

ever wonder...

... what do we owe to future people?



Do We Owe Far-Future People Enough?

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What do we owe to “far-future people” – that is, people who, if they ever come to exist, won’t come to exist for at least another hundred years? A prevalent view, both in the literature on intergenerational justice and international soft law, is that we owe far-future people at least enough to meet their “basic needs”: their needs for drinkable water, food, shelter, security, and perhaps also education and self-respect. I argue this apparently uncontroversial view is beset by a serious problem, and that existing attempts to solve it fail. I then offer a new solution. But though more successful than its predecessors, the solution has a disquieting upshot. Namely, even if we owe far-future people enough to meet their basic needs, that is all we owe them. We don’t also owe them, for example, the resources needed to enjoy lives as good or better than our own.

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