Exploring the care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the question: *How can we meaningfully analyze the combination of care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework?* The relevance of this question lies in the fact that sustainable development has numerous definitions, which makes it a vague concept. To be able to use sustainable development in policy-making, a conceptual understanding of the term is required. Therefore, I will focus on the widely accepted definition of sustainable development adopted from the United Nations report *Our Common Future*: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the world's poor without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED chapter 2 §1). The definition contains two concepts. The first is the concept of "needs". Needs are "relative", which means they include both material and non-material aspects. Furthermore, they are universal and are therefore applicable to people living today and to those who will live in the future. The second concept is the idea of limitations. This is about the carrying capacity of the Earth and the position of technology in it.

If we want to analyze the care for both the current poor and future generations a balance is needed. This does not *necessarily* require us to take a step back in our consumption patterns, but it requires us to analyze possible different solutions to problems, without compromising future generations to meet their needs. If we do have to limit our actions the sufficientarian approach can be a good guide. It requires that people, those living now and in the future, do not fall below a *normatively defined line*. People fall below it if their needs are not being met. Sufficientarianism gives us a grip in policy-making and brings the conceptual aspects down to a level of practical implementation. It is therefore the right theory to analyze the care for our generation and those to come.

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1. Introduction

Recently, "sustainable development" has become a frequently used concept in many different disciplines. The term is broad and generally there is no consensus on what it actually entails. For that reason it is applicable in different contexts and it is regularly used as an "attention-grabbing" concept. However, due to its all-embracing notion it has, according to critics, no analytical bite at all (Beckerman 4).

In 1984 the United Nations instructed the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) to write a report on sustainable development. The report, *Our Common Future*, made an attempt to clarify the definition of sustainable development. Although it has not (yet) succeed in its mission, it has provided a definition that has become widely accepted: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the world's poor without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED chapter two §1). There are two important concepts associated with this definition, namely the concept of "needs", and the idea of limitations. First of all, the needs of both the current poor and future generations should be met. However, the actions of the current generation, be it the poor or the rich, will inevitably have an effect on the ability of future generations to meet their needs (for better or for worse). A negative effect on future generations can be illustrated by the ability of the current generation to endanger the environment, by excessively using natural resources. As this poses a problem for future generations, we – the current generation – should consider how we affect others in terms of limitations. This is important in order to define the concept of "needs" for both the current and future generations. Secondly, the idea of limitations requires research on the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs. This portrays the major tension that exists between the current and future generations. Although we have the ability to affect future generations by imposing limitations for their needs, their actions will not affect us. This directionality forces us to consider what we leave for future generations and what we will use to meet our current needs. Currently, it is mainly the poor who should still be given access to basic needs, as until now we have not succeeded in providing them with their needs. Recently, there has also been

increased attention on the needs of future generations. If we contemplate how we want to see our world develop, we should analyze how we can care for both the current poor and future generations in a sustainable development framework. This leads me to the question I want to answer:

How can we meaningfully analyze the combination of care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework?

The aim of this thesis is to make sense of the bulk of information available on sustainable development. Although much has been written on the subject, there is no clear picture of what it actually means. Clarification is needed on the conceptual level, which will facilitate policy-making in the field. This is necessary if we ever want to provide for both our needs *and* the needs of our posterity. However, this does not necessarily require a new theory, but a guide through the already available ideas and theories.

To answer the question I will first focus on the definition of sustainable development and the concept of poverty. Subsequently, I will analyze how the two can be linked, which will provide the fundamental framework from which I will continue to answer my thesis question. After that I will turn to the concept of "needs." Although basic human needs are regularly discussed in literature, this is mostly done in relation to the current poor. My aim is to analyze whether needs could also apply to future generations and if this is the same concept. I will then turn to the relation between our current generation and future generations. This relates to the topics intergenerational justice and I will explain this discipline using four different approaches: utilitarianism, egalitarianism, prioritarianism and sufficientarianism. Although all four theories can be criticized, I will argue that the latter provides the best theory to deal with intergenerational justice. In the final chapter I will combine the arguments of the three preceding chapters. I will argue that a balance is needed between the current poor and future generations. The sufficientarian approach is the right theory to create and maintain this balance.

2. Sustainable Development and Poverty

The aim of this thesis is to meaningfully analyze how we can care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework. "Sustainable development" is a regularly used concept in many different contexts. For this reason one of the major criticisms of the term is its vagueness and overuse (Lélé 607). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to clarify its meaning. I will illustrate the different categories to which definitions of sustainable development belong. After that I will analyze the widely accepted definition of sustainable development given in the report *Our Common Future*. The definition described in the report emphasizes the important role of the current poor in sustainable development. To better understand the position of the poor I will focus on the concept of poverty. I will then analyze which position, if any, poverty has within the concept of sustainable development. I will do this by using several examples which link the poor to (un)sustainable development.

2.1 Sustainable development

2.1.1 Different approaches to sustainable development

Sustainable development is an eclectic concept, as a wide array of views fall under its umbrella. Most definitions include one or more components: economic, social and/or environmental. What all definitions have in common, the majority more implicitly than explicitly, is that they try to solve the "environmental paradox" (Williams and Millington 100). This paradox can be explained as the mismatch between demands made on the Earth and the capability of the Earth to provide the supply. To solve this problem it is necessary to reduce societal demands and/or to increase resources. Doing so will – to a certain extent – allow the gap that exists between supply and demand to be bridged (Williams and Millington 100). The answer to the question how demand and resources can be joined exactly can be tackled in different ways. There are three broad gradations of answers: weak, strong and moderate sustainable development. The two core schools of thought – weak and strong sustainable development – should be recognized as a spectrum of thinking instead of an either/or dualism (Williams and Millington 100). Due to the spectrum of views weak

sustainable development can be called weaker and strong sustainability can be referred to as stronger sustainable development.

Weaker sustainable development (or "shallow environmentalism") is an anthropocentric approach and is prevalent in the Western, industrialized world (Williams and Millington 100). It is composed of three ideas: 1) "the perception that people are separate from nature", 2) "the idea that nature is a 'resource' to be used for the benefit of society or individuals" and 3) "the view that we have the right to dominate nature" (Wiliams and Millington 100). In the light of weaker sustainable development, current trends are allowed to continue. This means that the current stock of resources can be expanded even further, because at its core it has the implicit optimism that technological progress will enable people to manipulate the Earth and to meet people's enormous demands from it. In other words, weaker sustainable development theorists believe that "any problems that arise will … be solved through technological development" (Willams & Millington 101). While many people are wary of the ability of humankind to solve the problems that might arise in the future related to resource depletion, the scenario can work reasonably well on micro-economic levels up to the national scale.

An example of a workable form of weaker sustainable development is the Government Pension Fund in Norway. This pension fund is commonly named The Oil Fund due to its ties with the petroleum sector. The Norwegian oil company Statoil ASA is state-owned and its surplus profits from petroleum are invested into The Oil Fund, which is currently worth approximately $613 billion ("Norges Bank Investment Management"). The oil – a form of natural capital – could have been used to increase supply and directly decrease fuel prices in Norway. Instead Norway has decided to export a large quantity of the oil and invest the profits in order to create human-made capital, in the form of a large pension fund. As a result, the fund allows for lasting income for the Norwegian population in exchange for a finite resource (McDonell). This is a positive example of weaker sustainable development, however it is one position within a spectrum of stances. In general, weaker sustainable development theorists do not want to change fundamentally in reference to progress and economic

development. Nonetheless, as this example shows, there are different concessions possible towards environmental protection within the spectrum of weaker sustainable development.

Counter to weaker sustainable development is *stronger sustainable development* (or "deep ecology"), which focuses on inter-species equity and biotic rights (Williams and Millington 100). Biotic rights indicate that nature has the right to remain unharmed (Williams and Millington 102). Unlike weaker sustainable development theorists, stronger sustainable development theorists argue that manmade products cannot replace the natural capital found in ecosystems. At the beginning of the environmental movement this approach was more prominent than it is nowadays, although its core values have not been overruled by weaker sustainable development. For this approach to be implemented, current demands would need to be revised and therefore, a radical change would be needed. In the case of super strong sustainable development, this would require, according to Robert Goodland (formerly of the World Bank), "environmental sustainability [that would] never deplete anything" (qtd. in Wilson). Therefore, (non)-renewable resources will only be harvested "in the form of overmature portion[s] of the stock" (qtd. in Wilson).

While the present-day idea is that well-being is associated with material goods, those in favour of stronger sustainable development claim that society is heading in the wrong direction. They argue that well-being needs to be defined in different terms than in relation to material goods. This mirrors Aristotle's critique of moneymaking (chrematistics). Aristotle argued that people should not overexploit natural resources to benefit well-being but instead they should focus on self-development. It cannot be doubted that economic activity enables people to live well, as it allows people to have enough time to develop friendships and participate in politics (Sayer 703). However, there should be some idea of sufficiency of material consumption. Aristotle saw "economic activity directed towards moneymaking as pathological; as mistaking the means of achieving economic well-being" (Sayer 703). Based on such an idea, stronger sustainable development theorists advocate "a more small-scale decentralized way of life based upon greater self-reliance, so as to create a social and economic system less destructive towards nature" (Williams and Millington 102).

A practical example of this is local community forest management in Nepal. The Nepalese conserve forests and obtain forest products by sustainably managing local forests. The indirect advantages of this approach are that it allows the local community to control landslides and improve watershed and microclimate. Furthermore, they are able to take forest products and increase forest stock, which enhances natural capital. In addition, they do not only satisfy their demand for natural resources, but are also "determined to increase their socioecological resource potential for the future" (Devkota 297).

The third and last approach is *moderate sustainable development*. It takes a central position between the two core schools of thought. This means it combines elements from both the weaker and stronger approaches. At its core it aims to expand the stock of resources, but also to reduce the demand of those resources (Williams and Millington 100).

The three broad approaches indicate that there are large differences in how the concept of sustainable development can be interpreted. This explains the regularly given criticism that the concept of sustainable development is vague. For this reason I want to investigate the concept further. I will now turn to the definition of sustainable development that is considered as one of the most widely recognized.

2.1.2 The Brundtland Report

The well-known definition of sustainable development is given in the report *Our Common Future* (WCED). The report was commissioned by the United Nations in 1987 with the aim of focusing on the heavy deterioration of human environment and natural resources. The United Nations appointed the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland as chair and therefore, the report is also commonly known as the Brundtland Report. She selected a group of people to constitute the Brundtland Commission, formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). With the publication of the Report the Brundtland Commission aimed to achieve the following goals:

> - to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond;
> - to recommend ways [in which] concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries and between countries at different stages of economical and social development and lead to the achievement of common and mutually supportive objectives that take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment, and development;
> - to consider ways and means by which the international community can deal more effectively with environmental concerns; and
> - to help define shared perceptions of long-term environmental issues and the appropriate efforts needed to deal successfully with the problems of protecting and enhancing the environment, a long term agenda for action during the coming decades, and aspirational goals for the world community. (WCED Chairman's Foreword)

The definition that the Brundtland Commission decided upon is: *"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the world's poor without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (chapter two §1). The definition contains two concepts, namely the concept of "*needs"* and the idea of *limitations*. The first, the concept of "needs" can easily be recognized in the definition. The Brundtland Report states: "the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given" (chapter two §1). The essential needs can include food, shelter, clothes and jobs (WCED chapter two §4). The second concept is the "idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (chapter two §1). When analyzing the definition the concept is not as easily recognizable as the first is. However, the idea of limitations reflects "a political compromise between growth and environmental sustainability" (Castro 196).

This means that the main focus of this concept is on the carrying capacity of the Earth and the position of technology in it.

There might be differences between countries on what sustainable development entails from an economic, social and/or environmental perspective; however, the Brundtland Report emphasizes the importance of countries to share the basic features of sustainable development. Those basic features should all lead to the "satisfaction of human needs and aspirations in the major objective of development" (WCED chapter 2 §4). Basic needs should be available to all, however, for many citizens of developing countries this is currently not the case. Inequality is a major issue in poverty-ridden countries as Pogge states: "inequality continues to mount decade after decade as the affluent get richer and the poor remain at or below the subsistence level" (3). However, from a sustainable development standpoint it is important that the poor have access to their basic needs as their actions might interfere with sustainable development.[1] In the Brundtland Report it is argued that for this to be possible there is a need for economic growth in developing countries (chapter 2 §6). Another important aspect that can make sustainable development possible is to ensure that the natural systems that support life on Earth are not endangered, such as "the atmosphere, the waters, the soils and the living beings" (WCED chapter 2 §6). Also, sustainable development is not only important for people who are currently alive, but also for those who will be in the future (chapter 2 §55). For instance, when focusing on the overexploitation of resources one should note that this might provide many advantages to our generation, but it can greatly influence the life of our posterity and their ability to access their needs. Therefore, people should be aware of how their actions will affect the availability of renewable and non-renewable resources for future generations.

I have just explained several aspects that encompass the definition of sustainable development described in the Brundtland Report. Taking the different aspects of the Brundtland Report together it claims that sustainable development is a "process of

[1] For more explanation of this point see Section 2.4.

change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (chapter 2 §15). This shows that sustainable development includes many different aspects. This has been criticized by sustainability advocate Mathis Wackernagel and professor William Rees:

> The Brundtland Report attempted to bridge some of these debates [about both goals and means] by leaving a certain ambiguity, talking at the same time of the priorities of meeting the needs of the poor, protecting the environment and more rapid economic growth. The looseness of the concept and its theoretical underpinnings have enabled the use of the phrases 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' to become *de rigueur* for politicians and business leaders, but as the Workshop on Urban Sustainability of the US National Science Foundation pointed out, sustainability is 'laden with so many definitions that it risks plunging into meaninglessness, at best, and becoming the catchphrase for demagogy, at worst. [It] is used to justify and legitimate a myriad of policies and practices ranging from communal agrarian utopianism to large-scale capital-intensive market development. (qtd. in Hopwood, Mellor & O'Brien 40)

Although Wackernagel and Rees make some important points I will put this criticism aside for a moment.[2] I will first turn to the concept of poverty.

2.2 Poverty

There are numerous definitions of the concept of poverty. The most prominent include those given by the United Nations and the World Bank. The definition of poverty given by the United Nations is concerned with "a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity" (Gordon). The definition was described in

[2] I will return to this point in section 2.4.2

more depth at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, when the United Nations claimed poverty has various manifestations, including:

> Lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. It occurs in all countries: as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets. (United Nations, World Summit for Social Development)

The latter, the definition given by the World Bank, claims that poverty is:

> Pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many definitions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical survival, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. (World Bank, Poverty Reduction and Equity)

The main similarity between both definitions is the categorization of poverty. It can be categorized in either a narrow or broad interpretation of the concept. This means that definitions can vary in relation to "whether they are confined to the material core; the nature of that material core; and whether they embrace also relational/symbolic factors associated with poverty" (Lister 13). Differently put, a narrow definition of

poverty is mainly concerned with the material aspects of poverty. According to sociologists Brian Nolan and Christopher Whelan poverty should be discussed in a narrow manner. They define poverty "in terms of the inability to participate in society … but emphasize that what is distinctive is the 'inability to participate owing to lack of resources'" (Lister 13). Therefore, their definition is mainly concerned with areas of life that are related to financial resources. This is opposed to a broad definition of poverty that the United Nations and the World Bank adopt. A broad definition takes both material and non-material aspects into account.

According to Nolan and Whelan a broad definition could run into the problem of losing sight of the "core notion of poverty" when it includes non-material elements such as "a violation of human dignity" and a "lack of participation in decision-making" (Lister 13). Ruth Lister claims that if the intention to define poverty is to place it opposed to non-poverty it makes sense to work with a narrower, material definition of poverty. This is because those non-material elements could also be associated with other conditions such as being dark skinned in a white-dominated society. However, Lister also states that "in order not to lose sight of the condition's wider meanings and of the interpenetration of the material and the relational/symbolic, it is important that definitions of poverty are not divorced from wider *conceptualizations*" (13). Before I indicate which is the better interpretation of poverty in relation to my question, I want to make another distinction.

This distinction can be made between a citizen's standard of living and his or her "right to a minimum level of resources" (Lister 14). The first is an *actual outcome*, while the latter is a *material resource*. A person's standard of living is commonly discussed in literature and it includes non-material aspects. The latter, the material resource, focuses on minimum levels of resources that "might be said to be implicit in measures of poverty based on the numbers falling below a certain point in the income scale or the level of income provided by the country's social assistance scheme" (Lister 14). An example of such an approach is when one describes poverty in relation

to a set poverty line: “this is a level of income below which an individual or household cannot afford on a regular basis the necessities of life” (WCED chapter 2 box 2-1).

It is clear that, similar to sustainable development, the concept of poverty has many different definitions. The descriptive definitions adopted by the United Nations and the World Bank are the most prominent and are not concerned with the material resource. Instead it centers the actual outcome. Such an approach allows different aspects to be included and this makes a broad definition of poverty better in relation to my question.

2.3 Sustainable development and poverty in practice

The definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland Report mentions the current poor. The definition implies that, in the opinion of the authors, sustainable development and poverty are connected. In this section I will investigate whether, and if so how, sustainable development and poverty are related to each other in practice. To do this, I will focus on three examples in which poverty leads to sustainable or unsustainable development. The first example is one in which the poor have a negative effect on sustainable development. The second shows how the poor can partly have a negative effect on sustainable development. The third example shows how the poor can have a positive effect on sustainable development.

2.3.1 Example 1: Slash-and-burn method

Worldwide there are around 200 to 500 million slash-and-burn farmers (Stief). This type of farming can be categorized as part of the shifting cultivation agriculture. Slash-and-burn farmers work in areas that are usually not easily accessible. This is because of, for example, dense vegetation, uncontrollable pests or soil infertility. Those farmers cut down trees in the forest and burn them at a later stage. The ash that results from the burning fertilizes the soil and this allows crops to grow on soil that would otherwise have been infertile. At that moment, the farmer and his or her family “own” the land. However, when the soil is extensively used the farmer moves to another piece of forest. The used piece of land will be left uncultivated for ten or more years before enough vegetation has grown for it to be used again.

This technique is considered unsustainable as it leads to the following five ecological problems: 1) deforestation – when a piece of land is not given sufficient time for the vegetation to grow back there can be permanent loss of forest cover, 2) erosion – due to the slashing, roots and temporary water storages are lost and nutrients might permanently leave the area, 3) nutrient loss – fields can lose their fertility due to slashing, which can eventually lead to desertification, 4) biodiversity loss – the slashing of forest results in plants being cleared and animals being swept away (Stief), and 5) poor air quality – when practiced on a large scale such as in the Amazon, slash-and-burn farming releases "more than 1½ million metric tons of carbon per year" into the atmosphere, which is approximately 23% of the total released by human activities (Rainforest Conservation Fund).

Although the effects are unsustainable, the farmers – usually tribal communities – often do not have the possibility to do different work. Most farmers and their families need to live from their own grown crops. Originally, the technique intended farmers to return to a piece of land after a couple of years, although the farmers "now have neither enough land nor time to let forests re-establish. So forests are being destroyed, often only to create poor farmland that cannot support those who till it" (WCED chapter 1 §14). Although slash-and-burn does not necessarily need to be unsustainable, it is unsustainable due to the population growth and increases in population density. As a result, more farmers cut down more forest, leaving insufficient time for land to regain its soil quality. This example shows that poverty can have a negative effect on sustainable development.

2.3.2 Example 2: Excessive greenhouse gas emissions

Anthropogenic climate change is the result of excessive release of greenhouse gases (GHGs).[3] It is estimated that as a result of this release global temperature increase will "approach a level between 1.1 °C and 6.4 °C … by the end of this century" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Developed countries have, since

[3] To lower GHG levels, emitting the following GHGs should be minimized: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride (Bloch).

industrialization, released many GHGs. To reduce GHG levels, several environmental treaties have been implemented. The best known is the Kyoto Protocol. It is the principal update of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). The Protocol was adopted in 1997 and ratified by 193 countries, of which 37 of the richer countries have legally binding emission targets ("Kyoto Protocol" article 3 §1). Developing countries do not have binding targets due to "common but differentiated responsibilities" (article 10). This is based on two elements. First, all the countries, referred to as Parties, have the common responsibility to protect the environment. Secondly, the different circumstances of the Parties are taken into account. This means that the ability of the Parties to prevent, reduce and control the threat is analyzed ("Kyoto Protocol"). In 1997, when the Protocol was adopted, it was believed that developing countries did not have the capacity to prevent, reduce and control GHG emissions. Furthermore, developed countries had released significant amounts of GHGs since industrialization and were mainly responsible.

As developing countries do not have binding emission targets they are capable of emitting GHGs without consequences. While some countries are "simply" too poor to industrialize, others have been growing quickly, such as India and China, with China even overtaking the United States in GHG emissions (PBL). The reason that China has grown so quickly is partly due to developed countries being restricted in their emissions, and partly due to manufacturing of products being outsourced to China, resulting in much higher emission rates.

This development shows how GHG emissions are a form of unsustainable development. It will probably only become more unsustainable in the future as emissions are still increasing greatly. Although developed countries have, since industrialization, released the most GHGs in total, developing countries – where poverty is a big problem – are able to release GHGs without restrictions. This is becoming a serious problem, as is the case for China. The reason a country like China is still able to release so many GHGs is because it is still considered to be a developing country while it would fit more in the realm of a developed country. This could be argued for more countries that are experiencing huge economic growth. The

"wrong" label put on certain countries will probably result in an even bigger problem in the near future, as many developing countries' population rates are rapidly increasing, leading to ever increasing emissions.

2.3.3 Example 3: Solar energy in the Sahara

In 2009 the non-profit foundation DESERTEC was established. They work on the premise that "the world's deserts collect in six hours more energy than mankind consumes in a year" (DESERTEC). The aim of the non-profit project is to build solar panels in the Sahara and it hopes to provide 15% of Europe's electricity in 2050. Although this project was set up in Germany, it works together with different developing countries. There have been talks with the Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian government. Building will start this year in the Moroccan desert with a field of solar panels of twelve square kilometers (DESERTEC).

Unlike the previous two examples, this is without doubt a case of sustainable development in a poor, developing country. Although the project was not set up in a developing country, different governments from countries bordering the Sahara have agreed to the project. There has also been increased attention from different African governments, which means there is hope for further expansion of the project in the future.

2.4 The two concepts

2.4.1 Is poverty eradication a necessary aspect of sustainable development?

The three examples each illustrate, on a different level, the relation between poverty and sustainable development. The first example showed the negative affect of poverty on sustainable development. In the second example the poor *partly* have a negative affect. This is because it is both developed and developing countries who are responsible for higher GHG emissions. The third example, however, provides a hopeful example of the possibility of sustainable development in a poor developing country.

All three cases are a combination of both poverty and (un)sustainable development. In the case of unsustainable development the poor have, in many instances, no other

choice for survival but to act according to the opportunities provided. However, this does not mean that the poor are necessarily the most detrimental to sustainable development. Developed countries are in part responsible for this (Castro 202). They even stimulate certain behaviour in developing countries, for instance when outsourcing the manufacturing of products to developing countries. This results in higher GHG emissions from that developing country without consequences. This is the case in China and India. They are, together with the United States, the biggest GHG polluters. This means that two of the largest emitters are developing countries (as long as we claim that they are developing countries). China currently tops the list of CO^2 emitting countries as it surpassed the United States in 2006 with 8% (PBL). However, you could claim that China and India are exceptions when analyzing economic growth in developing countries. In most cases the poor do not have the capacity to develop: "there is now a growing consensus that 'many environmental problems in developing countries originate from the lack of development, that is from the struggle to overcome extreme conditions of poverty'" (Lélé 612). It is for that reason that some claim that "environmental degradation is very often caused by poverty, because the poor have no option but to exploit resources for short-term survival" (Lélé 612). If we claim this to be true, then poverty eradication becomes a necessary condition for sustainable development to be possible. However, is this really the case? In other words, is poverty eradication, conceptually speaking, a necessary aspect of sustainable development?

Poverty and environmental degradation appear to be a vicious cycle. On the one hand the actions of the poor can result in environmental degradation. On the other hand "environmental degradation impoverishes those dependent directly on the natural environment for survival" (Lélé 612). This is also implicitly described in the Brundtland Report, when statements are given for "both sides" of the cycle: "poverty itself pollutes the environment; … those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive", and: "development countries … endure most of the poverty associated with environmental degradation" (WCED chapter 1 §8; Mestrum 50).

The social scientist Francine Mestrum explains this view in more depth. She makes a distinction between a *dependent* and *independent* variable of sustainable development. She does not favour one position over another. Rather, she focuses on what official documents say about poverty being either a dependent or independent variable of development. When poverty is a *dependent* variable the poor can be considered to be an *obstacle* to sustainable development. To prevent this it would require that the world's poor cause minimal damage. "Policies to stop population growth are the first logical element of such an approach. Another option is to give poor people access to productive resources that are less harmful for the environment" (51). The United Nations' Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 agree with this, as they claim that poverty eradication is a condition of sustainable development (United Nations, Agenda 21, §3.2). For instance, the fifth principle of the Rio Declaration states: "all States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensible requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world" (United Nations). Adopting this position means that the poor should have the ability to develop. This enables them not to be dependent on actions that can be considered unsustainable. However,

> to reduce poverty, the countries in the periphery need to have economic growth, … there need to be freer markets. In addition … developed countries have to transfer to the underdeveloped countries knowledge, capital, and technology, which actually means that businesses in the core will continue accumulating capital by selling expertise, capital, and technology to the countries in the periphery. (Castro 197)

The World Bank takes a similar position as it acknowledges poverty to be one of the factors of environmental degradation. "Poverty, uncertainty, and ignorance are the allies of environmental degradation. Addressing them is therefore the first requirement of effective environmental policies" (Castro 201). As a result, there is a large focus on poverty reduction when one decides on this policy.

On the other hand poverty can be described as an *independent* variable of sustainable development. In that case poverty eradication is the result of a sustainable development process. It is "logical to focus on the preservation and enhancement of natural resources, as well as on their equitable distribution. In that case, anti-poverty policies might focus on human rights, inequality and the unsustainable consumption patterns of the wealthy" (Mestrum 51). Previously, adopted policies have taken this position less frequently.

It becomes apparent that the current policies mostly acknowledge the view that poverty is a dependent variable of sustainable development. According to Mestrum poverty eradication policies should be abundant. This raises the question what this actually means. This will be the focus of the next section.

2.4.2 What does it mean for poverty to be a dependent variable of sustainable development?

The Brundtland Report claims there is a need to eradicate poverty to ensure sustainable development. Furthermore, commitment 2 of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, states that absolute poverty should be eradicated through national actions and international cooperation (United Nations). Similar to the Copenhagen Declaration, the World Bank wants to provide opportunities to be able to assure basic needs and access to productive resources (Mestrum 43). For this to be possible there should be a raise in per capita incomes and growth of resources. According to the Brundtland Report national income growth needs to be around "5 per cent a year in the developing economies of Asia, 5.5 per cent in Latin America, and 6 per cent in Africa and West Asia" (chapter 2 §30). This increase in growth allows people to rise above the minimal poverty line.

Although more resources might be needed, the Brundtland Report also states that the idea of sustainable development is based partly on the view of "desiring less." According to the Report: "meeting essential needs depends in part on achieving full growth potential, and sustainable development clearly requires economic growth where such needs are not being met" (chapter 2 §6). However, it also claims that: "the

idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization [is] on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (chapter 2 §1). If poverty eradication requires an increase in resource use, but sustainable development (partly) requires less, does this not lead to a paradox? While on the one hand developing countries need to grow, on the other hand sustainable development seems to want to hinder this. It is a paradox, which arises in relation to the definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland Report. However, as stated before, the definition in the Brundtland Report was criticized for being a loose concept.[4] This raises the question if sustainable development and poverty eradication actually lead to a paradox or if the definition of sustainable development is not clear enough?

If we argue that there is a paradox, then this leads to another problem, namely whether economic growth is absolutely necessary for sustainable development (Lélé 614). There is no total agreement that growth is necessarily *the* solution to poverty eradication. According to Sharachchandra Lélé, who has an interest in resource and environmental issues, the basic needs approach was adopted in the 1970s because it was necessary to overcome the fact that it was not 'economic growth *per se*' that could ensure the eradication of poverty (614). Instead a list of necessities was created to clarify what was needed to eradicate poverty. While the useful function of economic growth still applies, it diminishes the possibility that sustainable development and poverty eradication lead to a paradox. This is because it is not necessarily economic growth – thus the exploitation of resources - that poses a problem.

If we put this idea aside for a moment, we should look at the problem from another perspective. When we analyze the process of establishing the Kyoto Protocol, it becomes clear that developing countries did not, and do not want to be part of the binding GHG emission targets. They claim they (should) have the right to release more as developed countries have done so since industrialization. They make this claim on the basis of the Brundtland Report. The approach developing countries adopt, could indicate that they want to counteract sustainable development. If this is the case, then it could lead to stalemate.

[4] See section 2.1.2, in which I discuss the criticism given by Wackernagel and Rees.

These difficulties indicate that the flaw of sustainable development is the ambiguity of the term. Although the definition described in the Brundtland Report is widely accepted, there is still no consensus whether this is actually the best definition. Furthermore, there is no clarity what it precisely wants to promote. Acknowledging the so-called, looseness of the concept, makes it possible to include many aspects. In relation to the question I want to answer I will keep using the definition of sustainable development given by the Brundtland Commission. However, this does not mean that it is not important to recognize the difficulty of the concept and the ambiguity that it can entail. Furthermore, sustainable development and poverty eradication do not necessarily lead to a paradox. This is because sustainable development does not *necessarily* indicate that one should take a step back. I will come back to this point at a later stage.[5]

[5] I will explain this point in Section 5.2

3. Needs

One of the main focus points in the previous chapter was the definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland Report. One of the two concepts underlying the definition is: "the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given" (WCED chapter 2 §1). In this chapter I will focus on what those needs actually entail.

3.1 Different types of needs

The topic of needs raises different questions. Two of the most important are: Should needs be identified as "absolute" or should they be described in more formal, "relative", criteria? And, in relation to the first question, do universal needs that we share as human beings exist or are needs conditioned by social, historical and cultural context? I will focus on each question separately.

3.1.1 "Absolute" or "relative" criteria?

Needs can be described as material criteria, which can be identified as economic aspects. Those aspects relate to basic needs that can include food, clothing, shelter, water and sanitation. In the Bruntland Report those are (partly) the needs that the current poor should have access to (WCED chapter 2 §4). Another way to describe material needs is by using an "absolute" definition of poverty. This includes setting an "absolute" poverty line that is applied across all potential resource distributions. An example is the extreme poverty line of $1,25 a day set by the World Bank. If people earn this amount or more, they will be able to afford their basic needs. Setting such a(n) (arbitrary) line makes it useful for studies on poverty.

An "absolute" definition on needs can be useful to measure whether people have access to their basic needs. However, the current discussion on poverty is turning away from this approach as it does not give an indication of what kind of life a person is actually living. A person might live above the extreme poverty line and therefore, be able to afford his or her basic necessities. However, this does not mean that the person has the capability to live the life he or she actually values. For instance, social aspects of poverty such as education and health care, are not included in a material

discussion on needs. To include those aspects a more formal criterion of needs has been developed.

A more formal criterion of needs goes a step further and includes both material *and* non-material needs. This "relative" definition of needs takes the social context into account. The social scientist John Veit-Wilson gives a description of needs in which he emphasizes social and psychological aspects:

> The full range of intangible and material resources that are required over time to achieve the production, maintenance and reproduction of the fully autonomous, fully participating adult human in the particular society to which he or she belongs…Material resources may support the physical organism but it is the full range of social and psychological resources which are required for the experience of humanity. (qtd. in Lister 24)

In his article *Measuring the Minimum*, Veit-Wilson further defines the adequacy of resources "in terms of acquiring and maintaining dignity and being able to take a respectable and recognised part in one's own society" (qtd. in Lister 24). Therefore, Veit-Wilson does not only argue for material aspects of needs, but also includes relational aspects. Differently put, a "relative" definition of needs can be described as a multi-dimensional concept as it embraces "all of the major spheres of life" (Lister 22). It is only in recent years that the importance of theorizing human needs to social policy has been recognised.

The notion of "relative" includes a number of different meanings. One is the idea of *comparisons* that can be made in judging whether poverty exists (Lister 22). The essence of the comparative element lies in the idea that it is only possible to judge whether someone is in "relative" poverty (or not), in relation to other people living in the same society at the same point in time. This can be broken down into three elements: historical, cross-national and intra-national. The first, the historical element, can be exemplified by people who survived the Second World War and who claim that "real" poverty does not exist anymore in Western Europe. However, "relative" poverty is based on a comparison between people who live at the same moment in

time. This means that others are not in the position to decide what is a decent life for people currently. Secondly, looking at the cross-national element raises the difficulty of comparing poverty between people in developed and developing countries. While poverty may be rarely existent in developed countries, it is important not to move past the "demands, expectations and costs of living in an affluent consumer society" (Lister 23). The third and final element is intra-national. This focuses on inequality *within* societies. It highlights any inequalities of material resources that may exist between groups. These three elements would pose problems in an "absolute" approach to needs, but are fit for a "relative" notion.

The difference between "absolute" and "relative" criteria of needs comes down to the explanation given by Peter Townsend: material deprivation refers to "material goods and amenities", while social is about "ordinary social costumes, activities and relationships" (Lister 22). The question I raised in this section is whether needs should consist of "absolute" or "relative" criteria. It can be answered in the following way. Although an "absolute" approach to needs gives a clear-cut picture, the more formal criteria also take other aspects of life into account. This is important because recently people have started to realise that while food and shelter and other material criteria might be necessary, it does not describe the kind of life someone is actually living. Someone can still be considered poor if he is not able to maintain his dignity and humanity. To illustrate, I want to focus on the Dalit population in India. They fall outside the caste system and 1.3 million are manual scavengers. This means that they have to remove human and animal excreta from dry latrines. They do this using brooms, small tin plates, and baskets that are carried on their head ("Manual Scavenging"; Kumar). Although this work has been legally banned since 1993, it is still practised nation-wide. As a result of social pressure they are rarely capable of acquiring a different job. They are poor by material standards as they earn only up to one rupee a day, but also by personal standards since their dignity is violated due to the work they have to do. For those reasons one could argue that they live in "double poverty." An "absolute" definition of poverty would brand them poor on the basis of their income. However, this leaves an important aspect aside, namely their dignity. Adopting a "relative" approach would take both aspects into account. It is for that reason that the second question will be answered in light of a more formal, "relative" view on needs.

3.1.2 Universal needs or socially, historically and culturally constructed?

The second question is whether needs are universal or if they are conditioned by social, historical and cultural context. According to medical ethics professor Len Doyal (1944) and political economy professor Ian Gough, needs are universal. This is similar to the capabilities approach described by economist-philosopher Amartya Sen (1933) and philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1947) (Section 3.1.2.1). Peter Townsend, however, argues that needs are conditioned by social, historical and cultural context (Section 3.1.2.2). Both views argue from a "relative" approach to needs, but take a different stance on how those "relative" needs are constructed.

3.1.2.1 Universal needs

Len Doyal and Ian Gough argue that human needs can be universally conceptualised. Basic human needs are "the universal pre-requisites for successful … participation in a social form of life" (Lister 31). They claim that human beings have two basic needs, namely physical health and autonomy. Doyal and Gough define the latter as "the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it" (Lister 31). Basic human needs are universal because they are necessary in any culture before an individual can effectively participate in achieving other goals. They are, however, very general and thus not a very helpful guide to social policies: they do not tell us what is required to satisfy those basic needs. To solve this problem, Doyal and Gough add another layer called "intermediate" needs. Those are eleven broad categories of needs, which improve physical health and personal autonomy everywhere:

1. Adequate nutritional food and water
2. Adequate protective housing
3. Non-hazardous work environment
4. Non-hazardous physical environment
5. Appropriate health care
6. Security in childhood
7. Significant primary relationships with others
8. Physical security
9. Economic security
10. Safe birth control and child-bearing

11. Appropriate basic and cross-cultural education. ("Doyal and Gough's needs")

As this list shows, needs are a combination of material and non-material aspects. The "intermediate" needs provide a bridge between the basic needs – physical health and autonomy – and the "socially relative satisfiers." The "socially relative satisfiers" can be defined as the "actual commodities through which these needs are met, which clearly vary according to time and place" (Lister 31). Apart from time and place, they also vary between groups within a society. The reason to use the "socially relative satisfiers" is the recognition that there are increasingly diverse societies. This means that Doyal and Gough have conceptualised different "intermediate" needs, but they acknowledge that there can be slight differences between needs in one place or time and another.

The needs described by Doyal and Gough have many similarities to a capabilities approach. Capability theorists focus on the positive. This means that they analyze which kind of life we want people to be able to achieve in order to flourish. This is opposed to focusing on the negative, which includes the lack of material resources that can prevent people from achieving a life in which to flourish. Another way to explain it is that a capabilities approach is concerned with human *functioning* – what a person is *capable* to do or be. This can include nourishment, but also the ability to participate in the community and the achievement of self-respect (Lister 16). A capability approach is also concerned with *capabilities*. They discuss how to actually achieve those functionings – what a person actually *can* do or be and this focuses on the aspect of freedom (Lister 16). The capability approach entails two normative claims. First of all, "the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance" (Robeyns). The second claim states "that [the] freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value" (Robeyns).

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum are prominent capability theorists. Especially Sen has contributed to a shift in the meaning of development from economic growth, to a focus on "poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life" (Lister 15). This means that his conceptualisation of needs is broader than the

"absolute" focus on needs. Sen argues that living standards and income do not matter in their own right. Instead it is important that a person is able to lead a life in which choices and opportunities are open to everyone, thus that people have functionings and capabilities. Sen discusses basic capabilities in reference to a threshold; a level that satisfies certain functionings up to a certain level. Those might include being able to survive and avoid poverty. "The relevance of basic capabilities is 'not so much in ranking living standards, but in deciding on a cut-off point for the purpose of assessing poverty and deprivation'" (Robeyns). For that reason poverty can be described as capability failure. Although Sen describes what capabilities are, he does not give a list of what they are exactly.

Nussbaum, on the other hand, does give a list of ten human capabilities. They are not necessarily exhaustive, but include: "life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment" (Nussbaum 41-42). The idea behind this list is that if people have access to those capabilities they will never be so impoverished that it is not worthy of a human being. Every human being on Earth has the moral entitlement to those capabilities and, according to Nussbaum; governments should ensure that people have access to them.

Both Goyal and Dough and Sen and Nussbaum argue for basic human needs that are universal. I will now turn to Peter Townsend's view. His view is based on the idea that there are no universal needs, but rather that needs are socially, historically and culturally constructed.

3.1.2.2 Socially, historically and culturally constructed

Townsend does not agree with the idea that needs are universal. Instead, he claims that needs are conditioned by social, historical and cultural context. Although Doyal and Gough recognize slight differences in needs in time and place, Townsend's theory is focused around the idea that those differences are crucial. "Human beings are social as well as physical beings; in addition to physiological requirements our needs reflect a range of social expectations and responsibilities" (qtd. in Lister 24). In 1999, the British Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey came to the conclusion that the general UK population subscribes to such an understanding of needs. The majority of the

respondents claimed that the important needs are basic nutrition, clothing and shelter. However, "items such as a refrigerator, washing machine and telephone and activities such as celebrations on special occasions, visiting friends or family and a hobby or leisure pastime" should also be included (Lister 25).

One might expect that such a view on needs has been developed in our current fast-paced and ever-changing world. However, this idea is not new. The economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) already discussed it in the late eighteenth century. He claimed that:

> By necessaries, I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is strictly speaking not a necessity of life….But in the present time…a creditable day labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt. (qtd. in Lister 26)

Townsend takes Smith's view a step further. He claims that even physiological needs, such as nutrition, cannot be separated from social, historical and cultural contexts. "The amount and cost of the food which is eaten depends on the social roles people play and the dietary customs observed as well as the kinds of foods made available socially through production and availability in markets. In short, food of all kinds of society is 'socialised'" (Lister 25).

The social and cultural conditioning of needs is more pronounced in the modern society. The problem is that, when people in a consumer society are increasingly defined with what they have, "the poor…are re-cast as 'flawed consumers'" (Lister 26). Due to current advertising targeted at children and young people, a culture of acquisition has been created. Although this is dominant in the Western consumer societies, globalization has resulted it in no longer being confined to these societies. This means that it is increasingly difficult for poor people to meet their children's needs. According to Marshall Wolfe "even the most extreme forms of poverty 'are

being penetrated in incongruous ways by elements of the consumer culture'" (qtd. in Lister 26).

Adopting Townend's view on needs means that needs constantly change. It makes it increasingly difficult for the poor to acquire those needs. According to Jock Young this can lead to the "bifurcated process of 'cultural inclusion' and 'structural exclusion', in which the delights of mass culture are dangled in front of those without the means to enjoy them" (qtd. in Lister 26). It is for this reason that a universal approach to needs should be adopted. It enables everyone to focus on those basic needs, which, I believe, are absolutely necessary.

3.2 The "future" of needs

The focus of this chapter has been on the concept of "needs." I have come to the conclusion that a "relative" approach to needs is the most useful. It escapes the problem of dealing only with basic needs, which does not take the actual standard of living of people into account. Furthermore, needs are universal, which means that they are not restricted to time and place, but apply everywhere, anytime and to anyone. This allows both the poor and the rich to be included in the concept of needs. Social and cultural conditioning of needs leads to the problem that only part of the world is able to acquire their needs. However, even with universal needs there can be slight differences between one society and another due to the "socially relative satisfiers". Those differences are not big and will always lead back to the same basic needs. Everyone, both the rich and the poor, will want to acquire those basic needs. However, if we claim that needs are universal, what does this mean? The discussion on needs has had the current poor as its main focus. But, if needs are not restricted to a certain timeframe, could they also be applied to future generations? Consequently, could they be analyzed in a broader sense? If this would be the case then possibly the needs of the current poor could be extrapolated and "copied" onto the needs of our posterity. To know if this is possible I will first focus on our relation to future generations. After that I will analyze whether it is possible to apply our understanding of needs to our posterity.

4. Future Generations

The relations within and between generations are different. In this chapter I will analyze how they are different. This can clarify whether needs are indeed universal and can apply to our generation and the next. Although I will clarify the difference, I will leave the discussion whether they are universal to the next chapter. Another point I will focus on in this chapter is intergenerational justice. Different intergenerational justice theories exist and I will clarify why they are or are not applicable.

4.1 Relations between generations

Four differences can be named focused on the relations within our generation and between different generations. First of all, we can exercise power over future generations. “Present generations effectively manipulate interests of future generations, and can successfully achieve the intended result of having their projects continued” (Meyer). However, remote generations cannot exercise this power over us, which makes the power relation asymmetrical. Secondly, we can exercise our power in such a way that it harms our posterity. This means that our behaviour is capable of affecting the lives of people who will come into existence in 50 years or possibly even in 10,000 years. A good example of this is climate change. There is a general consensus that our greenhouse gas emissions will affect people in the future. Although we cannot predict the exact effect, it will probably have a negative impact on future generations. The third reason is how we can affect the very existence of our posterity, their number and their identity. Differently put, “future people’s existence, number, and specific identity depend … upon currently living people’s decisions and actions” (Meyer). Institutionalized population policy, for instance, can result in people not coming into existence in the future, it therefore has a direct effect on future generations. Lastly, the knowledge we have of the future is limited. Although we are capable of knowing – to a certain extent – previously and presently existing people, we are not in the position to refer to specifically identifiable future persons. These four points clarify that there is a difference between solely focusing on our generation and analyzing all generations together.

It is clear that there are differences in relations and this raises several important normative questions. If we can harm people who will live in the future, does this mean we have a certain responsibility towards them? Related to this question; should we take future generations into account in our decision-making? Or differently put, do we have duties to future generations? I will now turn to answering these questions.

4.2 Responsibility

There is an obvious dichotomy between those in favour of a responsibility towards our posterity and those against such a view. There are many different opinions on how we should look at the responsibility towards future generations. Although variations might exist on how to approach the responsibility, the environmental lawyer Lothar Gündling claims that there can be no doubt that the reason we need to act is based both on the prevention of disasters occurring to our posterity but also "that it is our will that humankind should survive" (209). According to Gündling there is no doubt that this will exists and that it is based on worldwide consensus. What he means with this is that everyone can identify with the will that humankind should survive. He argues that there might be discussions about different attitudes towards future generations, but this does not mean that the consensus does not exist. Instead, it is more likely that the threat to future generations will be considered less dramatic, e.g. "the threat to future generations will not be *that* bad" (209). Or our posterity is given more credit on the ability to cope with the problem, e.g. "future persons will invent a way to deal with it" (209). I agree with Gündling's reasoning that people share this will and therefore, that the responsibility to future generations exists. However, there are different ways in which we can approach this responsibility.

4.3 Intergenerational justice

If we accept that there is a responsibility to future generations the question can be raised whether there are – or should be – only duties for the present generation. If we have the capacity to affect future generations, does this not give us duties towards future generations? This would be the case if we agree that future "generations can be viewed as holding legitimate claims or rights against present generations, who in turn stand under correlative duties to future" generations (Meyer). Theories of distributive justice are concerned with exactly that discussion. In practice this might result, in the

case of an intergenerational conflict of justice, in us being prevented from pursuing policies that will create benefits for ourselves, but which will impose costs on future generations. However, the forcefulness of such a policy depends on the theory of justice that is chosen. There are different theories and the best-known claim "that we allocate benefits and burdens so that some currency of well-being is maximized, or shared equally, or so that the worst off group is as well-off as possible, or so that as many people lead a decent life" (Page 2). The first view, which focuses on the maximization of well-being, argues from a utilitarian point of view. The second is based on equality and is called egalitarianism. It is followed by the view that justice should be perceived from a prioritarian point of view. The last argues from a sufficientarian approach. Although there are numerous ways in which justice is described in literature, focusing on it from the perspective of utility, equality or priority is the most common. The last theory, based on sufficiency, has not been discussed as much in literature. However, I think this relatively unknown approach can be useful in the intergenerational justice discussion. I will now focus on each approach separately, and explain the possibilities and problems they might face when they are implemented.

4.3.1 Utilitarianism

There are different variations to the utilitarian approach, but in relation to future generations it can be best defined as that "acts and social policies should be evaluated only in terms of their consequences, and that these consequences in turn ought to be maximally beneficial in the sense that they promote the maximum amount of welfare possible" (Page 2-3). This means that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good; the one in which well-being is maximized. Well-being applies to everyone, both the currently living and future generations. Therefore, each action should take everyone into account. Focusing on the consequences of an action can also be called consequentialism. One type of consequentialism is *impersonal* consequentialism. According to this approach contemporaries should always bring about the best state of affairs. Therefore, one "should care equally about goods in all times in history" (Chatterjee 541). To implement this theory and associate duties to them requires strong duties. This means that one has to do the same for promoting the quality of life for future generations, as he or she would do for contemporaries. This

requires calculating the aggregate good in a population at a certain time. Within the framework of impersonal consequentialism there are two principles that focus on aggregate good.

The first principle states that the good in a population equates the sum of the goods of all its members. This means adding up the aggregate goods of every member. However, this principle leads to what is called the "repugnant conclusion." The British philosopher Derek Parfit (1942) introduced it in 1984 in his book *Reasons and Persons*. The formulation of the "repugnant conclusion" is as follows: "If there were ten billion people living, all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence would be *better*, even though its members have lives that are barely worth living" (415). This would undermine the view of impersonal consequentialism, because by creating more people you simply create more utility. However, this does not mean that the quality of life of the individual person is worth living. For instance, "it is indifferent to the plight of the very severely disadvantaged if their disutility is outweighed by the utility of others" (Caney 85).

The second principle of impersonal consequentialism states that the good in a certain population equates to the average good per member. It is able to avoid the "repugnant conclusion" because it does not overlook the utility of the individual person. However, it is not able to avoid a different criticism, namely, "if we add to our ideal state some extra people at a slightly lower but still high quality of life, we make the state worse" (Hurka, Future Generations 587). This is not what an impersonal consequentialists want, as they want to pursue the most good per member.

4.3.1.1 Criticism on utilitarianism

The criticisms given about each principle show that the impersonal consequentialist approach to intergenerational justice is not applicable in practice. Furthermore, impersonal consequentialism is unreasonably overdemanding, as it requires that we seek to promote the quality of future life like we do our own (Perett 30). In other words, it is excessively demanding to expect people to always bring about the best

outcome, which increases both the well-being of themselves as the well-being of future generations. This would result in the problem, that for currently living people, there will be "no moral time off, no moral relaxation, no such thing as a moral holiday" (Hurka, Sustainable Development).

4.3.2 Egalitarianism

One of the most prominent theories on intergenerational justice is egalitarianism. It is focused on the idea of equitable distribution, which means that inequality should be minimized, as this is bad or unjust. The philosopher Brian Barry (1936-2009) has adopted this view. He argues that each generation has a duty to pass on to its successors a total range of resources and opportunities, which is at least as good as its own. The legal scholar Edith Brown Weiss shares this approach. She claims that there are three principles of intergenerational equity. First, there are comparable *options*. This means that the diversity of the natural resource base should be conserved such that our posterity can satisfy their values. Secondly, there is comparable *quality*, which means that the "quality of the environment on balance is comparable between generations." Lastly, there is comparable *access*, which means that there should be "non-discriminatory access among generations to the Earth and its resources" ("Climate change" 616).

Derek Parfit makes a distinction between *telic* and *deontic* egalitarianism. According to telic egalitarians inequality is bad in itself. This results in the claim that the more inequality exists the worse the outcome. Deontic egalitarians, however, claim that "inequality is bad only if it has certain origins" (Page 3), which means origins from wrongdoing. Therefore, more inequality does not necessarily mean we have the worst outcome; rather, it depends on how the inequality came about.

4.3.2.1 Criticism on egalitarianism

Four criticisms can be named on egalitarianism. Firstly, telic egalitarianism faces the "leveling down objection." The objection highlights the following problem: imagine there is a population in which half of the people are rich and the other half is poor. With other things being equal, "egalitarianism would view a move to an entirely impoverished population in such cases as just in at least one respect" (Page 3). This is

because although the population would be poor, they would all be equal. However, according to a telic egalitarian inequality is always unjust. As there is no rule that egalitarianism always has to move upwards towards the rich, it can be brought down to the level of the poor. To avoid this from occurring, the view that inequality is unjust in itself should be rejected. This is (partly) the view deontic egalitarians adopt. They claim that inequality is only unjust if it originates from wrong doing. Although it could therefore avoid the "leveling down objection" it faces its own problem, namely, "blameless inequality" (Page 4). This second criticism is based upon the inability of a deontic egalitarian to explain "what is unjust about inequalities between individuals or groups that do not engage, or have not in the past engaged, in dealings of moral reciprocity" (Page 4). To illustrate this I will use an example. Imagine that there are two populations, A and B. They have little or no mutual dealings. One day, a member of population A decides to visit population B out of curiosity. To his surprise he finds that the people in population B are very badly off compared to those in A, although well-being in both populations is evenly distributed. In that case a deontic egalitarian would regard such "inequalities as trivial from the point of view of justice since the inequality did not arise from wrongdoing" (Page 4-5). This means that the deontic egalitarian would not take any action to change the situation around.

The third criticism, which applies to egalitarianism in general, is that adopting this approach can lead to pity and envy. It encourages "the better off to pity the worse off, and the worse off to resent the better off, egalitarianism encourages complacency and arrogance in some and a lack of self-esteem and respect in others" (Page 9). Although the aim of egalitarianism is to get everyone on an equal level of well-being, there will always be those who will be in a better position than others. Due to the big focus on equality those (minor) differences can become real problems amongst people.

The fourth criticism is an objection that can be made against the comparative judgment aspect of the approach. Egalitarianism reasons that people should help each other if one is worse off than the other. However, there might be cases in which we are both well off, but one person is slightly worse off than the other. It seems difficult to justify that in such a case the better-off person has to help the person slightly less well off (Hurka, "Sustainable Development"). This means that an egalitarian approach

lacks a level at which a person has enough and requires no further help. It is for that reason that egalitarianism can be considered demanding.

4.3.3 Prioritarianism

In order to avoid the "levelling down objection" and "blameless inequality" problems egalitarianism faces, another approach can be adopted. This is the prioritarian approach, which could currently, together with egalitarianism, be considered the dominant theory within intergenerational justice. Prioritarianism shares many similarities with egalitarianism. Some philosophers who were thought to be egalitarians actually turned out to be prioritarians. The difference between the two is that prioritarianism does not rely on comparative properties of distributive outcomes. Instead it focuses on people that are badly off as such. "The lower the level of a person's well-being the stronger our duty is to help them" (Page 5). This means that benefits to the worst off matter the most. This is not because of how it compares to others, but because people are at a "lower absolute level." Therefore, benefits would matter just as much even if there were no people better off (Page 5; Holtug 132). Therefore, prioritarianism is concerned with absolute levels of individual welfare.

4.3.3.1 Criticism on prioritarianism

According to the American philosopher Harry Frankfurt (1929), prioritarianism faces the same criticism of pity and envy as egalitarianism does, except that it is based on a different argument. According to Frankfurt people in the "lowest strata of society" usually live in horrible conditions (Page 10). However, the association between low social position and "dreadful quality of life is entirely contingent" (Page 10). This means that there is not necessarily a connection between living at the bottom of society and "being poor in the sense in which poverty is a serious and morally objectionable barrier to life" (Page 10). Therefore, the problem of prioritarianism is about absolute well-being. Absolute well-being results in constant interference in people's lives in order to benefit the worst-off, which can lead to pity and envy (Page 10).

The second criticism is based on the following example. Imagine there is a society in which one group of people is living a "very happy" life and another group is living an "extremely happy" life. Both groups are living a sufficient life, however, the

prioritarian would have to take action if this would result in the "very happy" group to be even better off. The question then becomes: should there be a duty to help the so-called "worst-off" although they are already leading lives of such high standards? According to the prioritarian this should be the case, "the very happy, as the worst off, deserve the attention of prioritarians even if they live so well they want for nothing" (Page 10).

Prioritarianism partly faces the same criticism as egalitarianism, but it also faces its own. Although it is currently the most prominent theory, I want to focus on another approach, which I think is better suited in relation to my thesis question: sufficientarianism. The sufficientarian approach has gained increased attention in recent years, but it does not have the significant position the other theories have (had). Nonetheless, I think it can provide us with a useful new look onto intergenerational justice.

4.3.4 Sufficientarianism

A sufficientarian approach holds that "benefits and burdens should be distributed in line with the 'doctrine of sufficiency'" (Page 8). This approach is most closely associated with Harry Frankfurt. According to this view as many people as possible should have enough "to pursue the aims and aspirations they care about over a whole life" (Page 8). This has "lexical priority" over other ideals such as utility, equality and priority (Page 8). In practise this means that people should live a good enough life, a life in which they have enough: a life that is sufficient (Frankfurt 21).

Sufficientarianism can be described in relation to a threshold of harm. A threshold of harm can be defined in the following way: "An action (or inaction) at time t_1 harms someone only if the agent thereby causes (allows) this person's life to fall below some specific threshold" (Mack "Absolute poverty and global justice" 137). This means that a person is harmed when due to the consequence of an action the person falls below a *normatively defined state*. It is irrelevant whether the harmed person exists momentarily or will at a later time. It *is* relevant whether the person falls below the threshold because if he or she does, absolute suffering and deprivation have not been alleviated (Spagnoli). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the person is kept

above the threshold as this is the "minimum acceptable outcome under a given policy scenario" (International Council on Human Rights Policy).

A distinction can be made between weak and strong interpretations of sufficientarianism. *Weak sufficientarianism* implies that the priority that is to be given to people "below the threshold decreases to zero at the threshold" (Meyer). However, the consequence of this approach is that it is capable of making "unreasonable demands on the currently living" (Meyer). For instance, we might do more good in total if we improve the well-being of people above the threshold, instead of below the threshold. However, weak sufficientarianism's priority goes to people *below* the threshold. The main focus of *strong sufficientarianism* is also on people whose well-being is just below the threshold, however, it also focuses on the group of people that can be benefitted the most (Meyer). Therefore, in some cases, it is unimportant whether it benefits a group of people below or above the threshold. Differently put, priority should be given:

> First, to the group of persons whose improvement in well-being has absolute or lexical priority [to] those whose level of well-being is below the threshold; to benefit persons below the threshold matters more the worse off they are. Second, and in addition, while within the group of both those below and those above the threshold, it matters more to benefit persons the more people are being benefited and the greater the benefit in question, trade-offs between persons above and below the threshold are precluded. (Meyer)

To sum up, whether a stronger or weaker version of sufficientarianism is adopted depends upon the priority that is given to the well-being of persons below the threshold. Just like an egalitarian, the sufficientarian wants to reduce inequality. However, in itself equality has no intrinsic value. This means that equality will be sacrificed if it conflicts with the doctrine of sufficiency. Frankfurt clarifies this when he refers to, what he calls, "the fundamental error of egalitarianism" ("Equality as a moral ideal" 34). According to him, the flaw of egalitarianism is that "it is morally important whether one person has less than another regardless of how much either of them has" ("Equality as a moral ideal" 34). However, Frankfurt does not agree with

this and he claims “it is not that everyone should have *the same* but that each should have *enough*. If everyone had enough, it would be of no moral consequence whether some had more than others” (“Equality as a moral ideal” 21).

4.3.4.1 Criticism on sufficientarianism

Just like the other three approaches, sufficientarianism faces certain criticisms. Firstly, there is the claim that the approach is actually not so different from egalitarianism. The reason for this is that as soon as you talk about the worst off, you are engaging in “comparative and relational analysis, by necessity” (Spagnoli), which is inherent to egalitarianism. According to critics this will also be true for sufficientarianism when the approach is implemented in practice.

There is another reason why sufficientarianism is possibly not so different from egalitarianism. According to this second criticism, the problem of sufficientarianism is about evolvement through time. Basic needs might change over time, just like the meaning of “suffering” might. However, what does this mean for the threshold? Do sufficientarians want to keep the threshold fixed or should it rise over time? If the latter is the case, then the difference between sufficientarianism and egalitarianism might become rather small.

The third criticism is concerned with the threshold being philosophically vague. This means that it is not unlikely that there will be numerous cases in which the person is just above or below the threshold of a decent life. If that is the case, what should be done?

The fourth criticism is related to the previous one. It is concerned with setting a threshold. In practice, this will probably be somewhat arbitrary and could result in the following problem. If two people are in a similar situation only one will receive help if one is just above the threshold and one is just below. Although deciding on a cut-off point is inevitable, the difference in importance might become painfully clear to those concerned.

4.3.4.2 Reaction on criticism of sufficientarianism

Although these criticisms need to be taken into account, there are several considerations "that point in the direction of accepting a sufficiency threshold" (Page 15). Although a utilitarian, egalitarian or prioritarian approach can be useful in one way or another, I think the following reactions can clarify why a sufficientarian approach is the best. If we focus on the sufficientarian threshold one could argue that setting a certain line is arbitrary, as is the case with the World Bank's poverty line. "Yet, it is not arbitrary in the practical sense that people, states, and international institutions habitually make assumptions about the necessary features of a decent life" (Page 15-16). To clarify, we should not focus on the difficulty of specifying a threshold in the face of philosophical vagueness, but instead "we ask what practical work a sufficiency threshold can do, for example in the construction of policies to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development" (Page 16). Although setting a boundary will probably always deal with the criticism that it is arbitrary, it can be "extremely useful in the formulation of the goals and targets" of a development policy (Page 16). Relating this to the three other theories, I think it gives us a better grip in policy-making than the other theories can.

Another criticism is how to define what is sufficient, in other words, when does someone fall above or below the threshold? According to Frankfurt, "having enough" is not only about having access to needs which make life bearable. This means a threshold should not be the level at which a person is able to just escape "'extreme poverty' or exceeds some slightly more generous indicator of well-being." This would be the case when taking the $1,25 calculated by the World Bank as a standard. Rather, the level of sufficiency is when the person "exhibits no substantial discomfort or distress throughout a life of normal lifespan" (qtd. in Page 16). This means that apart from material aspects, non-material aspects should also be included. Therefore, at the time, when all persons who are mentally and physically able to, can lead such a life, the "duties and entitlements of distributive justice are exhausted" (qtd. in Page 16).

Furthermore, the difference between egalitarianism and sufficientarianism *could* possibly become smaller. A sufficientarian is not against equality, but at the core it is not the aim of the approach. It is therefore not important if the gap between the two approaches becomes smaller, as at the heart of the approach they are not the same.

4.4 Which theory to choose?

In this chapter I have focused on four different approaches of distributive justice. The approach I discussed first, utilitarianism, is difficult to implement in practise as it is overdemaning. The second, egalitarianism, has received increased criticism, while prioritarianism has only gained popularity in recent years. This is probably due to the fact that prioritarianism is able to escape the "levelling down objection" and "blameless inequality" that egalitarianism faces. Nonetheless, prioritarianism faces its own criticism related to envy and pity and standard of living. The last approach I discussed, sufficientarianism, also faces certain criticism, which can be opposed with good arguments making it a good theory to deal with intergenerational justice. This makes it a good theory to apply in practice, which is required if we wish to analyze both the needs of the current poor and future generations.

5. Needs and Intergenerational Justice

In this chapter I will argue that the concept of "needs" is the same for people today as it is for future generations. Previously, I analyzed the concept and I came to the conclusion that a "relative" and universal approach to needs is the most useful. This made me raise the question if needs could be "copied" to future generations. To clarify this I explored the relation between contemporaries and future generations. The relation amongst and between generations is different. However, I will now argue that this does not call for a different concept of needs. Needs are universal and can, and should, apply to all. Although this can "easily" be stated, the question becomes: how can we ensure that both contemporaries and future generations have access to their needs? This requires a balance between generations and the sufficientarian approach can be the conceptual starting point for this.

5.1 How to analyze the care

The question I want to answer in this thesis is: How can we meaningfully analyze the combination of care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework? The concept of needs is an important aspect within this framework and it plays a major role both in our lives, as it probably will in the lives of our posterity. Needs are universal, however, the relation between our generation and future generations is unidirectional. One major issue is that we have the ability to exercise power over future generations; the decisions we make today "will determine the initial welfare of future generations" (Weiss "In fairness to future generations" 25). For instance, the resources we use today, will have an effect on the ability of our posterity to access their needs. The overexploitation of resources compromises the possibilities future generations have. Furthermore, the problem of anthropogenic climate changes will only increase over time. This can lead to numerous problems in the future such as temperature increase, more and heavier rainfall and extreme drought. Those nature-associated problems will greatly affect future people and their ability to access their needs (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). However, does this make a difference for what the concept of needs means currently and what it will include in the future? Before I turn to answering this I want to clarify why it is so

important that needs are universal. The economy professor Paul Streeten (1917) explains this:

> One merit of the basic needs concept is that it provides powerful basis for organizing analysis and policymaking. Just as it can mobilize political support, it is also capable of integrating thought and action in different fields. This could be illustrated in the areas of energy, environmental pollution, raw material exhaustion, appropriate technology, appropriate consumption patterns, urbanization, rural-urban migration, international trade, dominance and dependence, and the treatment of transnational corporations. (23-24)

Differently put, the basic needs approach provides a grip in a discussion, which does not only focus on policy-making, but can also apply to other practical aspects in life.

If we claim that needs are universal we face two problems. The first problem is concerned with the quantitative basis of needs and the second with the qualitative aspects. The first, the quantitative problem, focuses on the amount of needs our posterity should have access to. If we agree that future generations *should* have access to their needs, then it is useful to know the amount they should have access to. However, this is not possible because we do not know how many people will actually live in the future. Imagine we could make a fairly precise estimate of the future population size and we could then calculate how much, for example, food, our posterity needs. We could never be sure that our estimate is right. Although calculating the need for food, which is a basic need, could maybe be possible, the need for appropriate health care, for instance, would be a lot more difficult. Such a need can have more or less priority in the future depending on many different factors. With food "only" nutrient intake would have to be calculated, but a lot more information is needed for health care. What I want to indicate is that, even if certain calculation problems can be overcome, there is always the uncertainty of exactly how much our posterity requires of a certain need. As I stated before, the knowledge we have of future generations is limited.[6] The second problem is qualitative. This focuses

[6] I discussed this in Section 4.1, when I analyzed the relations between generations.

on the type of needs future persons should have access to. In the second chapter I came to the conclusion that a "relative" notion of needs is the most realistic, as it does not only focus on material needs, but also looks at the life a person is actually living. Material needs, such as food, water and shelter will probably always be necessary to live a decent life. However, we cannot decide precisely what the non-material needs should be and this could become a problem. Brian Barry explains this in more depth when he claims that making the decision for future generations on what they need would probably be an "objectionable criterion for 'what matters'. This is because one of the defining characteristics of human beings is their ability to form their own conceptions of the good life. It would be presumptuous – and unfair – of us to pre-empt their choices in the future" (Barry 103-104). I agree with Barry that making a decision for future generations would be unfair; we would be adopting a paternalistic attitude. This does not necessarily have to be negative, but it can be in relation to future generations. This is because you can never be sure what future generations are actually in need of. There might be a possibility that you can decide for your grandchildren what they need. However, extending this to people who will live in, for instance, a 1.000 years is not realistic. This means that needs can be universal but require slight differences in application. Therefore, future generations should have the opportunity to decide for themselves how their needs should be filled in exactly. It is the "socially relative satisfiers" which make it possible for them to decide what is needed to a more or lesser extent.

This corresponds to the idea of a children's "right to an open future." The political and social philosopher Joel Feinburg (1926-2004) introduced this idea. Rights to an open future are a subset of so-called C-rights. C-rights only apply to children and they give the child the right to be the adult he or she will become. This poses limitations on the rights of parents and it imposes duties on the state to protect those rights. The state needs to protect the future interests a child will have as an adult, which "implies that they are anticipatory welfare rights" (Archard). In reference to future generations we could adopt a similar approach. This means we should analyze whether we should be limited in our options to allow future generations to live the life they should. I will come back to this point at a late stage.

5.2 The need for balance

The concept of needs is the same for us and our posterity. This means we should keep our discussion focused on *both* current and future generations; all should have access to resources and opportunities. However, what does this mean for our view on sustainable development? A dominant view within the sustainable development framework is that we should take a step back in our consumption patterns. Or differently put: "how many of the needs … of the current generation are to be sacrificed in order to help future generations meet their needs?" (Beckerman 1). Let us return to the Brundtland Report, which I discussed in chapter two. We are facing a challenge because of inequity in our generation. Differently put, many problems in our current generation arise from inequalities in access to resources (WCED chapter 2 §24), but there is also the need to be concerned about future generations (Gündling 211). "Simply" taking a step back in our use of resources would be a major problem for the current poor as it would not benefit their development. The Brundtland Report acknowledges this when it claims that non-renewable resources *can* be used. However, "the rate of depletion should take into account the criticality of that resource, the availability of technologies for minimizing depletion, and the likelihood of substitutes being available … Sustainable development requires that the rate of depletion of non-renewable resources should foreclose as few future options as possible" (chapter 2 §12). Therefore, according to the Report, contemplating the options for future generations does not necessarily mean that one has to abstain from using resources, instead it means that other possible options should be taken into account. If those other options can be fulfilled then, for instance, non-renewable resources can be used, therefore not foreclosing "as few future options as possible" (WCED chapter 2 §12).

This means we should focus on our current situation and analyze which changes are needed, and how our decisions include the needs of our posterity. This means that technological development and institutional change should be taken into account to ensure harmony between all and "enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (WCED chapter 2 §15). This is not only because of development goals, but also because we have a "moral obligation to other living beings and future generations" (WCED chapter 2 §55) to take care of the Earth's natural resource base.

The Brundtland Report further argues that there should be a balance between the possibilities of future generations to meet their needs and the minimum consumption rates of people in developing countries. This is an important point. Balance indicates stability. This means that not too many resources are used up, but it also does not necessarily mean that we cannot use any resources. Therefore, we do not *necessarily* have to take a step back. We should seek solutions, which will benefit the current poor *and* leave opportunities for future generations. This means we can avoid the paradox I described in Section 2.4.2. However, in cases in which we do have to limit our actions we need guidance on how this can be achieved. This is because if we do not clarify how we should do this, the discussion will remain at a rather vague level and will not provide much grip in policy-making. It is for this reason that I want to return to the sufficientarian approach.

5.3 Sufficientarianism

5.3.1 Sufficientarianism and needs

I came to the conclusion that there should be a balance across generations, which means everyone, has a right to his or her basic needs. As I explained in the previous chapter, sufficientarianism can be a useful approach to deal with intergenerational justice. It is capable of accommodating for both the needs of the current poor and future generations. To ensure this, people should not fall below the threshold. This is achieved if people have an adequate level of provision. This level of adequacy is achieved when citizens have access to enough basic needs and opportunities, which allow them to function as full citizens. Or as political theory professor Edward Page states: “the capacity to be an autonomous rational agent capable of performing the tasks expected of fully functioning members of society” (17). To do this there does not necessarily have to be equality amongst generations. Rather, a person X who falls below the threshold should be benefitted instead of person Y, who is already above the threshold. The main concern of this approach is the situation of the less well-off who live below the threshold (Mack 135). It strives for everyone to live above the moral threshold and this could result in great inequality between person X and Y, however this is not important.

In chapter two I discussed the definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland Report: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of

the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Page 11). Relating this to the idea of sufficientarianism means that "the core idea is that each generation … should refrain from activities that leave later generations without enough, but this does not mean that an injustice is committed if the latter are prevented from enjoying an exactly similar, or improved, level of well-being" (Page 11). This means that sufficientarianism would result in a different set of requirements, than a prioritairian or an egalitarian approach would.

The question can be raised what the exact requirements of a sufficientarian approach are. This stands to discussion. It "will be framed in terms of the best scientific evidence available and modified by public deliberation about what constitutes 'having enough'" (Page 11). Although it is best to avoid a paternalistic attitude, future generations should have access to their basic needs. "We say that a person has enough when all of their basic human needs, generously interpreted, have been met and are likely to continue to be met" (Page 16). According to Len Doyal and Ian Gough basic human needs are universal and objective. The latter means that needs are "required regardless of whether, and to what extent, they are desired" (Page 17). Although they will not change, the "satisfiers" *will* vary according to a person's nature, as well as their historical and cultural circumstances. If we focus on the needs of the current poor and future generations, the needs of the current poor are easier to understand. However, the knowledge we acquire from the current poor can be "copied", to a certain extent, to future generations.

5.3.2 Implementing the sufficientarian approach

Sufficientarianism is the best theory in relation to my question, but what does this mean if it is implemented? To be able to answer this question we need to consider what would be the idea of our posterity of a good life. Vital interests such as nutrition, clean drinking water, clothing and housing, together with health care and education are essential needs and would probably be included (Weiss "Our rights and obligations" 105). Apart from those, we should leave other options open for future generations to fill in themselves, such as resources and opportunities. Taking such an approach means that we leave most of the decisions to the consumers themselves and not to experts on this subject who live now.

If we want to allow future generations access to a sufficient life, there are different steps we could (or should) take. For instance, if we look at anthropogenic climate change our actions, which currently minimize the opportunities for future generations, could include the stabilization and reduction of concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions. Doing so will probably minimize the number of people that will live under the threshold of harm. Therefore, "climate changes that are still preventable" (Page 11) should be encouraged. Another possibility is investigating technologies of adaptation. This focuses on those climate changes that are no longer avoidable, but which can still maximize the life of those living on or above the sufficientarian threshold. On a smaller, possibly an individual scale, it should be possible to improve efficient land management and public health infrastructure. Such actions should mostly be undertaken in places that are vulnerable to extreme weather. Chances are that people living under such circumstances have the biggest chance of falling below the moral threshold and therefore, need the most help. Another way to protect vulnerable populations is to improve the infrastructure with the use of improved planning (Page 11). Furthermore,

> water security could be enhanced in developed and developing countries by improved public health infrastructure in communities vulnerable to extreme weather events; and the socio-economic infrastructure of vulnerable populations could be protected by improved planning. In each case, the idea is that earlier generations are bound a sufficientarian duty to ensure that their successors have access to a climate system that is hospitable for decent lives. (Page 12)

These ideas are mainly focused around the idea of climate change. Different topics and policies need to be discussed in public deliberation. Although a sufficientarian approach provides us with a hopeful perspective there are three aspects, which still need further discussion before this approach could actually be implemented.

The first aspect is concerned with how the needs can be guaranteed. "It has yet to be established what category of responsibility underwrites the entitlements of justice that the approach specifies. Are they guaranteed by rights, for example?" (Page 17). Although I would argue that we have the moral duty to ensure that future generations

will have access to their needs, this could turn into a long and difficult discussion. Although it might be "simple", lightly put, to decide that we have an obligation to future generations, the question becomes who has that obligation precisely. Should *everyone* living today ensure future generations have access to their needs? Or should it *exclude the poor* who themselves are incapable of gaining access to (all of) their needs?

Secondly, discussion is needed on how to tackle the problem of priority. "Even in relatively favourable situations, it may not be possible to guarantee the sufficiency of one population without sacrificing the sufficiency of another" (Page 17). There are theorists who claim that priority should be given to those who are already in the position to meet their basic needs. However, others regard this as morally unacceptable.

The final aspect is about the appropriate level of analysis at which duties and responsibilities should operate. "Is it individuals, corporations, states, international institutions, or generations as a whole that possess the duties and entitlements of intergenerational distributive justice?" (Page 18).

Sufficientarianism provides a promising approach for looking at the concept of needs in relation to the care for both our generation and those to come. However, the three aspects I just described need to be analyzed further to actually make this approach as useful as it can be. Nonetheless, we can say with certainty that a sufficientarian approach makes the discussion on intergenerational justice "modest, achievable and fair" (International Council on Human Rights, p. 7). It provides the answer to my thesis question as sufficientarianism is the key to understanding how we should analyze the combination of care for our generation and the next. Although it still requires clarification in certain aspects, it gives us a practical theory to work with within the sustainable development framework.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to answer the question: How can we meaningfully analyze the combination of care for the current poor and future generations within a sustainable development framework?

Sustainable development is a commonly used concept, however, due to the ambiguity of the concept an exact definition is difficult to give. In this thesis I have analyzed different categorizations of the concept and looked closely at the well-known definition given by the Brundtland Commission. According to their definition, the needs of the current poor should be met without compromising future generations to meet their needs. This definition shapes the framework of sustainable development, although we should acknowledge the looseness of the term. Nonetheless, in relation to my question, it provides us with the best framework to work with.

To clarify my question even more, I analyzed the concept of poverty. It is an important aspect in the sustainable development framework as the poor can be an obstacle to it. This means that they have the ability to prevent sustainable development because of the actions they take. To minimize this the poor should cause limited damage, which is possible when they have the ability to access their needs.

"Needs" is a concept that has a prominent position within the definition of sustainable development given by the Brundtland Report. Needs do not only include material, but also non-material aspects. Another way to refer to them is as "relative" needs. This definition of needs can escape the problem "absolute" needs face, which is about not taking the actual standard of living of a person into account. Apart from "relative", needs are universal. This means that they apply to anyone at any moment in time. Although the relations between us and our posterity are different, needs apply to all. Needs are generally the same, but the "socially relative satisfiers" can differ. This allows future generations the opportunity to decide for themselves how their needs should be filled in exactly.

To give us a grip in ensuring that the needs of all are met, we can use the sufficientarian approach. I have focused on different theories of intergenerational justice: utilitarianism, egalitarianism, prioritarianism and sufficientarianism, but it is the latter, which provides the best solution. This is because it provides us with a strong basis for policy-making. Furthermore, it is not over-demanding. Sufficientarianism indicates a minimum threshold for both current and future generations below which people should not fall. People will remain above the threshold if they have access to their basic needs and opportunities. What those opportunities are precisely stands to public deliberation. This means we can discuss the precise needs and opportunities the current poor should have. Furthermore, we can discuss which options we should leave open for future generations to fill in themselves. This could require us to limit our own actions, but the sufficientarian approach can help us understand when we should and when we should not limit our actions.

Although a sufficientarian approach provides us with a useful basis to work with, more clarification is needed before the approach can actually be used. It would be necessary to clarify how needs can be guaranteed. Also, how should we look at the problem of priority? Who should be given priority, our current generation or future generations to come? Furthermore, clarification would be needed regarding the level at which duties and responsibilities should operate. Although answering these questions requires much discussion, the current situation is making it increasingly clear that we should look for a theory that can help us provide for both ourselves today and others in the future. Implementing the sufficientarian approach would be a decent first step in the right direction.

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