

Intergenerational Justice and Personal Identity

A contribution to solving the Non-Identity Problem

January 2010

Drs R.A.J. Mees

1st Supervisor Prof. Dr M. Düwell

2nd Supervisor Dr J.H. Anderson

Utrecht University
Faculty of the Humanities/Department of Philosophy
Master Programme Philosophy in Business (FiB)
Master Thesis (15 ECTS)
Stud.nr. 7922795

Heidelberglaan 8
P.O. Box 80126
3508 TC Utrecht
The Netherlands

“Philosophers should not only interpret our beliefs;
when they are false, they should *change* them.”

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. x

Acknowledgements

This master thesis marks the temporary end result of a journey I started end 2004, when I interviewed Prof. Dr Marcus Düwell about how I could reach a deeper understanding of my working with the practical challenges of an organisation by establishing a connection to the realm of philosophy. Düwell advised me to follow the master programme ‘Filosofie in Bedrijf’ (Philosophy in Business), which he substantiated by handing over to me the reader of the first year course in ethics and inviting me to do an oral exam. One way or another, this was an action I needed to start my journey into philosophy. I am very grateful to Marcus Düwell for his advice that has been invaluable to me. At the end of the master programme I am again grateful for his efforts put into supervising the writing of this master thesis, and pointing out to me the relevance of a philosophical research project concerning sustainability and intergenerational justice.

I would like to thank Dr Joel Anderson, my second thesis supervisor, for his valuable critique on earlier versions of this master thesis. Whilst writing the master thesis and a preparatory paper, I have recognised Joel Anderson as someone, with whom I share the desire to strive for the best argument only. His fields of philosophical interest and expertise (philosophical anthropology, ethics and social theory) largely overlap with those in which I would like to specialise further.

Finally, I thank Derek Parfit for providing me with the fascinating topic of this master thesis: the complex of the notions intergenerational justice, personal identity both in relation to the Non-Identity Problem. Like Parfit, when we would distinguish between descriptive and revisionary philosophers, I choose to be a member of the latter group. Indeed, I adhere to the motto that philosophers should change false beliefs. In the case of the topic I address here, however, I am arguing that it is time to changing some of Parfit’s beliefs. The reader is invited to convince her/himself.

Roland A.J. Mees

Driebergen-Rijsenburg, The Netherlands

rolandmees@gmail.com

Intergenerational Justice and Personal Identity

A contribution to solving the Non-Identity Problem

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 The relevance of Intergenerational Justice to the sustainability debate.....	4
1.2 Research question and programme of this master thesis	5
2. Intergenerational Justice and the Non-Identity Problem.....	8
2.1 Outline of the concept of Intergenerational Justice	8
2.2 Definition of the Non-Identity Problem (NIP).....	11
2.3 No-Difference View and Repugnant Conclusion	12
2.4 Why the Non-Identity Problem forms an objection for Intergenerational Justice.....	14
2.5 Strategies for responding to the Non-Identity Problem	18
3. The Non-Identity Problem discussed by three contemporary authors	22
3.1 Herwig Unnerstall (2003)	22
3.2 Discussion of Unnerstall (2003)	24
3.3 Konrad Ott (2004).....	25
3.4 Discussion of Ott (2004).....	27
3.5 Lukas Meyer (2008).....	28
3.6 Discussion of Meyer (2008).....	32
3.7 Conclusions.....	34
4. Parfit’s concept of personal identity and the Non-Identity Problem.....	36
4.1 A summary of Parfit’s concept of personal identity	36
4.2 Implications on morality of the Reductionist View on personal identity	39
4.3 How the Reductionist View implies the Non-Identity Problem	41
4.4 Further moral implications of Parfit’s concept of personal identity	42
4.5 On the phrase: “If P, then he would never have existed”	45
5. Concluding reflections and remarks.....	48
5.1 Looking backward: have we contributed to solving the NIP?.....	48
5.2 Looking forward: options for further research.....	50
Literature	52

1. Introduction

1.1 The relevance of Intergenerational Justice to the sustainability debate

“What difference can CEOs of big companies make in fighting global climate change e.g. by managing in such a way that their companies become climate neutral?”¹ This question was phrased a year ago by a member of the Dutch parliament, when discussing his agenda towards the UN conference on climate change December 2009 in Copenhagen. It highlights the historical fact that the question as to whether organisations should contribute to a sustainable society is one of the most prominent questions discussed in the public domain currently.

This master thesis will take as a starting point the philosophical research that has been done concerning the question: can the political requirement to endeavour for a sustainable development of society be based on an account of the rights of future generations? While discussing intergenerational justice and in particular the objection raised to this concept in the form of the Non-Identity Problem², I will uncover that certain presuppositions concerning concepts of personal identity are bearing on this discussion, which until now have undergone only little philosophical reflection. The title of this master thesis should then be understood in the following sense: I will depart from an understanding of intergenerational justice, analyse and discuss the Non-Identity Problem, in order to arrive at a particular concept of personal identity that forms a sufficient condition for the Non-Identity Problem. In other words, I will argue that the Non-Identity Problem necessitates us to view the concepts of intergenerational justice and personal identity in close connection to each other. From its first impression (see note 2) the urgency to solve the Non-Identity Problem becomes apparent, since it may lead to moral indifference regarding the potential violation of the rights that future people will have in the future. The Non-Identity Problem hampers an unambiguous formulation of the rights of future generations including the obligations that follow from these rights for current generations. It thereby blocks making sufficient progress in the sustainability debate in a time period that scientists increasingly reach a consensus that the answer to the question: is there a problem with human behaviour in relation to the environment? should be clearly affirmative.³

¹ Mr. Kees Vendrik, member of the Groen Links party in the Dutch parliament, on a conference about “Ethics and Politics of Climate Change”, organised by the Ethics Institute of Utrecht University, 24 January 2009

² This is the problem that, according to Parfit, there is no moral difference between conserving and depleting natural resources, because the identity of *future* people is fully contingent upon actions undertaken by *current* people.

³ For example SRU (2002)

An organisation's contribution to sustainable development thus takes the form of e.g. reducing the emission of greenhouse gasses by its factories, its offices, its members. Organisations nowadays are being called to responsibility for the consequences of their actions to the environment. Organisations are expected, regardless whether these expectations can be justified by an appropriate ethical theory, to integrate their contribution to a solution to the problem of climate change into their strategic plans. In that sense, to cut a history of at least four decades short in one sentence, there has been a change in many societies since Milton Friedman wrote that "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits"⁴

In the mean time, the academic debate about sustainable development has reached the point at which there is a broad consensus that a concept of intergenerational justice is fundamental for sustainable development.⁵ The relation between sustainable development and future generations for the first time has been stated clearly in the report of the Brundtland Commission (1987), which defines: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁶ Moreover, article 20 of the German constitution reads: "Der Staat schützt auch in Verantwortung für die künftigen Generationen die natürlichen Lebensgrundlagen." In other words, at the level of basic ideas it is uncontroversial that the concept of sustainable development is connected to the existence of obligations by present towards future generations.⁷

The question about the contribution by organisations to a sustainable society can be narrowed to the question whether decisions in organisations should be led by considerations regarding moral obligations towards future generations. In particular, I will limit myself in this master thesis to the interpretation of sustainable development in terms of intergenerational justice. How can we formulate a concept of intergenerational justice from which we can derive moral obligations that influence our current decisions and actions? Between which theoretical alternatives do we need to choose when thinking about intergenerational justice?

1.2 Research question and programme of this master thesis

Within the context of intergenerational justice I will concentrate on a problem that by a number of authors has been brought forward as a cornerstone in the debate about this concept: the Non-Identity Problem (see note 2).⁸ In relation to this problem I will take as the leading research

⁴ Friedman (1970)

⁵ SRU (2002), p. 21

⁶ Brundtland Report (1987), p. 48

⁷ SRU (2002), p. 57

⁸ SRU (2002), Unnerstall (2003), Ott (2004), Meyer (2008), Roberts (2009), Roberts, Wasserman (2009)

question: between which alternative concepts of personal identity do we have to choose, when we aim for a formulation of a concept of intergenerational justice that is freed from the Non-Identity Problem? Regarding this question my central claims will be that:

- (1) the Non-Identity Problem forms an objection to intergenerational justice because of Parfit's claim that we should believe his Reductionist View on personal identity⁹;
- (2) We should reject the Reductionist View based on its moral implications;
- (3) In case we intend to conceptualise intergenerational justice without being hampered by the Non-Identity Problem, we should be looking for an alternative to Parfit's concept of personal identity and start from there.

The programme that I will carry out to arrive at these conclusions will be as follows.

In order to build up the foundation for this master thesis, I will start in Chapter 2 by giving a brief outline of intergenerational justice. I will specify this concept to the extent needed to understand the reasons why the Non-Identity Problem has been brought forward as an objection to intergenerational justice. Subsequently, I will be outlining the Non-Identity Problem based on Derek Parfit's original text (1984, part IV). The definition of the problem will be clarified by discussing Parfit's three well known cases: the 14-Year-Old Girl, the Natural Resources or Depletion Case, and the Two Medical Programmes. In addition, I summarise Parfit's conclusions that show how –in his own words- his attempt has failed to find a moral theory that is capable of solving the Non-Identity Problem.¹⁰ Based upon the previous sections, I will in detail discuss the argument for raising the Non-Identity Problem as an objection to intergenerational justice. I will end Chapter 2 by summarising strategies to deal with the Non-Identity Problem identified in the literature after Parfit's original formulation of the problem in 1984.

I will continue in Chapter 3 with working on the research question by providing an overview of three recent contributions to the debate about intergenerational justice by philosophers who are specialists in this field: Herwig Unnerstall (2003), Konrad Ott (2004), and Lucas Meyer (2008). All three mention the so called Future Individual Paradox (FIP), or its later version the Non-Identity Problem (NIP), as the central objection raised against intergenerational justice. On the one hand, Unnerstall and Ott argue that the FIP should not hamper us from continuing with the formulation of a concept of intergenerational justice, without discussing the underlying presuppositions of the FIP to a sufficient detail, that is, without replying to this objection. On the other hand, Meyer strives for a notion of intergenerational justice that can

⁹ Parfit (1984), p. 216-217

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 443

withstand the NIP. However, in order to achieve this, Meyer needs to rely on a notion of harm to which, on my account, serious objections can be raised. As a consequence, this means, in my view, that the roots of the NIP need to be studied further in order to inquire whether there are other ways of dealing with this obstacle to intergenerational justice than the ones explored by the authors mentioned above.

I will then devote Chapter 4 to an analysis of the origin of the NIP by looking at Parfit's concept of personal identity, which he formulates in (1984, part III). In addition, I will elaborate on the moral implications of Parfit's so called Reductionist View on personal identity, both by reviewing the implications mentioned by Parfit himself as well as two implications that I will come up with. My claim will be that the NIP follows logically from Parfit's concept of personal identity and that, when we aim for a concept of intergenerational justice that is able to withstand the NIP, we should be looking for an alternative concept of personal identity than the one formulated by Parfit. Note, however, that a thorough analysis of the concept of personal identity including its ramifications is beyond the scope of this master thesis. I will end this chapter with reviewing the phrase "if P, then he would never have existed". It will turn out that this sentence is not as neutral as it seems regarding the concept of personal identity that it implicitly presupposes.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I will look back and reflect upon what we have gained by following the programme outlined above. I will end this master thesis by suggesting some options for further research in the fields of personal identity and intergenerational justice.

2. Intergenerational Justice and the Non-Identity Problem

A brief outline of the concept of intergenerational justice should be the point of departure to start this master thesis. This outline is given in Section 2.1, from where we can commence the journey into the Non-Identity Problem, to which Derek Parfit has devoted part IV of his book *Reasons and Persons*. In these chapters Parfit discusses the part of our moral theory in which the problem arises that actions by current people might affect the identity of future people. In Section 2.2 I will summarise Parfit's argument that -what he has called- the Non-Identity Problem forms an objection to the possibility of a concept of intergenerational justice. Note that in Section 2.2 it is my aim to outline the Non-Identity Problem and in Section 2.3 some of its consequences, and that I, therefore, in these sections stay as close as possible to Parfit's text, postponing analysis and discussion to Chapter 4. In Section 2.4 I will combine the contents of the previous sections in order to argue why the Non-Identity Problem seems intractable and needs to be dealt with in order to make progress with intergenerational justice. I will make use of contributions in a recent collection of articles concerning the Non-Identity Problem.¹¹ I end this chapter by summarising, in Section 2.5, a few strategies for attacking the NIP as outlined in the literature.

2.1 Outline of the concept of Intergenerational Justice

Until the end of the twentieth century the discussion about the rights of future generations was characterised by a twofold naivety. On the side of philosophy there was the inexperience in choosing the concepts with which one should describe what would be owed to future generations. For example, the imperative has been formulated to preserve natural capital, without actually defining what natural capital is, how it should be measured and what it means to keep it constant. On the side of the natural sciences and in politics this naivety was situated on the normative level, that is in the moral justification of concrete environmental objectives and regulations. Regarding the relation to future generations it was often postulated that these generations were entitled to the same amount of natural resources per capita as current generations. Thereby formulating an abstract ideal of equality that was already dismissed in ethical theory as a solution to the pertinacious moral problem of global inequality in the access to natural resources.¹² It is therefore necessary to raise the question about the rights of future generations and future individuals, and how we can speak about these rights in a meaningful

¹¹ Roberts, Wasserman (2009), Roberts (2009)

¹² Unnerstall (1999), p. 17

way. In the following paragraphs I will highlight some of the main elements of the concept of intergenerational justice, without going into much of the details that should form the foundation of such a concept.¹³

First, it should be noted that in order for (future) generations to be the bearer of rights, that is to be the bearer of rights *as a generation*, amongst others complicated forms of collective action have to be presupposed. For this reason, when discussing intergenerational justice, reference is made to (future) *individuals* instead of generations as groups of human beings. Moreover, as we are dealing with the (possible) rights of future people and the obligations that follow from those rights for current people, also the current generations should be understood as current individuals. In this master thesis I will thus keep using the term ‘intergenerational’, but with the meaning of current or future people, or current or future persons.^{14 15}

Second, we should be more precise about the time value of the rights of future people. In order for rights to be able to be exercised by the bearer of those rights, the bearer has to be actually present in space and time. This means that we cannot speak about the current rights future people might have, as future people are not present yet. In the literature concerning intergenerational justice there is consensus that we can only speak in a meaningful way (i.e. making statements to which a truth value can be assigned) about the future rights of future people.¹⁶ So far we can thus say that intergenerational justice is about the question which obligations current people have in order not to violate the rights future people will have in the future. In the following paragraphs I will concentrate on the future rights of future people and on the obligations of current people that can be derived from those rights.¹⁷

When we think about rights future people will have in the future, we are dealing with a set of claims that someone can uphold against others on the basis of certain conventions, laws, norms or principles. In an ethical context such as intergenerational justice we are especially interested in moral rights. Moral rights, and more specifically moral claim-rights, appear in the following form: A has with respect to B a right to X on the basis of Y. In this definition A is the subject or bearer of the rights, and B the addressee of the rights, that is the one for whom the

¹³ See for a systematic account: *Ibid.*, Ch. II

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126

¹⁵ Unnerstall has suggested in (2003) to rename intergenerational justice to ‘intertemporal’ justice. However, in order to remain consistent with the literature, I do not follow this suggestion.

¹⁶ Unnerstall (1999), p. 52

¹⁷ Unnerstall studies two possible ways to establish the connection between obligations and rights: deriving the future rights of future people out of the obligations of current people, and fixing the future rights of future people and argue for the obligations of current people from there. Unnerstall concludes (1999, p. 128) that the former way does not lead to a satisfactory result. As it is beyond the scope of this master thesis to analyse this argument in detail, I shall concentrate of the latter possibility.

obligation counts to respect the right to which A is entitled. X defines the rights' content, and Y constitutes its legitimate foundation.¹⁸ If we try to clarify the components of this definition, it becomes clear that we have so far spoken about A (i.e. future people) and B (i.e. current people), whereby it is already an extension of the concept of moral rights that A and B are not simultaneously present in time and space, but that A appears long after B has disappeared. Furthermore, the content X can be viewed to be formed by an answer to the question: what is it to which future generations are entitled? At this point we should realise that the debate about sustainable development is mainly devoted to answering this question. For example, we are distinguishing here between weak and strong sustainability, preserving natural capital, and so on.¹⁹ As it is beyond the scope of this master thesis to go into detail regarding the possibilities for X, I choose for the time being the following general formulation: future people have the right to a life as a human being. Regarding Y it can be observed that some authors²⁰ have studied the generally known ethical theories (utilitarianism, Rawls, discourse ethics, Alan Gewirth, categorical imperative) and their suitability as to constituting a basis for the foundation of X. Again, I shall stay close to the topic of this master thesis and leave out a discussion of the various options for Y. Moreover, since the Non-Identity Problem constitutes a problem for intergenerational justice irrespective of its foundation in an ethical theory, I should discuss my analysis of the Non-Identity Problem without limiting myself to a particular ethical theory.

So far we have found the following formulation of intergenerational justice: future people will have with respect to current people the right to live their lives as a human being on the basis of an ethical theory Y that needs further specification. As a consequence, current people have the obligation to respect, that is not to violate the right of future people to live their lives as a human being. Which consequences does this obligation have for current people? It means in particular that current people should not undertake actions that can result in a violation of the right of future people to their life as a human being. And since actions by current people can have an influence on the degree to which future people are able to exercise this future right, the obligation mentioned here counts as a moral obligation. The situation that future people will have a right to a life as a human being is thus sufficient for the foundation of normative consequences that bear on the actions of current people.²¹

¹⁸ Hübenthal (2007), p. 283

¹⁹ SRU (2002), Ott (2004)

²⁰ Unnerstall (1999, 2003), Ott (2004)

²¹ Unnerstall (1999), p. 450

In summary, intergenerational justice is about the question: to what extent do current people have moral obligations to restrict their actions, or let their actions be legitimately restricted by a sovereign state, in view of the (future) right that future people will have to live a life as a human being?

2.2 Definition of the Non-Identity Problem (NIP)²²

In a section called “How our identity in fact depends on when we were conceived” Parfit starts his outline of the Non-Identity Problem (NIP) by presupposing: “Each of us grew from a particular pair of cells: an ovum and the spermatozoon by which, out of millions, it was fertilized.”²³ This presupposition allows Parfit to argue for his Time-Dependence Claim (TD2): “If any particular person had not been conceived within a month of the time when he was in fact conceived, he would in fact never have existed.”²⁴

A next important assumption, Parfit puts forward, is “that one person can be worse off than another, in morally significant ways, and by more or less”, whereby, “[...] ’worse off’ could be taken to refer, either to someone’s level of happiness, or more narrowly to his standard of living, or, more broadly, to the quality of his life.”²⁵ With these assumptions and definitions in place, Parfit can now illustrate the NIP by considering the case of a 14-Year-Old Girl:

“This girl chooses to have a child. Because she is so young, she gives her child a bad start in life. Though this will have bad effects throughout this child’s life, his life will, predictably, be worth living. If this girl had waited for several years, she would have had a different child, to whom she would have given a better start in life.”²⁶

The question Parfit raises is: can we argue that the girl should have waited for several years to have her child instead of having it at the age of 14? The crux of Parfit’s formulation of the Non-Identity Problem is that the answer to this question is not straightforwardly affirmative, because “if she had waited, this particular child would never have existed.”²⁷ That is, in the different situations (having the child at the age of 14, or waiting for several years) different people would be born. Subsequently, in the remainder of his book, Parfit undertakes the challenge to find a theory (“Theory X”) that should be capable to solve the NIP.²⁸

As a next example where the NIP arises, Parfit considers the Natural Resources case in which a choice must be made between two social or economic policies:

²² The NIP first has been formulated in an essay by Parfit (1982), which follows up on the Future Individual Paradox (FIP) introduced by Kavka (1982).

²³ Parfit (1984), p. 351

²⁴ Ibid., p. 352

²⁵ Ibid., p. 357

²⁶ Ibid., p. 358

²⁷ Ibid., p. 359

²⁸ Ibid., p. 361

“As a community, we must choose whether to deplete or conserve certain kinds of resources. If we choose Depletion, the quality of life over the next two centuries would be slightly higher than it would have been if we had chosen Conservation. But it would later, for many centuries, be much lower than it would have been if we had chosen Conservation. This would be because, at the start of this period, people would have to find alternatives for the resources that we had depleted.”²⁹

The NIP comes to the fore when trying to answer the question: what is the moral reason not to choose Depletion? As Parfit writes: “This problem arises because the identities of people in the future can be very easily affected. [...] When we are choosing between two social or economic policies, of the kind that I described, it is *not true* that, in the further future, the same people will exist whatever we choose. It is therefore *not true* that a choice like Depletion will be against the interests of future people. We cannot dismiss this problem with the pretence that this *is* true.”³⁰ And again, Parfit appeals to a Theory X that should be able to cover this case of the NIP.

When trying to find solutions to the NIP, Parfit points out that an appeal to rights cannot wholly solve the problem. Consider the 14-Year-Old Girl. “It might be claimed: ‘The objection to this girl’s decision is that she violates her child’s right to a good start in life’”.³¹ According to the NIP, the child she would have had when she was a mature woman would be different from the child she had at the age of 14. It follows that, although the child might have the right to a good start in life, it cannot be fulfilled. And hence, the girl cannot be claimed to have violated this right. Consider the case of Natural Resources, that is the choice between two social or economic policies. If we choose Depletion, people who live more than two centuries from now will have a lower quality of life than earlier generations. If these people have the right to an equally high quality of life than ours, it makes sense to claim that their right has been violated by us choosing Depletion. However, if we had chosen otherwise, on Parfit’s account these people would never have existed. Since their rights could not be fulfilled, we may not violate their rights.

2.3 No-Difference View and Repugnant Conclusion

At this stage we may conclude that due to the NIP we cannot say that the choice for Depletion in the Natural Resources case makes people in two centuries from now worse off than in case we had chosen Conservation. The question then is: does this make a moral difference? That is, “We may have thought that a policy like Depletion would be against the interests of future people. When we saw that this was false, did we become less concerned about effects on future

²⁹ Ibid., p. 362

³⁰ Ibid., p. 363 (italics by Parfit)

³¹ Ibid., p. 364

generations?”³² To illustrate more precisely what Parfit calls the No-Difference View, he uses the example of the Two Medical Programmes:

“There are two rare conditions, J and K, which cannot be detected without special tests. If a pregnant woman has Condition J, this will cause the child she is carrying to have a certain handicap. A simple treatment [RM: of the woman] would prevent this effect. If a woman has Condition K when she conceives a child, this will cause this child to have the same particular handicap. Condition K cannot be treated, but always disappears within two months. Suppose next that we have planned two medical programmes, but there are funds for only one; so one must be cancelled. In the first programme, millions of women would be tested during pregnancy. Those found to have Condition J would be treated. In the second programme, millions of women would be tested when they intend to try to become pregnant. Those found to have Condition K would be warned to postpone conception for at least two months, after which this incurable condition will have disappeared. Suppose finally that we can predict that these programmes would achieve results in as many cases. If there is Pregnancy Testing, 1,000 children a year will be born normal rather than handicapped. If there is Preconception Testing, there will each year be born 1,000 normal children rather than a 1,000, different, handicapped children. [...] Assume next that the handicap in question, though it is not trivial, is not so severe as to make life doubtfully worth living. [...] We should add one detail to the case. If we decide to cancel Pregnancy Testing those who are later born handicapped might know that, if we had made a different decision, they would have been cured. Such knowledge might make their handicap harder to bear. We should therefore assume that, though it is not deliberately concealed, these people would not know this fact.”

With these details added, Parfit argues that there are no moral differences between the decision to either cancel Preconception Testing or Pregnancy Testing. The reasoning is that in both situations the same number of handicapped people will be born, but that these will consist of different groups of people. Such as in the Natural Resources case Parfit concludes that we should accept the No-Difference View, that is we should accept that there is no moral difference between choosing Depletion or Conservation.³³ Parfit concludes: “Since these two choices will be worse for no one, we need to explain why we have a moral reason not to make these choices. This problem arises because, in the different outcomes, different people would exist. I therefore call this the Non-Identity Problem.”³⁴ And, again, Parfit takes up the challenge to find Theory X that should be capable of resolving the NIP.

As another consequence of the NIP and the No-Difference View Parfit mentions what he has called the Repugnant Conclusion. Parfit arrives at this conclusion when considering two populations A and Z. Population A consists of a group of people enjoying a high quality of life. Z consists of a much larger group of people having a very low but still positive quality of life. Although people’s lives in Z are barely worth living and their quality of life is much lower than in A, there is a greater quantity of welfare in Z compared to A, because there are many more

³² Ibid., p. 367

³³ Ibid., p. 369

³⁴ Ibid., p. 378

people in Z. Hence Z is better than A. The fact that this conclusion follows from his attempt to solve the NIP is what Parfit finds hard to accept and therefore calls “repugnant”³⁵. It follows from Parfit’s Impersonal Total Principle: “If other things are equal, the best outcome is the one in which there would be the greatest quantity of whatever makes life worth living”³⁶, as this view implies that any loss in the quality of lives in a population can be compensated for by a sufficient gain in the quantity of a population.

Finally, in the concluding chapter of his book, Parfit admits that he has not found a complete moral theory that solves the NIP and avoids the Repugnant Conclusion (“Theory X”).³⁷ “If we want to avoid the Repugnant Conclusion, we cannot solve the NIP by appealing to a *person-affecting* principle. We must appeal to a principle which is about the quality and quantity of the lives that are lived, but is not about what is good or bad for those people whom our acts affect.”³⁸

2.4 Why the Non-Identity Problem forms an objection for Intergenerational Justice

Since the publication of *Reasons and Persons* in 1984 many authors have claimed that the Non-Identity Problem forms an objection for the possibility to conceptualise intergenerational justice in a meaningful way, e.g. the authors whose response to the NIP I will discuss in Chapter 3. In this Section, however, it is my aim to play the devil’s advocate in the sense that I am going to question whether the NIP really forms an obstacle for intergenerational justice. I will refer to some arguments that recently have been brought forward by Melinda Roberts in favour of this claim and bring these into alignment with what has been provided in the previous sections.

Recall that I have formulated intergenerational justice (2.1) and the NIP (2.2) in the following way:

(IJ) Current people have moral obligations to restrict their actions, or let their actions be legitimately restricted by a sovereign state, in view of the (future) right that future people will have to live a life as a human being.

(NIP)³⁹ Many of us believe that:

(1) Some acts whose effects are restricted to future people are morally impermissible, or wrong; and

³⁵ Ibid., p. 388. See also Ryberg, Tännsjö, Arrhenius (2006)

³⁶ Ibid., p. 387

³⁷ Ibid., p. 443

³⁸ Ibid., p. 447 (italics by Parfit)

³⁹ Note that in Section 2.2 I have given a *description* of the NIP on the basis of Parfit’s text. For a formulation as a *statement* I use a shortened version of Roberts’ definition in (2009, p. 1).

(2) If such an act is wrong, it is wrong because it will affect some future person in some adverse way; it is wrong because it will predictably harm one or more future persons, or make things worse for one or more future persons than things might have been.

The NIP argues that these two beliefs cannot both be correct.

In order to relate the definition of the NIP to the one of IJ later on, let us reconsider the Natural Resources case mentioned in Section 2.2. The two acts we compare are Depletion and Conservation. As has been described, Depletion results in a lower quality of life for the people existing for many centuries starting two centuries from now, compared to Conservation that causes a slightly lower quality of life during the next two centuries. What the NIP tells us is that the acts of Depletion and Conservation give rise to the existence of different populations of future people, because our policy choice most likely will influence the timing and manner of conceptions, and that these acts can therefore not be compared in terms of right and wrong. Although we would intuitively be inclined to judge Depletion to be the action which is morally impermissible, the NIP prevents us from doing so, because of the difference in populations being brought into existence when choosing Depletion compared to Conservation. If we accept (1) above, we seem forced, in other words, to reject (2). Moreover, this conclusion leaves us with another question: “where an exclusively future-directed act is wrong, *what makes it wrong*, if not that it is “bad for” someone or another?”⁴⁰

We now raise the question: does the NIP impose an objection to the formulation of intergenerational justice (IJ) above? As we have seen in Section 2.1, IJ presupposes that actions by current people can violate the right that future people will have to live a life as a human being. In particular, we stated that the right future people will have to a life as a human being is sufficient for the foundation of normative consequences that bear on the actions of current people. In the Natural Resources case this would mean that when choosing between Depletion or Conservation, we would take into account the potential violation of the right future people will have to live a life as a human being. In other words, our more precise question in the Natural Resources case is: does the choice for Depletion violate the right future people will have to live a life as a human being? In response, it might be claimed that people living more than two centuries from now have the right to an equal range of opportunities to provide in their means of subsistence as ours, and that this right is violated since we have depleted thereby reducing their range of opportunities. As Parfit argues, the NIP tells us that future people owe their existence to

⁴⁰ Roberts (2009), p. 3 (italics by Roberts)

the choice for Depletion in the first place, that Depletion harms no one, and that we, therefore, do not violate the rights of future people when we choose for this option. It may, however, be objected “that we cause people to exist with rights that cannot be fulfilled.” In reply Parfit argues that future people, who know that they owe their existence to our choice for Depletion, will implicitly waive their right or implicitly consent to its violation since they will be glad to be alive. On the other hand, since we are not sure that all future people would react in this way, an appeal to IJ might still be an objection to our choice for Depletion. From here Parfit follows a rather cumbersome route that leads towards the wish that “Theory X” will solve the NIP. Roberts illustrates Parfit’s objection to IJ through the waiving of rights, by giving the example of someone being brought into a hospital unconscious and in immediate need of open heart surgery. We would not think in this case that the surgeon’s act to help this patient is morally wrong, because he has violated the patient’s right against bodily injury. That is the right against bodily injury is implicitly waived by following up on the moral obligation derived from the superseding right to receive medical treatment in case of a life threatening situation.⁴¹

On my account, the reason why the NIP forms an objection to IJ lies in the presupposition that the right’s subject, that is the future person as bearer of the right to a life as a human being, is fully contingent upon the actions taken by current people, who happen to be the addressee of the right. This contingency is considered total in the sense that number, existence and identity of future people are determined by the actions of current people. The proponents of the claim that the NIP forms an objection to IJ reason that since this contingency holds, future people owe their right to a life as a human being entirely to the actions of current people. It is argued that the future right of future people cannot be violated by current people, since future people are not made “worse off” by the actions of current people. In the Natural Resources case this argument runs as follows. Suppose first that causing to exist can benefit. Then because the lives of the people who will live under the Depletion scenario are worth living and because they would not be alive if the alternative course of action (i.e. Conservation) were chosen, these people are benefited by the choice of Depletion. Suppose, alternatively, that causing to exist cannot benefit. Then we can at least say that the choice for Depletion does not make these future people worse off than they would otherwise be under the alternative course of action (i.e. Conservation). Since this is so, if there is an objection to the choice of Depletion, this objection cannot consist in the bad effects done to future people, in wrongs done to these people or in the violation of their right to live a life as a human being.⁴² As the future right of future people

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9-10; Parfit (1984), p. 365

⁴² Woodward (1986), p. 805

cannot be violated by the actions of current people, there does not seem to be a reason why current people would have a moral obligation to restrict their actions in view of the right future people will have to a life as a human being. In this way it can thus be argued that the NIP forms an objection to intergenerational justice as I have formulated it (IJ).

It should, however, be noted that, although the argument above is used by many authors as a starting point for proposing their solution to the NIP⁴³, it could still be considered as not fully convincing. I would explain the reason for this as follows. At the beginning of Section 2.2 I mentioned the assumptions from which Parfit starts building up his argument for the NIP. Parfit chooses as his first observation that “Each of us grew from a particular pair of cells: an ovum and the spermatozoon by which, out of millions, it was fertilized.” That is, a unique combination of an ovum and a spermatozoon constitutes a *necessary* condition for human existence. From there Parfit asks, as a thought experiment, what would have happened in case his mother had conceived a child not at the time when she in fact conceived Parfit, but a few days later. Parfit asks: would this child have been me? In the next paragraph Parfit arrives at his Time-Dependence Claim. Here, without further clarification, it seems that the gametes of our parents have become a *necessary and sufficient* condition for our existence. We sense from this that when accepting the NIP as an objection against IJ, we are manoeuvred also in a position to commit to an account of personal identity on which behalf it is taken for granted “that the disadvantaged or impaired child and the healthier, better off child who would have existed had the agents acted otherwise are “nonidentical””.⁴⁴ In Chapter 4 I will continue the discussion about the relationship between the NIP and the concept of personal identity that seems to come with it.

In summary, “we worry about the non-identity problem because we want clearly to articulate our obligations in respect of future persons. We are pressed to say just what makes some future-directed conduct wrong when the most natural and intuitive account of that fact –the person-affecting account; the idea that what is “bad” is “bad for” some existing or future person– has been so compellingly challenged by the non-identity problem.”⁴⁵ Given the reservations made above I take it, for the time being, that the NIP forms an obstacle for intergenerational justice. It may therefore be worthwhile to consider some ways of treating the NIP that have been formulated in recent literature. This I will do in the next section.

⁴³ Roberts, Wasserman (2009)

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xxvi

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. xxiii

2.5 Strategies for responding to the Non-Identity Problem

In a recent article David Heyd has given an overview of a number of ways of approaching the Non-Identity Problem⁴⁶. In this Section I summarise Heyd's overview, as it provides a valuable frame of reference for the remainder of this master thesis. Heyd distinguishes four approaches, which can again be categorised in accordance with an answer to the question "whether the identity of persons is at all a relevant issue to moral judgements concerning the good, the right and the just."⁴⁷ This question is at the heart of the debate between "person-affecting" and "impersonalist" approaches to the nature of value in general. The first of the strategies to solve the NIP, as discussed below, is impersonalist in nature, whereas the other three are person-affecting in one way or another.

Denying the problem⁴⁸

This approach is best characterised by the view called "impersonalism", which holds that value is not human-dependent but an attribute to the world. In fact this approach denies the relevance of the NIP altogether. Impersonalists state that a world of a million happy people is better than a world with no people at all. And it is also better than a world with half a million equally happy people, even if these are completely different people. Who is made happier by some beneficent act is unimportant as long as it creates more happiness in the world than an alternative act. According to impersonalists values such as goodness, justice and liberty should be promoted in their own right, independent of the existence of human beings as their "carriers". As Parfit has argued (see Section 2.3), this strategy is extremely difficult to sustain, as it leads to the Repugnant Conclusion that we have a duty to procreate as long as this contributes to the "total" happiness in the world. In addition, when impersonalists deal, for example, with justice, they have to argue why this should be promoted in itself, even when justice seems to be something in particular for human beings. According to impersonalism, "it is the world in general which is made better by good deeds, regardless of who are the carriers or subjects of that value". This view faces the objection that an appeal has to be made to non-moral notions such as shame or loss for the moral grounding of the duties and values it wants to promote.

⁴⁶ Heyd (2009)

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 4

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6-7

Hoping for a future solution⁴⁹

The second response is associated with Parfit's own approach and his search for "Theory X", as mentioned in Sections 2.2 and 2.3. On the one hand Parfit wants to avoid his Repugnant Conclusion when adopting a strict impersonal approach, on the other hand he wants to stick to his impersonal intuitions that "an action can make the world worse without wronging any actual human being". After having examined various options, at the end of *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit can only express the hope that in future a moral theory will be found that is able to integrate both the Repugnant Conclusion and the NIP. We could, however, question whether such hope is at all justified, "since as Parfit himself has shown pure impersonalism with no regard for person-affecting considerations leads to absurd results but person-affecting considerations involve the insurmountable problem of nonidentity". As Heyd conjectures:

"The nonidentity problem is not a scientific or a mathematical problem which will be solved through further research or reasoning. It seems more likely that it will be dissolved rather than solved, and that this will happen when our notions of identity change and adapt to the new forms of control we can expect to acquire in genetics and in social policy over future human beings. So although this is a matter of speculation, it seems that the "solution" will occur on the level of the metaphysics of the subject of moral judgement rather than on the level of the logic of the ascription of value."

Accommodating Non-Identity⁵⁰

This way of treating the NIP tries to adhere to a person-affecting view by interpreting it in a wide sense or by supplementing it with impersonal features. In fact there reside two groups of strategies under this heading, which I will briefly summarise. Strategies of the first group try to combine person-affecting with impersonalist approaches. They accept that the child conceived in the famous case of the 14-Year-Old Girl (see Section 2.2) is not harmed, and they also claim that it is not wronged (although the mother acts wrongly). In their view, the adolescent girl should wait until she can conceive another child, later on, who will be happier than the one she contemplates conceiving now. Heyd's main objection against this group of strategies is that they use ad hoc arguments instead of providing a conceptually sound difference between person-affecting and impersonalist principles. Nonetheless "nonidentity is not a matter of the *degree* of harm or pain but a conceptual constraint regarding the conditions for making any moral judgement."

The second group of strategies rejects pure impersonalism and aims for a widening of the scope of the person-affecting approach, since it seems impossible to integrate impersonalism and

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 7-8

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9-15 (italics by Heyd)

person-affecting principles in one moral theory (Theory X or in some compromise mentioned in the previous paragraph). Many philosophers have tried to meet the challenge posed by the NIP without abandoning the person-affecting view or resorting to impersonalist supplements. Heyd describes and criticises five of these strategies in this group. As it falls outside the scope of this master thesis to discuss all of them, I mention the one that is most related to the topic of intergenerational justice. This approach has been commented on by Parfit himself, and by one of the early critics of Parfit's formulation of the NIP: James Woodward.⁵¹ At the end of Section 2.2, I elaborated that Parfit rejected an appeal to rights in order to solve the NIP. Instead he remained convinced that the NIP should be solved by finding an (impersonal) principle of beneficence in the form of Theory X. "Rights, unlike overall welfare, seem to be more typically linked to metaphysically identifiable persons who are the subjects of the rights." James Woodward has attempted to save the person-affecting approach and avoid impersonalism by showing that the wrongness of conceiving a child at the age of fourteen is connected with rights. As we will see in Chapter 3, also the contribution by Lukas Meyer can be regarded as a member of this group of strategies.

Embracing the implications of Non-Identity⁵²

The fourth reply to the NIP consists of embracing all the consequences and ramifications of this problem, including those which may be less appealing to our common intuitions, and doing so by adhering to a strict person-affecting view. Advocates of this approach, such as Heyd, are not indifferent to wrongful life cases and believe that there are moral reasons for avoiding the intentional creation of handicapped children or a reckless population policy. However, they consider seriously the following answers to the 14-Year-Old Girl case: wait another few years (as in Parfit's example) or let another more mature woman give birth to a child "instead of you". "The latter answer sounds of course absurd, though from the point of view of the future child there is no difference between it and the first offer, since both children are going to be different from the originally planned child." In other words, the difference between the two options relates only to the girl, whose interests of satisfying motherhood can only be fulfilled by the first option.

In the next chapter I will consider specific replies to the NIP, which three authors in recent years have formulated, that may or may not turn out to be examples of the strategies considered above.

⁵¹ Woodward (1986)

⁵² Heyd (2009), p. 15-17

3. The Non-Identity Problem discussed by three contemporary authors

In this chapter I will summarise recent contributions to a solution to the Non-Identity Problem by three contemporary authors who are specialists in the field of intergenerational justice and sustainable development. Intergenerational justice to be construed (as in Section 2.1) as the field of philosophical inquiry that deals with the question: “do justice considerations apply to intergenerational relations, that is, to relations between non-contemporaries?”⁵³ Note that I summarise the work of these authors to the extent needed for the remainder of this master thesis, and that I do not pretend to give an all encompassing overview of the articles I am referring to. Subsequent to each section, in which I present the author’s position, I add a section devoted to discussion and critique of that position in the light of the objective of this master thesis to contribute to the formulation of a concept of intergenerational justice that is not hampered anymore by the Non-Identity Problem. I end this chapter with conclusions about some characteristics I discovered in the positions of Unnerstall, Ott and Meyer, which form the basis for analysing Parfit’s concept of personal identity in more depth in Chapter 4.

3.1 Herwig Unnerstall (2003)

In a short essay Herwig Unnerstall discusses several ethical theories and their applicability as to the problem of intergenerational justice. Unnerstall starts by giving two metaethical precisions that, as I did in Section 2.1, can be accepted. First, Unnerstall argues that generations as such cannot be called moral subjects. In that sense the term ‘intergenerational justice’ is a metaphor for intertemporal justice, and rights of future generations should be understood as rights of future individuals. Second, it is only worthwhile to speak about future rights of future people and not contemporary rights of future people. However, such future rights can have normative consequences at present, as contemporary actions can violate future rights.

Unnerstall discusses the NIP under the heading “Future Individual Paradox” (FIP) in reference to the first formulation of this objection to intertemporal justice by Kavka (1982):

(FIP) If actions by present people affect the identity of future people, then at least these actions cannot violate the rights or interests of those future people that exist exclusively by virtue of these actions.

⁵³ Meyer (2008), p. 1

In this case no reference situation can be pointed at to which the situation of future people as a result of the actions can be compared, that is, the judgement cannot be made that the interests or rights of future people have been violated as a result of the actions. Against the FIP Unnerstall makes the following remarks: first, the thesis that certain contemporary actions influence the identity of future individuals cannot be verified empirically, because no alternative futures can be constructed. Second, as the FIP might be applicable to certain contemporary actions, it is certainly not applicable to all actions by present people. Third, the FIP argument will be weakened in case there is one future individual whose identity is not affected by the actions under consideration and whose situation deteriorates as a result of these actions thereby violating her rights.⁵⁴

When discussing seven ethical theories with regard to intertemporal justice, Unnerstall argues that it remains difficult to subtract concrete prescriptions as to what present people must do e.g. to preserve natural resources in order not to violate the rights and interests of future people. This leads many times to the formulation of pragmatic principles that cannot immediately be derived from these theories, but that at least should be able to be reconciled with these theories and about which one should be able to reach a political consensus. In this context the principle of a non-decreasing standard of wealth and that of equal chances for all generations can be mentioned. The principle to preserve natural capital is also highly popular, although it is still unclear what natural capital is, e.g. whether it should be measured in physical or monetary quantities. To circumvent these problems Unnerstall makes reference to so called management rules that should ensure the preservation of natural capital:

- The depletion rates of renewable resources must be lower than their regeneration rates;
- The utilisation of a non-renewable resource must not be bigger than the rate of substitution of all its functions;
- The emission of physical stuff must be lower than the absorption capacity of the environmental media.⁵⁵

In particular a lot of questions remain open when applying ethical theories to e.g. the utilisation of non-renewable resources: which quantity of them should remain constant: the reserves, the stocks or the technically available part of the resource base? Unnerstall concludes that it seems hardly possible to give sufficient conditions for satisfying the rights of future people. In his view it seems more feasible to come up with minimum requirements (i.e. necessary conditions in the

⁵⁴ Unnerstall (2003), p. 424

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 431

form of the above mentioned management rules) that must be met in order to have at least a chance that the obligations of present people towards future people can be fulfilled.⁵⁶

3.2 Discussion of Unnerstall (2003)

In his essay Unnerstall remains somewhat inconclusive as to the possibilities of a contribution to sustainable development by an improved concept of intergenerational justice. In the section “Methaetische Fragen” Unnerstall mentions the FIP, which historically is the predecessor of Parfit’s Non-Identity Problem (NIP, see Chapter 2), as a major objection against the recognition of the rights and interests of future generations. Subsequently, Unnerstall discusses seven ethical theories and their suitability as to providing a basis for the justification of the principles of intertemporal justice. Only in the case of utilitarianism Unnerstall refers to the FIP as primary objection to the possibility of comparing various courses of action with reference to their contribution to the common good. Finally, Unnerstall concedes that it is very difficult to derive from the ethical theories concrete prescriptions for e.g. dealing with natural resources in order not to violate the rights or interests of future people. Instead, the only way to reach a political consensus in society seems to be to adopt a couple of pragmatic principles that, at the least, are not in contradiction with the ethical theories. It seems then that Unnerstall’s article consists of three rather independent parts, which are divided by clear gaps, without being pulled together to form a whole that points into the direction of a claim about intertemporal justice.

Having said that regarding the composition of the article, let us look more closely at Unnerstall’s arguments against the FIP. His first argument is that the FIP cannot be empirically verified, because at any moment in time we cannot compare the well being of a certain group of people A to another (hypothetical) group of people B that would have existed if people in the distant past would have followed different courses of action. However, even without the possibility of empirical verification the FIP could still be true and have the effect that rights and interests of future people are neglected because the identity of these people depends on the actions taken by current people and, therefore, their rights are not violated. That is, advocates of the FIP can still stick to their argument. Second, Unnerstall argues that the FIP may apply to certain actions by current people but not to all of their actions, without being specific to which actions the FIP would apply and to which it would not. In this case supporters of the FIP could concede that indeed the FIP does not apply to certain trivial actions but still comes into play when deciding about important policies such as the depletion or conservation of non-renewable

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 432

natural resources or the choice between two medical programmes. Unnerstall's third argument reads: the FIP is weakened, if there is one future individual whose identity is not affected by the actions of present people, and whose well being deteriorates as a result of these actions, thereby violating her rights and interests. As with the first argument this would presuppose the possibility of some empirical verification of the FIP, because one needs to determine whether or not the identity of the proposed individual is influenced by the actions of current people. This, however, is not possible as we are not able to construct a world in which we can compare an affected identity and a non-affected identity. We thus need to look for other arguments that take away the objection against intertemporal justice raised by the FIP.⁵⁷

3.3 Konrad Ott (2004)

Konrad Ott begins his article by defining future ethics as an “ethically justified doctrine whose principles, criteria and standards should govern contemporary courses of action in regard to posterity”. Besides discussing further questions, Ott follows a programme that, like Unnerstall (2003), starts with the questions as to whether there are any obligations to future generations at all, and which ethical theory should govern assessments of future events.⁵⁸

While establishing a terminology for his article, Ott already chooses for the following notion of posterity:

“Posterity is something we bring about by our current behaviour which affects others for better or worse. This *bringing about* is to be understood as a ‘modal transformation’ by which possibilities, probabilities, tendencies and potencies are (or are not) transformed into actual existence.”⁵⁹

As is the case in Unnerstall (2003), Ott concludes that future generations consist of future people and that we therefore should concentrate on defining what future people are. At this stage Ott distinguishes between persons and individuals. A future person is to be defined as: “a human being who lives in posterity and owns features which are (or will be) constitutive of personhood”, thereby assuming that the concept of personhood will remain stable over time. On the other hand, Ott defines a future individual to be “a particular person who will live in posterity”.⁶⁰ Ott needs this distinction between persons and individuals when he discusses the FIP as the most prominent so called No Obligation Argument (NOA).

⁵⁷ Note that I have adopted Unnerstall's suggestion to speak about ‘intertemporal’ justice in Sections 3.1-2, but that I continue to use ‘intergenerational’ justice in the other chapters and sections to keep terminology unequivocal.

⁵⁸ Ott (2004), p. 83

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84 (italics by Ott)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85

Ott introduces his discussion of the NOAs by observing that most humans have a strong but diminishing concern for the future. That is they care about their children and further offspring, but this concern fades away rapidly beyond the family lines and beyond a time horizon of, say, more than hundred years. As Ott argues, these phenomena could very well be explained by evolutionary theory, but the ethicist, in an age where responsible human agency is valued across societies, cannot take such an explanation to replace her considerations of whether such behaviour can be justified. In the next few paragraphs I will outline Ott's argument that the FIP is by no means a convincing NOA.

As a first crucial aspect of the FIP Ott explains that this paradox "rests on the basic distinction that obligations to future generations must rely on *person-dependent* or on *person-independent* moral principles." Since Parfit has been unwilling to accept the repugnant conclusion (see Section 2.3) that followed from adopting person-independent principles, he has relied on person-dependent principles, which imply "that a course of action can be morally wrong only if a particular person (individual) will be wronged."⁶¹ Here Ott concludes that the FIP presupposes that "if there are no identifiable individuals, there are no victims." The second crucial aspect of the FIP on Ott's account is the consequence that "if future individuals cannot be victimized [...], it will be hard for future individuals to complain about environmental conditions they have to cope with."⁶² Subsequently, Ott undertakes to determine the fallacy in both crucial aspects.

As to the first aspect Ott makes the remark that people as moral persons might disapprove consistently certain necessary conditions for their individual existence. For example, the child of the 14-Year-Old Girl (see Section 2.2) could judge as morally wrong the fact that an increasing number of girls happens to get pregnant around the age of 14, and still judge that she has not been wronged as an individual by being brought into existence by a mother at the age of 14. In other words, Ott distinguishes between a moral person ("a person being able to judge from the moral point of view") and a particular individual. On Ott's account the first aspect of the FIP is now taken away, because someone can complain to have been victimized by previous courses of action, while at the same time this person would not have existed had these actions not been carried out. The second aspect relies, according to Ott, on the interpretation of person-dependent moral principles in terms of future individuals. Ott writes: "We should not confuse the idea that moral obligations are directed to individual (single) beings (and not to wholes) with an ethical requirement to identify any single moral patient in his/her individuality." In order to conclude:

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 86

⁶² Ibid., p. 87

“In the end, we should accept the fact that individuals emerge as a result of coincidences. But moral obligations rely on our respect for single persons regardless of their individuality.”⁶³ Besides the FIP Ott discusses three other NOAs (the ignorance argument, the no-claim argument and the paradox-of-procreation argument), and concludes that “there are no strong reasons to reject obligations to future persons on the grounds of the NOAs we know of”.⁶⁴

After having dealt with the NOAs, Ott sets to the task of selecting among ethical theories the ones which are most suitable to incorporate a morally convincing future ethics. On this topic Ott concludes that discourse ethics can best handle the challenges imposed by such a future ethics, because both deontological approaches and consequential evaluation can be encompassed by one set of procedural principles. The interests of future persons can be represented by participants to the discourse who take up the role to advocate the interests of future persons. Ott claims:

“Future persons have no voice of their own yet but one can reasonably predict what they (probably) would say if they knew of how we perform the modal transformation mentioned at the opening of this article.”⁶⁵

In the remainder of his article Ott discusses important topics of a future ethics (egalitarian or non-egalitarian standards, assessment of risk and uncertainty, and the concepts of weak and strong sustainability), which contribute to Ott’s substantial position. I leave the discussion of these topics out, since they fall outside the scope of this master thesis.

3.4 Discussion of Ott (2004)

In his essay Konrad Ott intends to give both formal features as well as a substantial position with regard to future ethics.⁶⁶ Ott starts his argument by rejecting the NOAs, followed by the second step in which he selects an ethical theory that is best suited in dealing with the requirements of future ethics. This results in the choice of discourse ethics as a general framework. Thereafter Ott argues for an ongoing chain of obligations among generations, a comparative and egalitarian standard, tutoristic criteria of risk assessment and the concept of strong sustainability. Although Ott, on my account, lives up to the title of his essay by giving quite a few “Essential Components of Future Ethics”, the question that should bother us here is: how strong is the foundation for Ott’s theory of future ethics, especially concerning his treatment of the FIP?

In my view Ott starts his attack on the first crucial aspect of the FIP with the right observation of the difference between the moral person and the individual. Indeed there is no

⁶³ Ibid., p. 88

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 91

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 98

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 106

contradiction in the statement: ‘this action was morally wrong, but in fact it was the best thing that could happen to me’. Hence an action done against the interests of future people can be morally wrong, whereas these future people would not have existed had this action not been performed. Ott has therefore resolved the first aspect of the FIP. When viewing Ott’s response to the second aspect, however, we come to a different conclusion for two reasons. First, Ott attempts to take away this aspect by pointing at the distinction between directing moral obligations to individuals and the ethical requirement to identify a moral person with his/her individuality. In Ott’s view, “moral obligations rely on our respect for single persons irregardless of their individuality”. There are, however, very many moral obligations that depend entirely on the contract between two or more individuals and not on persons only, since replacing the persons by other ones would immediately result into a different contract including different moral obligations between the new individuals. In other words, Ott’s distinction to me does not seem to be the right distinction. In fact in ethical theories about personal integrity⁶⁷ and motivation⁶⁸ there are strong arguments to formulate these concepts on the basis of moral internalism, that is being able to relate a moral obligation, attributed to one by others, to one’s own motives for moral action, that is to one’s self conception as an individual. In other words, the distinction Ott wants to make cannot be maintained as it is incoherent with other ethical notions. Second, from the text it is unclear how Ott conceptualises future people. On the one hand Ott refers to an undefined ‘modal transformation’ being performed by currently living people that brings about posterity, on the other hand individuals are supposed to emerge from coincidences. On my account there seems to be insufficient ground for Ott to take away the second aspect of the FIP, and Ott’s argument against the FIP does not seem fully convincing.

3.5 Lukas Meyer (2008)

In this entry of the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Lukas Meyer takes an entirely different route in coping with the FIP, or its later version by Parfit (NIP), than Unnerstall and Ott. Instead of arguing against the (F/N)IP, Meyer undertakes the project of formulating a concept of intergenerational justice that is able to withstand the NIP. In his article Meyer argues in favour of the following claims: “[...] present generations have duties of justice to future people but not to past people. [...] present generations also have additional moral duties (duties not grounded in correlative rights) to future people as well as moral duties to past people owing, in

⁶⁷ See my paper “Managers Coping With Integrity”, dated November 2006

⁶⁸ Scarano (2004), p. 434

part, to the rights these people had when alive.”⁶⁹ To start with, Meyer argues that the relations between present and remote past or future people are different from relations among contemporaries. In particular, “future people’s existence, number, and specific identity depend (are contingent) upon currently living people’s decisions and actions”⁷⁰, e.g. if we decide between two policies regarding the use of natural resources (see Section 2.2). In pointing out the differences between our relations to one another and our relations to past and future people, Meyer mentions the following normative problems regarding future generations he will discuss:

1. To what extent can future people be harmed by present people?
2. How should we relate to future people under conditions of risk and uncertainty?
3. What motivation could we have for fulfilling our duties to future people?

In dealing with these questions Meyer presupposes “a person-affecting view of ethics, which holds that the moral quality of an action has to be assessed on the basis of how it affects the interests of persons.” This claim can be contrasted “to an impersonal view according to which the value of states of affairs is not reducible to their effect on the interests of actual people.”⁷¹

Subsequently, Meyer discusses the question of the right to non-existence. That is, “can prospective children be said to have an interest that their parents not act in a way likely to lead to their birth when the parents are in a position to know that the life of the child, should it be born, would fall below some relevant threshold of well-being?” Regarding this question Meyer claims: “while prospective parents have no obligation to procreate out of regard for the interests of possible future children, they have an obligation not to beget children who are going to be miserable.” [...] “Objections to the asymmetry view presented above concern, in particular, the claim that after having made a decision to have children, prospective parents should revise their decision out of regard for their would-be child(ren) when they learn that the prospective child(ren) would have a life that falls below the relevant threshold.”⁷²

The relevance of these citations about the right to non-existence lies in the threshold notion of harm that Meyer will introduce later on.

The main objection to the very possibility of future people having welfare rights vis-a-vis those currently living, in Meyer’s view, is Parfit’s Non-Identity Problem.⁷³ In Meyer’s words this is the problem that, on the one hand, specific future persons are harmed by actions and decisions of currently living people, while, on the other hand, these actions and decisions count “as a necessary condition of the very existence of this genetically and numerically specific set of

⁶⁹ Meyer (2008), p. 1

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 3

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 4

⁷² Ibid., p. 7-8

⁷³ Note that Meyer refers to Parfit (1984, part IV) for a formulation of the Non-Identity Problem.

people at some future point in time.”⁷⁴ The core of Meyer’s article consists of formulating a response to the Non-Identity Problem (NIP). Meyer concentrates on the notion of harm that is used in the formulation of the NIP. Two notions of harm (the diachronic and the subjunctive-historical) require that the existence of the harmed person is independent of the harming act or policy. Hence, Meyer looks for a response to the NIP by introducing another conception of harm, the so called Threshold (or identity-independent) Conception of Harm:

“An action (or inaction) at time t_1 harms a person only if the agent thereby causes (allows) either the coming into existence of this person in a sub-threshold state or the already existing person to be in a sub-threshold state; further, only if this person would not be in the harmed state had the agent not interacted with (or acted with respect to) this person at all; and furthermore, only if the agent, if he cannot avoid causing harm in this sense, does not minimize the harm.”⁷⁵

According to Meyer this notion of harm limits the practical significance of the NIP to different degrees depending upon how the threshold is defined. Meyer claims that when choosing between long term policies the threshold notion of harm enables making a decision, notwithstanding the fact that the existence of those people who are said to be harmed is causally dependent on our decision to pursue one of these policies.

Meyer continues to use the threshold notion of harm when clarifying the claim that we can cause harm to a child by bringing this child into existence.

“In claiming that people should refrain from having children out of regard for the children, when the children can be expected to have a life that falls below the relevant threshold, we rely on our being able to define what it means to be in a state below the relevant threshold and to judge when lives are in that state.”⁷⁶

Meyer does not see difficulties in comparing the values of ‘having a sufficiently good life’ and ‘having a life that falls below the relevant threshold’, in order to decide whether parents should refrain from bringing their would-be child into existence.

Subsequently, Meyer discusses the three notions of harm he has defined so far (diachronic, subjunctive-historical, threshold) in the light of Parfit’s No Difference View. The No Difference View tells us that: “it makes no (practical or theoretical) difference to how we should act, all things considered, whether the size and composition of future generations depend upon our present decision.”⁷⁷ In Section 2.3 I have discussed the No Difference View in more detail. Here I continue with the main topic in Meyer’s article that still needs to be discussed: specification of the threshold in the respective notion of harm. As a first option Meyer mentions specifying the threshold by egalitarian considerations, according to which we will object to

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 9

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 10

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 13

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 16

inequalities. Since this view attributes intrinsic value exclusively to equality, it leads to highly implausible outcomes such as the preference for a bad but equal standard of living compared to a situation in which all have good or very good lives but some are better off than others. The second option consists of Parfit's priority view: "benefitting persons matters more the worse off the person is to whom the benefits accrue, the more people are benefitted and the greater the benefits in question."⁷⁸ However, also this view suffers from implausible implications, as it "is likely to define just one optimal outcome for people's actions", and it implies a version of Parfit's Repugnant Conclusion (see Section 2.3). Given these consequences, Meyer rejects the priority view.

As the third option to define the threshold, Meyer discusses the Sufficientarian Standard. This standard says: "to benefit person X is more important than to benefit person Y, if X is below the threshold and Y is better off than X."⁷⁹ In the literature concerning sufficientarianism both a weak and a strong form are being defined. Weak sufficientarianism resembles much of the priority view, and should therefore be rejected. Strong sufficientarianism, however, attributes a significant priority to those whose well-being is just below the threshold. It reads as follows:

"First to the group of persons whose improvement in well-being has absolute or lexical priority belong 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 benefitted and the greater the benefit in question, trade-offs between persons above and below the threshold are precluded."⁸⁰

Meyer prefers a sufficientarian specification of the threshold over the egalitarian and the priority one for the reasons that "avoiding or reducing differences must not lead to a state of affairs in which people are worse off than they ought to be", and that claims against currently living people should not be unreasonable in case they can bring about only trivial improvements in the well-being of future people, while as a result they fall below the threshold level of well-being.

As a fourth method of specifying the threshold Meyer discusses Rawls' Just Savings Principle, which Rawls presents as the outcome of a decision reached in the contractualist (hypothetical and non-historical) situation of the original position, and in which every generation is represented. However, as the relations between the contractors so conceived are not characterised by justice, the question of justice does not arise, and Rawls adjusts the interpretation of the original position in the way that the contractors know that they belong to a

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 20

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 21

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 22

generation, but the veil of ignorance blinds them to which particular generation they belong. From this position they determine the just savings rate.⁸¹

By giving a sufficientarian interpretation of the threshold notion of harm (together with an appropriate conception of wrongdoing) Meyer claims to have formulated a plausible understanding of what current people owe to future people. However, as Meyer mentions, “such a framework does not provide a complete moral theory of intergenerational relations and especially not in the context of decisions on the existence, number, and identity of future people.”⁸² That is, there are certain obligations of present people towards future people that are not grounded in rights of future people vis-a-vis current people. For instance when choosing between policies that allow future people to live lives above the sufficientarian threshold. In general, as Meyer argues, current people have the obligation not to “wilfully destroy the inherited goods and the conditions that are constitutive of persons’ pursuit of future-oriented projects.”⁸³ This conclusion seems to be consistent with the definition of intergenerational justice we arrived at in Section 2.1.

3.6 Discussion of Meyer (2008)

As I mentioned at the beginning of Section 3.5, Meyer takes an entirely different approach to dealing with the NIP than Unnerstall and Ott. Instead of analysing its underlying presuppositions and taking away the problem, Meyer ‘constructs’ a notion of harm that should be able to continue with the project of intergenerational justice not being hampered anymore by the objection in the form of the Non-Identity Problem. Although I am sympathetic to the method chosen by Meyer to achieve this goal, I am also considering the following objections against the notion of harm he has conceived.

First, throughout his article Meyer reasons exclusively from a 3rd person point of view.⁸⁴ This means that Meyer makes statements about the objective world as a scientist, that is as someone who is interested in certain behaviour by the object under study, but who is not concerned with e.g. the (subjective) emotional configuration of the object, nor with its (intersubjective) role in the interaction with other objects. In other words, 1st and 2nd person approaches are being disregarded in Meyer’s argument. The difficulty with maintaining a pure

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 24

⁸² Ibid., p. 25

⁸³ Ibid., p. 26

⁸⁴ This should be understood in the way Jürgen Habermas has defined these approaches (1981, p. 149, 164). That is, a statement from the 1st person perspective relates to a person’s subjective world; a 2nd person statement relates to a person’s social world (i.e. the entirety of someone’s interpersonal relationships); and a statement from the 3rd person is about something in the objective world.

observational approach becomes apparent when Meyer discusses the right not to be brought into existence, because, as Meyer says: “we rely on our being able to define what it means to be in a state below the relevant threshold and to judge when lives are in that state”.⁸⁵ The definition of the threshold and the judgement when lives are below that threshold exclusively from the 3rd person perspective leads in itself to moral complications (see my third objection below). But first we should discuss the question: how can Meyer talk about a person’s right not to be brought into existence in a meaningful way? Consider the following claims: “we can say of a person that she did not exist before her conception”⁸⁶, and “[...] prospective parents should revise their decision out of regard for their would-be child(ren) when they learn that the prospective child(ren) would have a life that falls below the relevant threshold”.⁸⁷ The second claim presupposes that the prospective child is better off not to be brought into existence, because it would be harmed by having a life that falls below the relevant threshold. That is, the second claim is logically meaningful only if we are comparing two states of being, namely the one pre-conception and the one post-conception. It does not make sense to compare a state of being (post-conception) to a state of non being (pre-conception), as Meyer would wish us to do according to the first claim.⁸⁸ Hence, we find the two claims mentioned above to be inconsistent with each other.

Second, the practicality of defining the threshold in concrete situations may be questioned, due to the fact that it is being defined from a 3rd person perspective only. Indeed, the notion of a threshold when defining harm seems intuitive in human life. For example, consider the medical practice called palliative sedation. This is the situation in which a patient is treated by her doctor by receiving a morphine injection in order to diminish the patient’s pain, almost always accompanied by diminishing consciousness of the patient. In many cases this treatment is given to patients in the last days or hours before they die. In common sense language it is being said: “She died without pain”. In this case it seems clear that there is some level of pain, above which the patient’s life becomes unbearable related to the relatively simple treatment a doctor can give to release the patient from her pain. The exact level of pain, however, depends on a number of factors which are specific for each patient. That is, the determination of the level of pain above which the treatment is given, depends primarily on the subjective experience of pain by the patient and the (intersubjective) interpretation thereof by the doctor, and cannot be defined

⁸⁵ See note 76

⁸⁶ Meyer (2008), p. 12

⁸⁷ See note 72

⁸⁸ Note that I also disagree with Parfit (1984, p. 487) on the question “whether causing someone to exist can benefit this person”. Parfit claims that if life is good, it is better than no life at all; if life is bad, it is worse than nothing. My objections to this type of argument I explain in Section 4.5.

beforehand by an objective outsider. Hence adopting an exclusive 3rd person perspective in defining the threshold in Meyer's conception of harm does not seem to be sufficient to apply this concept anywhere in a real life situation.

Third, the moral implications of applying Meyer's notion of harm might be hard to accept e.g. in questions of abortion. Again, I consider one of Meyer's statements about the procreative responsibilities of (prospective) parents: "[...] they [RM: the prospective parents] have an obligation not to beget children who are going to be miserable."⁸⁹ Although questions about the ending of pregnancies are legitimate in many of today's Western European societies, it has also been argued that the decision to abort cannot be imposed on someone from a 3rd personal point of view only, but that the mother's intimate relationship to the prospective child (2nd personal judgement) should play a decisive role.⁹⁰ Because of the above mentioned objections I find the notion of harm proposed by Lukas Meyer too restricted to form a basis for the further development of a concept of intergenerational justice.

3.7 Conclusions

The three authors, whose contributions have been discussed in this Chapter, take the Non-Identity Problem, or its earlier formulation as FIP, as a starting point for their reflections concerning intergenerational justice. Herwig Unnerstall clearly mentions the FIP as the primary objection raised against intergenerational justice. Konrad Ott starts his list of objections against intergenerational justice in the form of no obligation arguments with the FIP. Whereas both Unnerstall and Ott discuss several ethical theories and their suitability as to providing a 'future ethics', Lukas Meyer's contribution to the formulation of intergenerational justice is primarily construed with the aim as to resolve the Non-Identity Problem. Given the overview of strategies to solve the NIP provided in Section 2.5, it would be appropriate to ask whether the contributions by Unnerstall, Ott and Meyer fit within this overview. Since the articles by Unnerstall and Ott have been written with the objective to evaluate ethical theories as to their suitability to forming a basis for an account of intergenerational justice, and not with the aim to solve the NIP explicitly, in my view, it is not appropriate to categorise them under one of the strategies mentioned above. Although I believe that both Unnerstall and Ott treat the NIP somewhat lightly, I would not rank them e.g. under the heading "denying the problem", since this would commit them to the Repugnant Conclusion, which clearly is not what these authors argue for.

⁸⁹ See note 72

⁹⁰ Düwell (2003), p. 228

Meyer, on the other hand, does explicitly attempt to provide an account of intergenerational justice to which the NIP does not apply as an objection anymore. Meyer does this by “accommodating non-identity”, that is by constructing a notion of harm that should be able not to be affected by the NIP, whilst still appealing to a concept of rights of future people when they will be alive and the obligations for current people following from these rights. Although Meyer is not mentioned in Heyd’s article (2009), I would group his article under the third strategy mentioned in Section 2.5.

For the reason that these three authors⁹¹ have put the NIP into the centre of the debate about intergenerational justice, and Meyer’s attempt to define a notion of harm capable of responding to the NIP to which, on my account, serious objections can be raised, we should be looking at the origins of the NIP in more detail. The authors dealt with in the previous Sections seem to be viewing the NIP as something that is inevitable, a problem that cannot be solved but only can be circumvented (Meyer) or downplayed (Unnerstall and Ott). Contrary to these authors, I believe that the NIP should be resolved in a different way. This can be done by analysing its origins more thoroughly by stepping back and ask ourselves: why does the NIP arise in the first place? Moreover, my conclusion that further work on the NIP needs to be done seems to be supported by the SRU, a strong academic advisory council to the German government, who write in their 2002 report:

“Trotz einiger irritierender Paradoxa (“future-individual-paradox”) kann kein begründeter Zweifel daran bestehen, dass Verpflichtungen gegenüber zukünftigen Generationen anzuerkennen sind.”⁹²

In other words, although there seems to be an increasing general consensus about the pragmatic consequences of intergenerational justice for the question of sustainable development, there remain severe controversies at the conceptual level of which the NIP seems to be the most prominent one. In Chapter 4 I will continue, therefore, my analysis by tracing back the origins of the NIP in Parfit’s own formulation of the concept of personal identity.

⁹¹ For other authors see Roberts, Wasserman (2009)

⁹² SRU (2002), p. 58

4. Parfit's concept of personal identity and the Non-Identity Problem

This chapter starts with an expose of Parfit's concept of personal identity, the so called Reductionist View. Similarly to Section 2.2, where I gave a summary of Parfit's formulation of the NIP, I remain as close as possible to the original text, and I highlight those parts that in my view are necessary for understanding and overlooking the Reductionist View. Note that I will not enter into a detailed theoretical analysis of Parfit's concept of personal identity, as this falls outside the scope of this master thesis. Subsequently, in Section 4.2, I draw attention to some moral implications of this concept of personal identity, again, mainly based on Parfit's own comments. In Section 4.3, I start connecting the contents of Chapter 2 to the Reductionist View on personal identity outlined so far, in order to argue that the Non-Identity Problem is logically implied by the Reductionist View. To be specific, I will argue that the Reductionist View is a sufficient condition for the NIP. In Section 4.4, I will discuss, in addition to Section 4.2, some more of the moral implications, which are important in the context of intergenerational justice, that can be envisaged when adopting the Reductionist View. Finally, in Section 4.5, I will reflect on the sentence "If P, then he would never have existed", which is used in almost every text concerning the NIP, and which, on my account, should be examined in more detail.

4.1 A summary of Parfit's concept of personal identity

In this section I will summarise the constitutive parts of Parfit's concept of personal identity. Note that because this master thesis is not about a full theory of personal identity, I give this summary *as far as needed* for an explanation of the emergence of the NIP out of this concept. I do not pay attention to the various ways in which Parfit argues for his Reductionist View e.g. by discussing topics like divided minds, division of selves, series persons, partial survival, and successive selves.

An important element of the concept of personal identity, according to Parfit, is the thought experiment of the Teletransporter.⁹³ In the first version of this experiment "when I press the button, I shall lose consciousness, and then wake up at what seems a moment later. [...] The Scanner here on Earth will destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact states of all of my cells. It will then transmit this information by radio [...] to [...] the Replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and a body exactly like mine. It will be in this body

⁹³ Parfit (1984), p. 199-201

that I shall wake up.” In the second version of the Teletransporter “when I press the green button, I do not lose consciousness.” The New Scanner does not destroy my brain and body, it only records my blueprint. However, because the New Scanner damages my cardiac system I will die within a couple of days. “On the screen I see myself just as I do in the mirror every morning. But there are two differences. On the screen I am not left-right reversed. And, while I stand here speechless, I can see and hear myself, in the studio on Mars, starting to speak. [...] My Replica thinks that he is me, and he seems to remember living my life up to the moment when I pressed the green button. In every other way, both physically and psychologically, we are exactly similar. If he returned to Earth, everyone would think that he was me.” The function of this imagined case for Parfit is to illustrate his claim that the Replica in the second version of the Teletransporter is exactly like me, although being another person. Parfit claims that “being destroyed and Replicated is about as good as ordinary survival.”

With the example of the Teletransporter, Parfit develops his concept of personal identity that consists of three main parts, which I will summarise in the same order as Parfit introduces them. The first criterion for personal identity, that is what this identity necessarily involves or consists in, is the Physical Criterion:⁹⁴

“(1) What is necessary is not the continued existence of the whole body, but the continued existence of *enough* of the brain to be the brain of a living person. X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) enough of Y’s brain continued to exist, and is now X’s brain, and (3) this physical continuity has not taken a ‘branching’ form⁹⁵. (4) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) and (3).”

For the second criterion, Parfit first needs to define the concept of an overlapping chain of experience-memories: “[...], between X today and Y twenty years ago, there are *direct memory connections* if X can now remember having some of the experiences that Y had twenty years ago. [...] And when there are enough direct connections, there is what I call *strong connectedness*.”⁹⁶ The Psychological Criterion is defined as follows:⁹⁷

“(1) There is *psychological continuity* if and only if there are overlapping chains of strong connectedness. X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) X is psychologically continuous with Y, (3) this continuity has the right kind of cause⁹⁸, and (4) it has not taken a ‘branching’ form. (5) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) and (4).”

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 204 (italics by Parfit)

⁹⁵ With ‘branching’ Parfit means, as is the case in the second version of the Teletransporter, that my life and that of my Replica overlap during some time.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 205-206 (italics by Parfit)

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 207 (italics by Parfit)

⁹⁸ Note that Parfit defines (p. 208) “right” to be *any* kind of cause.

According to Parfit both the Physical and the Psychological criterion are *Reductionist*, because a person's identity over time consists in the holding of certain more particular facts, which can be described in an impersonal way, that is without presupposing the identity of the person, or even without explicitly claiming that this person exists. "On the Reductionist View, each person's existence just involves the existence of a brain and body, the doing of certain deeds, the thinking of certain thoughts, the occurrence of certain experiences, and so on."⁹⁹ Note that Parfit distinguishes carefully between a person being a *separately existing* entity (which Parfit rejects), and "an entity that is *distinct* from a brain and a body, and such a series of [RM: interrelated physical and mental] events."¹⁰⁰ The third part of personal identity by Parfit tells us about the importance of personal identity, namely that it is not important at all. Parfit rejects the claim that psychological unity is explained by a particular person that is the *subject of experiences*.¹⁰¹ Personal identity is not what matters, what matters is the so called *Relation R*:

"Psychological connectedness and/or continuity with the right kind of cause. In an account of what matters, the right kind of cause could be any cause."

The meaning of Relation R should be understood in the following way by considering the second case of the Teletransporter, "where my life briefly overlaps with that of my Replica. Suppose that we believe that I and my Replica are two different people. I am about to die, but my Replica will live for another forty years. If personal identity is what matters, I should regard my prospect here as nearly as bad as ordinary death. But what matters is Relation R, with any cause, I should regard this way of dying about as good as ordinary survival."¹⁰²

By referring to the Branch-Line case of the Teletransporter (i.e. the second experiment), Parfit aims to add arguments to his claim that we are not separately existing entities. Parfit claims that "we could not tell, from the content of *our* experiences, whether we are really aware of the continued existence of a separately existing subject of experiences." And: "Because we ascribe thoughts to thinkers, we can truly claim that thinkers exist. But we cannot deduce, from the content of our experiences, that a thinker is a separately existing entity."¹⁰³ In summary, I add to the overview given of Parfit's position regarding personal identity the following answers to straightforward yes/no questions:

- Are persons separately existing entities? No – Note 100;
- Does personal identity just consist in physical and psychological continuity? Yes – Note 99;

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 210-211

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 211 (italics by Parfit)

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 214

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 215

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 224-225, 251 (italics by Parfit)

- Is personal identity always determinate? No;¹⁰⁴
- Is the person distinct from brain and body and a series of events? Yes – Note 100;
- Is the Reductionist View necessarily a form of Physicalism? No.¹⁰⁵

4.2 Implications on morality of the Reductionist View on personal identity

It should be noted that Parfit mentions that as a consequence of adopting the Reductionist View, as a result of which we do not anymore believe that our identity is what matters, the way we think about morality maybe affected.¹⁰⁶ Given the discussion of the contributions to intergenerational justice by the three contemporary authors in Chapter 3, I shall mention here the moral implications of the Reductionist View that have been highlighted by Parfit himself.

Parfit concedes that as a consequence of changing our view about personal identity to the Reductionist View, “this may justify a change in our moral views.”¹⁰⁷ In particular, Parfit mentions the example of abortion. On the Non-Reductionist View existence is something that is all-or-nothing. Since it is implausible that we start to exist at the moment of birth, we are led to believe that existence of a person starts at the moment of conception. Hence on this view abortion is about the killing of innocent people, which is morally wrong. On the Reductionist View there is no sharp borderline between the existence and non-existence of a person. The fertilized ovum is not at first, but slowly becomes, a human being, and a person. This means that abortion in the first weeks of a pregnancy, according to Parfit, is not a morally wrong thing to do. On this view the foetus gradually becomes a person, and only towards the end of a pregnancy abortion becomes an action that morally must be disapproved.

Parfit claims that a similar reasoning can be performed regarding the other end of life. On the Non-Reductionist View a person is either alive or dead. On the Reductionist View one would be able to distinguish between the human being and the person. When a patient is in coma, and will certainly never regain consciousness, “we shall believe that the person has ceased to exist.”¹⁰⁸ According to the Reductionist View, at this end of lives, only the killing of persons is wrong.

As a next example Parfit discusses the question whether on the Reductionist View we should change our view about the punishment for our crimes. Although Parfit explicitly claims that it is possible on the Reductionist View to argue that persons should be punished for crimes

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 216

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 241

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 215

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 321

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 323

they committed in the past, to make his point he refers to the compatibilist and incompatibilist views in the philosophical debate on free will. On the Non-Reductionist View one believes that personal identity involves an entity distinct from physical and psychological continuity. Parfit concedes that on this view it is defensible, that only this entity carries with it desert for past crimes, and that, if there is no such entity, there is no desert. This is the analogue of the incompatibilist view on free will, and Parfit cannot find a decisive argument for desert based on the psychological continuity of the Reductionist View only.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Parfit claims that “when some convict is now less closely connected to himself [than] at the time of his crime, he deserves less punishment.”¹¹⁰ In terms of the Reductionist View this means that desert for past actions varies with the degree to which one is psychologically connected to those actions. That is, the degree to which we can be held responsible for our actions depends on the degree to which we have been able to establish the various relations between the experiences in our life that led to those actions. We should not welcome this outcome of the notion of desert under the Reductionist View, as it would lead to incentivising criminals to simulate only very loose psychological connections to their crimes, thereby undermining the foundations of our legal systems.

There is another implication of the Reductionist View on our morality that should be mentioned here. It is the case how we deal with commitments or obligations that we have taken on. Such as with the desert for punishment Parfit cannot decisively argue that we are bound by commitments made in the past, because the commitment can be made by another of our selves than we currently are. But, as Parfit argues, in the case of commitments and obligations the situation becomes more complicated, as the question of personal identity enters twice. We must consider both the maker of some promise, as well as the person to whom the promise is made. The maker of the promise might say: “I, and all of my later selves, shall help you”. But a forceful objection is that I can only bind my present self.¹¹¹ In addition, it could be argued that also the receiver of the promise will have successive selves. In other words, when two people make an agreement at a certain moment, then twenty years later it is unclear whether both persons are still committed to that agreement, since both can have been changed to another self. It is fair to say, that the ‘bookkeeping’ of promises and obligations in relation to the successive selves people can have on the Reductionist View becomes rather complicated.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 325

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 326

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 327

4.3 How the Reductionist View implies the Non-Identity Problem

Note that Parfit, when starting his outline of the Non-Identity Problem (NIP) in part IV of *Reasons and Persons*, makes only one reference to part III, in which he formulates his Reductionist View on personal identity.¹¹² In this endnote Parfit raises the question: “What is the relation between this subject and personal identity over time?” I have three reasons to discuss this question in more detail in this section. First, in the discussion by Parfit of this question, it remains unclear what “this subject” actually entails. It therefore remains unclear for which thesis Parfit wants to argue in this endnote. Second, the authors, whose essays I discussed in Chapter 3, seem not to have touched upon this question, that is they do not seem to have searched for the possibility to explain the NIP out of the Reductionist View on personal identity. And third, when discussing the NIP and its consequences, in my view, the question should be raised: does Parfit assume another concept of personal identity when formulating the NIP in Part IV, than he has given by means of the Reductionist View in Part III, or does the NIP follow logically from the Reductionist View? On my account, I will argue for the latter part of this question, that is P implies Q ($P \rightarrow Q$), whereby P and Q refer to the following claims:

- (P) The Reductionist View on personal identity is true;
- (Q) If actions by present people affect the identity of future people, then these actions cannot violate the rights or interests of those future people that exist exclusively by virtue of these actions.¹¹³

In order to argue that P is a sufficient condition for Q, I need to show that it follows from the Reductionist View that the identity of future people can be affected by the actions of present people, because the second part of Q (i.e. the consequence) has already been argued for by Parfit (see Section 2.1). That is, if we presuppose that actions by present people affect the identity of future people, then it can be concluded that these actions cannot violate the rights or interests of those future people that exist exclusively by virtue of these actions. On the Reductionist View we assume that personal identity is not what matters, and that the Physical Criterion and the Psychological Criterion are sufficient for a person to exist. Moreover, we assume P, and hence we must interpret the phrase “the identity of future people” in Q according to the Reductionist View, which means that the identity of future people consists in physical and psychological continuity. For arguing that P is sufficient for Q, we should thus consider the question: can actions by present people affect the physical and psychological continuity of future people?

¹¹² Ibid., p. 355, see endnote 6 on p. 522

¹¹³ Note that I take here Unnerstall’s formulation of the FIP in Section 3.1

Regarding the physical continuity of future people we should note that the actions by prospective parents influence the moment of conception of their children. That is, prospective parents influence the moment from which we can speak of physical continuity in the first place. Hence actions by present people affect the physical continuity of future people. For the influence of current people's actions on the psychological continuity of future people, we need to realise that on the Reductionist View persons are not separately existing entities. Overlapping chains of a person's memories are fully contingent on what happens in this person's environment. As under the Reductionist View there is no subject of experiences, there is no entity that relates itself to these experiences. There is just the chain of experiences itself that forms the basis for psychological continuity. And as the actions of current people and their consequences form part of the events that are experienced by future people, psychological continuity of future people is thus shaped by the actions of current people. Since the existence of future people involves no further fact than "the existence of a brain and body, the doing of certain deeds, the thinking of certain thoughts, the occurrence of certain experiences, and so on"¹¹⁴, we can conclude that it follows from the Reductionist View on personal identity that the actions of current people affect the identity of future people, or better: their existence as a person, since identity is not what matters anymore on the Reductionist View.

If so, we have found that the Non-Identity Problem is one of the implications that follow from the Reductionist View on personal identity, which answers in part the research question of this master thesis. For a concept of intergenerational justice, that is freed from the objection raised by the NIP, we need to look for a concept of personal identity that is freed from the Reductionist View. Such a research question falls, however, outside the scope of this master thesis. In the following section in addition to Parfit (see Section 4.2), I will emphasize some other moral consequences of the Reductionist View on personal identity.

4.4 Further moral implications of Parfit's concept of personal identity

At this stage, I state once more that it is the topic of this master thesis to analyse the concept of personal identity by Parfit *to the extent needed* for a better understanding and formulation of the concept of intergenerational justice. A thorough theoretical analysis of the concept of personal identity including its ramifications remains outside the scope of this master thesis. In order to assess the suitability of Parfit's Reductionist View to serve as a basis for a formulation of intergenerational justice, I look, in addition to the implications discussed in Section 4.2, at the

¹¹⁴ See note 99

moral consequences this view has on two ethical notions that are particularly important for intergenerational justice: responsibility and rights.

Responsibility¹¹⁵ is the response to a challenge, which one has to face and to which one has to respond in a rational and reasonable manner. We call someone responsible who is prepared and capable of exposing herself to the criticism by others regarding her actions and responding to it, whereby a non-action should also be understood as an action. In this sense responsibility is a quality of the individual. Responsibility presupposes a consciously performed action on the basis of reasons, and, subsequently, the acceptance by the subject of the action and its consequences. The consequences of the action belong to the action itself. We say: P is (prospectively or retrospectively) responsible for X towards Y based on certain normative principles Z. For the purpose of the discussion in this master thesis I take it that only human beings can be held accountable for their actions, and thus the subject P refers to a human individual. The object X refers to the action undertaken by P. That is, we presuppose here that without P performing her action X would not have occurred. Y represents the entity that holds P responsible, to which P should direct her response. On my account Y could be an institution that will, however, always be represented by human beings who enter into the rational deliberation with P about X while referring to Z. The normative principles Z then could be interpreted as a context of justification, in which the dialogue takes place between the parties involved in the question for responsibility. A context of justification is an environment in which P's actions and P's reasons for acting can be discussed, and where P can be held accountable. That is to say, P has the possibility to know beforehand (prospectively) on the basis of which criteria her actions will be judged. At the same time the persons (Y) who want to hold P (retrospectively) responsible, need to refer to Z within the context of justification to do so. It is important to mention that when P as an autonomous rational being decides to subject her actions within the context of justification to Z, she takes a moral responsibility. Hence, the concept of responsibility defined here is about moral responsibility since it refers explicitly to normative principles.

In relation to the Reductionist View on personal identity it should be questioned whether the notion of personal identity, (implicitly) presupposed by the above mentioned version of responsibility, can be made compatible to Parfit's View. Regarding this question many authors have noted that responsibility presupposes that the agent could have done otherwise, that is we presuppose the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP). This implies that in order for responsibility to have a meaning, first, the agent must have various options for action at her

¹¹⁵ Werner (2002), p. 521

disposal, and, second, that the agent herself chooses one of these options, and not an external influence nor that this choice happens by accident. In other words, the attribution of responsibility is only possible, when free decisions by autonomous persons can have a causal effect in the external world, without being itself determined.¹¹⁶ Whilst it should be noted that even a brief discussion of these presuppositions goes far beyond the scope of this master thesis, it is important to note here that the concept of responsibility would be void if it could not be based on human beings acting for reasons, on free will and agent causation. How can this be made consistent with a concept of personal identity that has abolished the subject of experiences like the Reductionist View? As in the case of desert (see Section 4.2) we can conclude that the case of responsibility runs into the same sort of difficulty. The Reductionist View implies that responsibility for past actions varies with the degree to which one is psychologically connected to those actions. That is, the degree to which we are responsible depends on the degree to which we have been able to establish the various relations between the experiences in our life that resulted in those actions. Under the Reductionist View it remains unclear how responsibility can be defined and how we can explain firmness of character and personal integrity over a longer period of time.

How can rights be brought into consistency with the Reductionist View on personal identity? What does it mean that we attribute rights to persons? Rights, and especially claim rights, we have discussed in Section 2.1, when we argued for a definition of the concept of intergenerational justice. Recall that rights appear in the following form: A has with respect to B a right to X on the basis of Y, whereby A is the subject and B the one for whom the obligation counts to respect the right A has. X defines the object of the rights' content and Y constitutes its foundation in the law.¹¹⁷ Such as with responsibility the more precise question is: can the notion of personal identity, (implicitly) assumed when conceptualising the right's subject A and its addressee B, be made compatible to the Reductionist View? In order for B to let her actions be restricted in view of the moral obligation she has to respect the right that A will have in the future, B must presuppose that A is (potentially) capable to exercise her right based on Y. This means that B must attribute to A the (potential) capability to subjectively judge whether her right has been violated. We should thus conceptualise A to be (potentially) in the position to determine a discrepancy between her situation at a particular moment t_2 and how that situation could have been, had B acted differently at t_1 . Subsequently, we should attribute to A the (potential) capability to judge whether the discrepancy detected in the previous step implies a

¹¹⁶ Werner (2002), 524-525

¹¹⁷ Hübenthal (2007), p. 283

violation of her right to live her life as a human being. And this presupposes that A (potentially) has a conception of what the ideal is to live a life as a human being, and whether her own life fits into this ideal. In addition, since we are talking here about rights, we must attribute to A the (potential) capability to extend the awareness of her own situation to that of all other human beings living at time t_2 that is her generation. In other words, when we attribute rights to A and derive moral obligations from those rights for B, we implicitly presuppose (potential) capabilities in A and B, which in turn are based on capabilities of rationality and autonomy in human beings. And, while returning to the question above, we should ask whether these capabilities are still being able to be brought in consistency with the Reductionist View. On my account, it is inconceivable to view the reasoning by A and B mentioned here to take place without presupposing a subject of experiences, the same subject which Parfit has eliminated from his View. The difficulty arises due to the contingency of (what has remained of) personal identity in Parfit's account. The changing of selves and the volatility in connectedness to experiences that can happen under the Reductionist View, would result in contingent ideals of a life as a human being and contingently changing interpretations by A of her own life against the background of that ideal. In other words, at time t_2 A might claim that her right to a life as a human being is violated, whereas at time t_2+1 she might withdraw this claim because of herself having changed in the mean time. The concept of rights needs as a foundation a more stable concept of personal identity than Parfit can offer with his Reductionist View.

In summary, we have found that in addition to the moral disadvantages Parfit has detected himself (Section 4.2) there are two more moral implications of the Reductionist View in the form of inconsistencies with the concepts of responsibility and rights. Our considerations show that these notions require another foundation in the form of a concept of personal identity than the Reductionist View.

4.5 On the phrase: "If P, then he would never have existed"

Finally, we shall return to the beginning from where Parfit started his argument for the NIP. This starting point can be traced back to the form of the Time-Dependence Claim: "if P, then he would never have existed", in which P is meant to constitute a sufficient condition for the non-existence of human beings. Interestingly, this phrase is used by almost all authors commenting on the Non-Identity Problem in a way that suggests that they deem it a neutral statement with an indisputable truth from which a journey towards a solution to the NIP can start. I question, however, whether it is at all possible to utter something meaningful about non-existence, let alone to give sufficient conditions for the non-existence of human beings. My claim is that the

statement “If P, then he would never have existed” begs already a specific concept of personal identity, and has therefore consequences for the way we think about future generations and their future right to live a life as a human being.

When we say: “if P, then he would never have existed”, we are presupposing at least two things. First, we seem to have an idea of what it is for a human being not to exist. Second, we assume that we can come up with sufficient conditions (P) for the non-existence of human beings. Let us consider these presuppositions in more detail. As to the first assumption, we are saying implicitly that we know what it is for a human being not to exist in any possible world at any possible time. Out of the situation of our current *existence* as a human being, we are claiming that we can think in a meaningful way about the *non-existence* of human beings, because we aim at formulating sufficient conditions for non-existence. But are we actually capable of making any meaningful statement about our own non-existence or the non-existence of others? There is one thing we know about non-existence: it is outside space and time. Since our usual imaginative capacities seem to be bounded to space and time, it seems difficult to formulate something meaningful about something that is outside space and time. As we have seen when we discussed the solution to the NIP that Lucas Meyer has proposed (see Section 3.6), we run into the same sort of difficulty when one compares non-existence to living with a severe handicap. Meyer considers non-existence as having zero value to a person and life with certain serious defects as having negative value. Since zero is better than negative, non-existence is judged better than living with a severe handicap. The problem with this analysis is that non-existence is given a value (zero), although there is no one to ascribe it to. Non-existence is neither good nor bad nor neutral for anyone, since good and bad can be attributed only to metaphysically identifiable persons. As David Heyd adequately describes: “We cannot say that someone who has no bank account can be considered as having a zero balance. For there is no person or bank account to which we can ascribe the value zero.”¹¹⁸ When we presuppose that we can ascribe certain properties to the situation that a person does not exist, and even formulate sufficient conditions for non-existence, we try to attribute a property to an entity which that entity cannot have. That is we make a Rylean category mistake.

To end the main part of this master thesis, I want to make some final remarks about the difficulty when using the phrase: “if P, then he would never have existed”, such as Parfit uses it at the beginning of part IV of *Reasons and Persons*. In Section 2.4 I mentioned that Parfit claims to have given only *necessary* conditions for the existence of human beings, when referring to the

¹¹⁸ Heyd (2009), p. 15

unique pair of spermatozoon and ovum from which we develop, but that, on my account, in his subsequent argument for the NIP it seems that Parfit presupposes, without further clarification, that the gametes of our parents constitute a *necessary and sufficient* condition for our existence. In other words, Parfit's argument for the NIP is based on the assumption that personal identity depends entirely on our genetic configuration.¹¹⁹ The reasons why we find it difficult to accepting the NIP as an objection to intergenerational justice are then as follows: first, we detect a flaw in the claim that we can say something meaningful about the non-existence of human beings; second, we acknowledge that when we accept the NIP, we are also forced to commit to a concept of personal identity (e.g. the Reductionist View), which is incompatible with a couple of ethical notions which we hold dear and without which we cannot run our societies. The foundation for formulating the NIP as an objection to intergenerational justice thus seems to depend on the notion of personal identity we employ. Parfit has chosen a concept of personal identity as his foundation from which the NIP is a logical implication. If we aim for a notion of intergenerational justice that is not hampered anymore by the NIP, and if we do not accept the moral consequences that follow from the concept of personal identity underlying the NIP, it is time that we start looking for another concept of personal identity, that is an account of personal identity which does not allow the NIP to show up.¹²⁰ The way we have found, therefore, to solving the NIP, does not consist in accepting this problem and its underlying concept of personal identity as something inevitable with which we are supposed to live for the time being ("The Intractability of the Nonidentity Problem"¹²¹), but should be sought in 'dissolving' the problem by starting the search for a concept of intergenerational justice on the basis of presupposing another concept of personal identity than Parfit's Reductionist View.

¹¹⁹ I agree with Clark Wolf (2009, p. 94) that "To some people, the claim that our identity depends on our genetic makeup in this way has seemed so obviously true as to need little supporting argument."

¹²⁰ Wolf (2009) has given an account of personal identity of which he claims that the NIP does not arise.

¹²¹ Heyd (2009)

5. Concluding reflections and remarks

5.1 Looking backward: have we contributed to solving the NIP?

In this master thesis I have considered a fundamental objection that has been raised against intergenerational justice in the form of the Non-Identity Problem, and I have tried to ‘dissolve’ this problem by arguing how it can be derived from presuppositions regarding the concept of personal identity. Looking backward to the thought process I have gone through, I would summarise this process as follows.

In order to be able to discuss the concepts of intergenerational justice and the Non-Identity Problem in relation to each other, I needed to clarify both concepts in the first place. I, therefore, started Chapter 2 by giving a brief outline of the concept of intergenerational justice, which arrived at a first formulation that “intergenerational justice is about the question: to what extent do current people have moral obligations to restrict their actions, or let their actions be legitimately restricted by a sovereign state, in view of the (future) right that future people will have to live a life as a human being?” I then introduced the NIP in detail based on Parfit’s text including two consequences of this problem (No-Difference View and Repugnant Conclusion), as argued by Parfit. Having provided the basic material for the master thesis in the form of the notions of intergenerational justice and the NIP, I confronted these concepts with each other in Section 2.4, in order to argue that the NIP indeed can be considered an objection to intergenerational justice. I argued for the justification of the subsequent discussion based on my own account developed so far, and based on literature concerning the NIP published in the course of 2009. As a means to structure the discussion in the remaining chapters, I gave a high level overview of various strategies to attack the NIP by summarising the relevant part of David Heyd’s article (2009).

Chapter 3 was devoted to reviewing the work of three authors with regard to the way they dealt with the Non-Identity Problem. As it turned out, although Unnerstall and Ott were not explicitly aiming at providing a strategy for solving the NIP, they named the NIP as the primary obstacle to their account of intergenerational justice, and they argued how this objection could be taken away. On the other hand, Meyer provided an account of intergenerational justice, and more specifically a notion of harm, with the objective to avoid the NIP. Since Meyer intends explicitly to contribute to solving the NIP, his article can be framed in terms of the strategies outlined by Heyd. However, the different ways of treating the NIP by these authors I did not find satisfactory

enough to form a basis for further developing an account of intergenerational justice that would not be hampered anymore by the NIP.

I started Chapter 4, whilst I was puzzled by the discrepancy between on the one hand the necessity to solve the NIP, as I argued for in Section 2.4, and on the other hand the somewhat unsatisfying solutions to the NIP, argued for by the authors whose work I commented on in Chapter 3. As I hinted at in the last paragraph of Section 2.4, it was my intuition that by assuming the NIP, as David Heyd calls it, to be *sui generis* and *intractable*, I felt myself forced to adopt certain presuppositions concerning personal identity that would lead to ethical positions regarding e.g. the “obligation not to beget children who are going to be miserable” (Meyer 2008) or Parfit’s No-Difference View (see Section 2.3), which I reject to begin with. This intuition motivated me to look for a concept of personal identity that would form a sufficient condition for the NIP. It seems that I did not need to look far away, since by reviewing specifically Parfit’s own account of personal identity (part III of *Reasons and Persons*), it became clear that this account was already what I was looking for. Based on the implication found between Parfit’s Reductionist View and the NIP (Section 4.3), I started to look for additional consequences of this View. Subsequent to the moral consequences of the Reductionist View argued by Parfit (Section 4.2), it turned out that the ethical notions of responsibility and rights could hardly be brought into consistency with this View (Section 4.4). Finally, I reflected on the statement that forms the starting point for Parfit’s formulation of the NIP: “if P, then he would never have existed” (Section 4.5). I detected serious flaws in using this statement both logically and morally.

Based on the reflections in the previous chapters I suggest that we could make progress with intergenerational justice by viewing our genetic makeup as a *necessary* condition for our existence but not as a *necessary and sufficient* condition. That is, the concept of personal identity suited to form a foundation for an account of ‘intergenerational justice-without-NIP’, should, in my view, be formulated taking this conclusion into account. The concept of personal identity on which we can build an account of intergenerational justice that is freed from the Non-Identity Problem should, on my account, be ‘Non-Reductionist’ in some sense of the word. To me personal identity in Parfit’s terms is a “deep further fact”, of which I realise that by searching for such a concept, the discussion about intergenerational justice and sustainability will get inevitably under the influence of discussions regarding the metaphysics of the subject. Others like David Heyd have come to similar conclusions (see Section 2.5).

5.2 Looking forward: options for further research

Having brought the project of this master thesis to an end for the time being, it would be interesting to mention some options for ways in which it could be continued. Below I mention briefly some possibilities that have come to my mind.

First, at the end of Section 4.1 I refer to a couple of Parfit's claims regarding his Reductionist View (Are persons separately existing entities? No; Is the person distinct from brain and body and a series of events? Yes; Is the Reductionist View necessarily a form of Physicalism? No). As it seems to me that Parfit's concept of personal identity has not been adopted in the mainstream of accounts in the philosophy of mind, it would be worthwhile to find out how Parfit's View can be regarded in connection with other views on personal identity, e.g. physicalism.

Second, following the overview of strategies for dealing with the NIP as provided by Heyd (2009) and the accounts by Unnerstall, Ott and Meyer referred to in Chapter 3, in my view a thorough literature study would be necessary, reviewing and evaluating all known strategies for solving the NIP with the objective to select those strategies that would be successful enough to continue the project of conceptualising intergenerational justice without being faced with the objection in the form of the NIP. Such a study would either strengthen or weaken the justification for continuing with the result of this master thesis that an account of intergenerational justice freed from the NIP should be formulated based on a 'non-reductionist' concept of personal identity.

Third, following the conclusion of this master thesis and after having carried out the above mentioned suggestions for further research, the main challenge lying ahead would be to search for possibilities to formulate intergenerational justice on the basis of a 'non-reductionist' concept of personal identity. It remains to be seen whether such an account, by introducing metaphysical elements into the concept of personal identity, would face more and heavier objections that turn out being as intractable as the NIP has been. Taking note, however, of the political situation the sustainability debate currently is in, that is after the UN conference on climate change has taken place December 2009 in Copenhagen, in my view, we have the moral obligation to also following this route in order to find a justification for saving the planet for future generations.

Literature

- Brundtland Report (1987), The World-Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford
- Düwell, M. (2003), *Der moralische Status von Embryonen und Feten*, In: Düwell, M., Steigleder, K., *Bioethik, eine Einführung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 221-229
- Friedman, M. (1970), *The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase its Profits*, New York Times Magazine, September 13, 1970
- Habermas, J. (1981), *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns Band 1*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, dritte durchgesehene Auflage 1985
- Haker, H. (2002), *Identität*, In: Düwell, M., Hübenthal, C., Werner, M., *Handbuch Ethik*, Verlag J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart, 394-399
- Heyd, D. (2009), *The Intractability of the Nonidentity Problem*, In: Roberts, M., Wasserman, D. (eds.), *Harming Future Persons: Ethics, Genetics and the Nonidentity Problem*, Springer, Dordrecht, 3-25
- Hübenthal, C. (2007), *Rechten*, In: Becker c.s., *Lexicon van de Ethiek*, Van Gorcum, 281-285
- Kavka, G. (1982), *The Paradox of Future Individuals*, Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 11 No. 2, 93-112
- Meyer, L. (2008), *Intergenerational Justice*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 26 February 2008, visited 12 December 2008
- Ott, K. (2004), *Essential Components of Future Ethics*, In: Döring, R., Rühls, M., *Ökonomische Rationalität und praktische Vernunft*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg, 83-108
- Parfit, D. (1982), *Future Generations: Further Problems*, Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 11 No. 2, 113-172
- Parfit, D. (1984), *Reasons and Persons*, Clarendon Press, Oxford
- Parfit, D. (1986), *Comments*, Ethics, Vol. 96 No. 4, 832-872
- Roberts, M., (2009), *The Nonidentity Problem*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 21 July 2009, visited 2 September 2009
- Roberts, M., Wasserman, D. (2009), *Introduction*, In: Roberts, M., Wasserman, D. (eds.), *Harming Future Persons: Ethics, Genetics and the Nonidentity Problem*, Springer, Dordrecht, xiii-xxxviii
- Ryberg, J., Tännsjö, T., Arrhenius, G. (2006), *The Repugnant Conclusion*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 16 February 2006, visited 2 September 2009

- Scarano, N. (2002), *Motivation*, In: Düwell, M., Hübenthal, C., Werner, M., *Handbuch Ethik*, Verlag J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart, 432-437
- SRU (2002), Sachverständigen Rat für Umweltfragen, *Umweltgutachten 2002: Für eine neue Voreiterrolle*, Metzler-Poeschel, Stuttgart
- Sturma, D. (2002), *Person*, In: Düwell, M., Hübenthal, C., Werner, M., *Handbuch Ethik*, Verlag J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart, 440-447
- Unnerstall, H. (1999), *Rechte zukünftiger Generationen*, Verlag Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg
- Unnerstall, H. (2003), *Intertemporale Gerechtigkeit*, In: Düwell, M., Steigleder, K., *Bioethik, eine Einführung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 422-434
- Werner, M. (2002), *Verantwortung*, In: Düwell, M., Hübenthal, C., Werner, M., *Handbuch Ethik*, Verlag J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart, 440-447
- Wolf, C. (2009), *Do Future Persons Presently Have Alternate Possible Identities*, In: Roberts, M., Wasserman, D. (eds.), *Harming Future Persons: Ethics, Genetics and the Nonidentity Problem*, Springer, Dordrecht, 93-114
- Woodward, J. (1986), *The Non-Identity Problem*, *Ethics*, Vol. 96 No. 4, 804-831
- Woodward, J. (1987), *Reply to Parfit*, *Ethics*, Vol. 97 No. 4, 800-816