pp. 142–51, at p. 143.
- ¹⁸ Gardiner, "A Call for a Global Constitutional Convention Focused on Future Generations."
- ¹⁹ For a preliminary sketch, see *ibid.*
- ²⁰ For example, see González-Ricoy and Gosseries, *Institutions*, and Rupert Read, *Parents for a Future* (UEA Publishing Project, 2021) and *Guardians of the Future* (Green House, 2012). As I understand them, the Paris Climate Agreement and World Climate Bank are problem-specific approaches, while proposals for ombudsmen for future generations, youth quotas, and additional legislative chambers are typically focused on the domestic level. Typically, proposals for a "green new deal" are both problem-specific and domestic-focused.
- ²¹ See, for example, Read, *Parents for a Future* and *Guardians of the Future*.
- ²² Mary Robinson, foreword to *Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide* (Geneva: International Council on Human Rights, 2008), pp. iii–iv.
- ²³ The mismatch is even more surprising given that global proposals are common in other work on international institutional reform (for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001]; and David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995]).
- ²⁴ See, for example, James Gustave Speth, *They Knew: the US Government's Fifty-year Role in Causing the Climate Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2021); and Spencer R. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- ²⁵ An anonymous reviewer objected to the phrase "natural default response" on the grounds that "coordinating such a body would be a massive logistical undertaking that would seem anything but natural." I see the worry but am not convinced. For one thing, a proliferation of issue-specific and domestic-level initiatives also seems "a massive logistical undertaking." Moreover, it is not obvious that a GCC or global institutional approach need be more logistically demanding. In fact, it may be much more efficient than a piecemeal approach. For another thing, confronting intergenerational problems, and especially the tyranny of the contemporary, may just be one of those tasks that does require a large undertaking, and is not at all unusual in that. Consider (for example) establishing the rule of law, a functional economic system, and the central mechanisms of international relations. None of those tasks should, I think, be dismissed on the grounds that they require a massive logistical effort, not least because failing to adequately address them often brings on its own—sometimes "massive"—burdens, including logistical ones. In my view, confronting the tyranny of the contemporary is *at least as important* as these more standard cases.
- ²⁶ For example, on the World Climate Bank, see Stephen M. Gardiner, "Intergenerational Climate Extortion: On Making Future Generations Pay for Mitigation (and Maybe Everything Else?)," *Rivista di filosofia del diritto* 2 (December 2021), pp. 269–84.
- ²⁷ See, for example, Read, *Parents for a Future* and *Guardians of the Future*.
- ²⁸ Gardiner, "A Call for a Global Constitutional Convention Focused on Future Generations."
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ For the first proposal, see Royal Society, *Geoengineering the Climate: Science, Governance and Uncertainty* (London: Royal Society, 2009); for criticism, see Stephen M. Gardiner, "Some Early Ethics of Geoengineering: A Commentary on the Values of the Royal Society Report," *Environmental Values* 20, no. 2 (May 2011), pp. 163–88, at pp. 171, 184; for the second proposal, see, for example, Halina Ward, Catherine Pearce, and Peter Roderick, "The Mandate of a UN Commissioner for Future Generations" (Foundation for Democracy & Sustainable Development, February 2012); and Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

- ³¹ See, for example, Gardiner, “Motivating (or Baby-Stepping toward) a Global Constitutional Convention for Future Generations.”
- ³² See the excellent piece, Anja Karnein, “Political Institutions and Intergenerational Ethics: Disenfranchising the Future?,” in Gardiner, *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ An anonymous reviewer (citing Kant’s arguments in *Perpetual Peace*) objected that my response does not work when the institutions in question are global, since these institutions are different in *kind*, rather than in *degree*, from other, especially national, institutions. I would resist this argument. Notice that the claim that global institutions are different in kind is an assertion. I would reject that assertion. In my view, the relevant differences are mainly of degree, and even those that might be differences of kind do not justify an extra burden of proof on global intergenerational institutions, or at least not a formidable one.
- ³⁵ Karnein, “Political Institutions and Intergenerational Ethics.”
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Edward Parson, *Protecting the Ozone Layer: Science and Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ³⁹ See, for example, Weart, *Discovery of Global Warming*.
- ⁴⁰ Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Ćirković, eds., *Global Catastrophic Risks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Toby Ord, *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020).
- ⁴¹ Presumably, the thought is that questions about future generations arise because of problems like climate change, which suggest severe impacts on future people in terms of death, disease, poverty, and so on. Nuclear weapons and agricultural degradation might have the same features and so fit this account.
- ⁴² Karnein, “Political Institutions and Intergenerational Ethics.”
- ⁴³ An anonymous reviewer objected that the phrase “take all their interests into account” means only “consider” those interests, and the rising tide does not prevent this. I think the problem here lies in an ambiguity of the phrase “take all their interests into account.” It might mean “consider” those interests, but it can also mean “be able to consider *and* act effectively” on those interests. This ambiguity is already present in Karnein’s phrasing. Her claim looks unappealing if interpreted in the first, weaker way, and only fully morally relevant if interpreted in the second, stronger way.
- ⁴⁴ Karnein, “Political Institutions and Intergenerational Ethics,” citing Anja Karnein, “Climate Change and Justice between Nonoverlapping Generations,” *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric* 8, no. 2 (2015), pp. 43–65.
- ⁴⁵ Stephen M. Gardiner, “Human Rights in a Hostile Climate,” in Cindy Holder and David Reidy, eds., *Human Rights: The Hard Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 211–30, at p. 221. See also Michael Blake, “Discursive Justice in and with Future Generations,” in Gardiner, *Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*.
- ⁴⁶ See Stephen M. Gardiner, “The Threat of Intergenerational Extortion: On the Temptation to Become the Climate Mafia, Masquerading as an Intergenerational Robin Hood,” in “Ethics and Future Generations,” special issue, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47, nos. 2–3 (2017), pp. 368–94; and Gardiner, “Intergenerational Climate Extortion.”

Abstract: We are in the early stages of a new “intergenerational turn” in political philosophy. This turn is largely motivated by the threat of global climate change, which makes vivid a serious governance gap surrounding concern for future generations. Unfortunately, there is a lack of fit between most proposed remedies and the nature of the underlying problem. Most notably, many seem to believe that only piecemeal, issue-specific, and predominantly national institutions are needed to fill the intergenerational governance gap. By contrast, I argue that we should adopt a genuinely global approach that treats intergenerational questions as foundational, and advocates for new permanent institutions with ongoing responsibilities to act on intergenerational threats. In this essay, I summarize my diagnosis of the underlying problem—that we face a basic standing threat that I call the “tyranny of the contemporary”—and sketch my proposal for a global constitutional convention aiming at institutions with standing authority and a broad remit. I then develop some of these ideas further through responses to fellow advocates for reform who nevertheless consider my proposals to go too far. In particular, I reject a counterproposal made by Anja Karnein, who argues that reforms should address only threats whose negative impacts would cross a high threshold. I argue that this would leave future generations vulnerable to what I call “squandering generations”. Among other things, these intergenerational squanderers violate appropriate

relationships between past, present, and future generations. Yet, in my view, a central task of defensible intergenerational institutions is to protect the future against such abuse.

Keywords: intergenerational justice, tyranny of the contemporary, climate justice, political institutions, Anja Karnein, constitutionalism