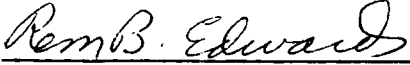
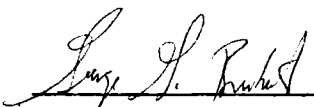


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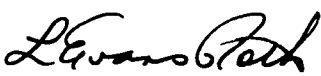
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Helen E. Uptain entitled "Our Responsibility to Future Generations." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.


Dwight Van de Vate, Jr., Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Helen E. Uptain

December 1980

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to
Professor Robert L. Perkins
who taught me to seek truth and to
Professor Dwight Van de Vate, Jr.
who taught me to avoid truth.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the question "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" The attempts of several authors to answer this question are examined. It is suggested that their answers to the question are unsatisfying because of their assumptions. A different approach which employs alternative assumptions is recommended so that we may give an adequate response to the question "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?"

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

A current issue of debate is whether or not we are responsible to future generations. Writers approach the question of our responsibility to future generations from two different perspectives. Some writers interpret it as an abstract question in ethical theory; that is, they ask if we ought to be responsible to future generations. They analyze the question in terms of duties and rights. Since they treat the question abstractly, these writers conclude that we are responsible to future generations.

In contrast, other writers emphasize the practical complications which would arise if we were to claim that we are responsible to future generations. They raise such issues as the selfishness of individuals, the uncertainty of the existence of future generations, our lack of knowledge of the needs of future generations, and our uncertainty about the effects of our actions upon the future. When these practical complications are emphasized, these writers conclude that our responsibility to future generations is greatly lessened and that our primary responsibility is to the present.

We might, at first, find unobjectionable the claim that future responsibilities are secondary to present responsibilities. It seems natural for us to give priority to the solving of the problems which currently confront us. However, it seems that if we allow the needs of today to take precedence over the needs of tomorrow, we may, in effect, be denying our responsibility to the future.

If we maintain that present needs have priority over future needs, it would seem that in a case in which the two conflict, we might automatically sacrifice the needs of the future for the sake of present needs. If this is what we do, then we may be paying only lip service to our future responsibilities. If we verbally uphold our responsibility to the future, but in our actual policy making sacrifice the needs of tomorrow for those of today, it seems that by our actions we are denying our responsibility to the future.

At this point, we seem to have a problem. We are faced with the question "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" When we adopt a theoretical approach, we answer in the affirmative. However, when we start working out all the details such a responsibility entails, we find ourselves lessening our responsibility to future generations. Does this mean that we do not have a responsibility to posterity in spite of the fact that when we consider the issue abstractly we affirm such a responsibility? As we look at several discussions of our responsibility to future generations, we will find ourselves perplexed in this way if we are trying to arrive at a rational answer to the question.

We might ask why it is important that we be able to give a rational answer to the question of our responsibility to future generations. Why should we even concern ourselves with trying to answer this question? There are several reasons why we should try to answer the question of our responsibility to future generations.

In recent years we have become acutely aware of environmental problems. We now realize that our natural resources are not unlimited. We know that the population of the world is increasing at an alarming

rate. We are beginning to experience bad effects from pollution. In a television advertisement, a child with an innocent face tells us that our generation enjoyed clean air and water; his generation would like to do the same. Our attitude toward these ecological matters will have an impact on the quality of life of future generations. Clearly, then, there are significant practical reasons to investigate our responsibility to future generations.

There are also reasons which make this an interesting question for a philosopher. First, the philosophical consideration of such a problem shows that philosophy can have a practical payoff. In recent years, philosophy has tended to become increasingly abstract. For the most part, only philosophers read philosophic literature. Philosophers tend to talk only to each other; they tend to interact as philosophers less and less with the members of other academic disciplines or with persons in the non-academic world. As a result, philosophy has tended to become a purely self-contained discipline. When we investigate a question such as our responsibility to future generations, we are demonstrating that philosophical analysis need not be pure scholasticism. Philosophy has traditionally affected the everyday world, and it can do so now. Philosophical analysis can help us understand a problem which is of tremendous practical concern. Hence, philosophy can justify its existence as a productive force in society.

Furthermore, the question of our responsibility to future generations raises interesting philosophical issues. We can answer this question only after we have investigated the nature of responsibility and the nature of the future. A consideration of the nature of responsibility and the nature of the future brings to light some

fundamental questions. Thus, the question of our responsibility to future generations is interesting on philosophic grounds.

Finally, the question of our responsibility to future generations is important because consideration of it shows the significance of metaphysics. We said that basic issues in philosophy appear when we begin our analysis of the problem. Our investigation will show that our answers to these fundamental questions will affect our answer to the question of our responsibility to future generations. What we accept as given or what we accept as most real defines our metaphysics. Our metaphysics, in turn, determines our approach to problems and our approach to problems influences the solutions we will produce. When we investigate the question of our responsibility to future generations, we find that our metaphysical views play a crucial role in our philosophizing.

In summary, the question of our responsibility to future generations is worthy of our consideration for several reasons. The question is of practical concern to the members of our society. In addition, the question is significant for philosophers because it provides a means by which we can justify our existence as philosophers to society, it raises interesting philosophical issues and it shows the significance of metaphysics.

We said that the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" is at times treated as an abstract, theoretical question and at times treated as a practical question. An abstract approach is one which considers whether or not in general we ought to be responsible to future generations whereas a practical approach is

one which considers the concrete difficulties which arise when we undertake to be responsible to future generations.

In the preface to his Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Immanuel Kant states that ethics contains both a rational and an empirical part. The rational part of ethics is morals proper which seeks to discover universal, necessary laws that are derived from pure reason. A moral law is a precept which rests solely in the concepts of pure reason. Since it is absolutely necessary, a moral law commands obedience. In contrast, the empirical part of ethics is practical anthropology which studies the circumstances under which men live and the ways in which men conduct themselves in experience. A practical precept is a rule which rests on empirical grounds. Because it is a contingent historical rule, a practical precept does not command obedience. According to Kant, the rational and the empirical must be kept separate when we are trying to establish the ground of morality which lies in pure reason alone. The foundation of morality is derived from pure reason, not from the empirical world.

This distinction between the rational and empirical parts of ethics parallels the distinction between the abstract and practical approaches to the question of our responsibility to future generations. An abstract or rational approach asks if we should be responsible to future generations. Such an approach considers a responsibility to be necessarily binding and outside of history. On the other hand, a practical or empirical approach asks if it is possible for us to be responsible to future generations given the actual conditions of our existence. This approach considers the particular, contingent, historical nature of such a responsibility.

We will look at several detailed attempts to answer the question of our responsibility to future generations. We will begin by looking at abstract approaches to the question as represented by Joel Feinberg and Immanuel Kant. Next we will turn to the practical complications raised by Thomas Derr, M. P. Golding and John Passmore. After looking at their attempts to answer the question, we will examine their common assumptions to see if their assumptions cause the difficulties which their discussions produce. We will suggest that these writers all maintain that responsibilities are assigned to man from a source outside of man, that the individual and society are separate antagonistic entities and that time is a given. Through examining these assumptions, we will find that a question of responsibility by its very nature presupposes the existence of man as a social being. This places the question of our responsibility to future generations in a socio-historical context. Trying to address the question on an abstract historical level results in only a partial answer. We are historical creatures and, as such, we should take into account the specific conditions of our existence. We will find that when the assumptions of these writers are brought into question, the practical complications that they have raised tend to disappear. Then, we will be ready to try to give our own answer to the question "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?"

CHAPTER 2

ABSTRACT APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

Joel Feinberg in his article, "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations," approaches the problem of our responsibility to future generations on an abstract level. He tries to clarify the notion of a right and of those who may legitimately claim to have rights. He says that he makes the following two assumptions: first, that in 500 years there will be a world which is inhabited by human beings who are much like us; second, that it is psychologically possible for us to care about our remote descendants. We want to protect the environment for our children because of our love for them. "But from the perspective of our remote descendants, it is basically a matter of justice, of respect for their rights."¹

Therefore, we have to examine the notion of a right. "To have a right is to have a claim to something and against someone, the recognition of which is called for by legal rules or, in the case of moral rights, by the principles of an enlightened conscience."² A person or entity has a right only if it has interests. A mere thing such as the Taj Mahal or a natural wilderness does not have rights

¹Joel Feinberg, "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations," in Philosophy and Environmental Crisis, edited by William T. Blackstone (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 43.

²Ibid., pp. 43-44.

because it does not have interests. A thing is not protected for its own sake, but for ours. A mere thing has no good of its own that it strives to fulfill because it has no conative life. If a thing has interests, it must have at least rudimentary cognitive equipment. A person or entity has rights only if it possesses conscious wishes, urges, unconscious goals, or natural fulfillments. Interests arise from conations and rights are grounded in interests. Derr presents his interest principle when he writes, ". . . the sorts of beings who can have rights are precisely those who have (or can have) interests."³

When we apply the interest principle to unborn fetuses, we find it reasonable to have legal protections for unborn fetuses because the potential persons have many potential interests and, thus, may legitimately claim rights against us. In the same way, it is reasonable to speak of the rights of future generations. Future humans are like fetuses; they are more remote, but they will one day exist. They will have interests and we affect their interests by the decisions which we make today.

The problem is not whether future generations will exist, but who they will be. Humans of the future are faceless, nameless, and unrelated to us. That is the real reason that we have difficulty in accepting our responsibilities toward them.

We see Feinberg asserting in a general way that future generations do indeed have rights against us. He does not consider our ignorance in regard to the specific interests of posterity. Nor does he question the existence of future humanity, but merely assumes this

³Ibid., p. 51.

as a starting point. In general, he treats the question on an abstract level, although his practical comments on the facelessness of future generations are well taken.

I would like to suggest a different analogy between the unborn fetus and unborn generations which I feel is much stronger as an argument for our responsibility to posterity. Feinberg says that the fetus and distant posterity are similar in that they both will certainly exist. However, I feel a more realistic appraisal of the situation is better. I would suggest that the fetus and unborn generations are similar in that they are both merely potentialities. The fetus may possibly naturally abort itself or be stillborn. Yet, if this happens, we do not say that the prospective parents were foolish for making sacrifices for an entity whose existence was merely hypothetical. Likewise, we should not consider it odd for our species to be concerned about its potential offspring. Our lives have a purpose because we believe that the human race will continue. It is natural for us to have and act in accordance with such a belief. Nevertheless, we may be wrong.

Like Feinberg, Immanuel Kant addresses the question of our responsibility to future generations on an abstract level. He emphasizes that man is a member of a species and not a solitary animal. There must be a purpose given to man by nature. Kant suggests that the full development of his natural capacities is the goal for which man strives. Obviously, a single individual cannot fully realize all his potentialities during his brief life time. He will succeed in some areas and fail in others. He builds on the accomplishments of his

predecessors and furnishes his descendants with better conditions upon which a more promising future may be built. Although the individual perishes, the species survives and continues to struggle toward the achievement of its goal. Earlier generations work for the benefit of later generations. There is progress in history.

According to Kant, the human race has already accomplished a great deal. We have moved from savagery to social cooperation in political communities. "We are civilized to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties. But we are still a long way from the point where we could consider ourselves morally mature."⁴ We still have a long way to go before we can fulfill our purpose. Until we do so, we have a responsibility to perpetuate the species and aid mankind in its struggle for fulfillment. We must do all we can to bring about the realization of all our natural capacities. We will be successful only in the proper environment which Kant describes as an international federation of states. When world-wide peace is attained, then man will be able to more actively pursue his betterment.

The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally--and for this purpose also externally--perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.⁵

Hence, we are responsible to posterity to bring about world cooperation and peace as quickly as possible. We must do everything we can to

⁴Immanuel Kant, Kant's Political Writings, edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 49.

⁵Ibid., p. 50.

insure a good future. We have to care about the future because it will be inhabited by our descendants who are a part of our species.

If we want to attack Kant's position, the best place to begin is with his notion of man's purpose as completely realizing all his natural capacities. We might want to question whether man's purpose is somehow given to him by nature. If there is no purpose for the species, then Kant's argument for our responsibility to unborn generations is refuted. However, it is difficult to criticize the ideas that mankind should strive for improvement and that this belief requires an awareness of the individual as a member of the human species. Thus, on an abstract level, with modifications, Kant presents a strong argument for our responsibility to future generations. However, he does not consider practical problems at all.

At this point, we need to consider Kant's view of the relationship between an individual and society. On the surface, this relationship appears to be cooperative. However, in his moral philosophy, Kant makes it quite clear that the individual and society are basically antagonistic. An individual possesses personal pernicious inclinations which are counter to the good of society. The moral person is one who courageously rises above his personal inclinations and acts from duty. The moral individual wills the moral law which is ". . . I should never act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be a universal law."⁶ In so doing, he removes the influence of his inclinations.

⁶Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by Lewis White Beck (New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959), p. 18.

Let us apply this view of the relationship between the individual and society to Kant's discussion of our responsibility to future generations. A person's inclination is not to be concerned about the future of the species, but only about his petty self-interests. An individual must strive to overlook his own needs and consider the needs of future generations. Thus, a responsibility to future generations is morally required of us, but as individuals, we must struggle in order to accept this responsibility.

We have seen Kant claim that we are responsible to future generations because we must perpetuate the species so that man can realize his full potential. This does not mean that Kant derives a moral obligation from the purpose given to man from nature. The ultimate obligation derives from the fact that each individual man can will that the maxim "I should strive to perpetuate the species so that man can realize his full potential" be a universal law. The realizing of the purpose given by nature is the secondary basis of obligation; the willing of the maxim as a universal law is the primary basis of obligation.

So far, we have examined two abstract approaches to the problem of our responsibility to future generations. We found that both Feinberg and Kant conclude that we do have a responsibility to future generations. In the next chapter, we will look at some attempts to answer the question which lessen our responsibility to future generations because of practical complications.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL COMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we will examine the attempts of Thomas Derr, M. P. Golding and John Passmore to answer the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" All these writers consider both abstract and concretely practical aspects of the problem. As a result, their conclusions are quite different from those of Feinberg and Kant. We will first consider Thomas Derr's treatment of the question.

In his book, Ecology and Human Need, Thomas Derr considers the question of our responsibility to future generations. He seems to move from one side of the issue to the other without ever taking a firm stand on either side. Derr analyzes our responsibility in terms of reciprocal relationships, self-interests, moral instincts and finally religious commitments.

Derr begins by saying that we need to extend our sense of responsibility in ecological matters both spatially and temporally. We have already done so spatially because of our awareness of our dependency upon others. If a city upstream pollutes a river, any cities downstream will be adversely affected. And on even a global scale, we now realize that if one country pollutes the air or ocean or wastes some valuable natural resource, other countries will suffer. Thus, because of our interdependency and self-interests, we have become cognizant of our responsibilities to our neighbors on a wide geographical scale.

If we try to extend our temporal responsibilities by this same reasoning, we will fail, for obviously we do not have reciprocal relationships with future generations. Therefore, Derr suggests that we might attempt to base our sense of responsibility upon self-interest. This might be done by appealing to our sense of collective immortality. If we can identify with the group, i.e., the human race, which outlives us as individuals, we may come to feel a responsibility to future generations. However, Derr feels that we will not identify with a group as large as the human race because our group identification is always motivated by a desire to separate our particular group from the rest of mankind.

But judging by history, the odds are against this wider identification. Historically the phenomenon appears in tribal, ethnic, or national chauvinism directed against other men. It is particular in impact, not general. I will survive only in my country, my race. Others are not my descendants and do not carry me on in eternal human life, so what I do now is meant to benefit only "my kind."⁷

Derr concludes that group identification is more likely to cause conflicts among nations than to aid global cooperation in ecological matters.

One may question Derr's reading of history here. Certainly, the definition of "my kind" has been continually including more people. To name just a few, we have moved from tribal to county to city to country to continental to hemispheric identifications. Or more specifically, in this country alone there has been a tremendous change in attitude in the last 200 years concerning group identification.

⁷Thomas Seiger Derr, Ecology and Human Need (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 92.

Our founding fathers considered themselves firstly Virginian or Georgian and only secondarily American, whereas today we consider ourselves firstly American and only secondarily Tennessean. Our forefathers would be astonished at the changes in governmental power and our attitudes toward state and federal government. The point of this is that it seems quite reasonable that eventually we will enlarge the concept of "my kind" so that it will refer to the human race as a whole. In fact, some men--for example, Kant--have already argued for such a concept. Hence, Derr too easily rejects one possible manner of extending our sense of responsibility. He treats group identification as a static rather than a temporally dynamic process.

Returning to Derr's exposition, he next presents the argument that if we are not responsible for the future, then we are not able to deal with the present. As a result, the present loses its meaning and sense of purpose. Our ideals of freedom, justice and happiness for the present all contain explicit commitments to the future. Denying an obligation to our posterity denies our responsibility to preserve our social institutions and ideals. Derr discards this approach for two reasons. First, this argument credits social ideals with too much power. Second, it does not take us past two generations because we do not know if our social ideals will be appropriate for distant posterity.

Once again Derr might be held to reject too readily this argument. First, social ideals wield an incredible amount of power over our actions. We make sacrifices continually for their sake. In some instances we even die for them--as in revolutions or protests as

exemplified by priests and students who burned themselves in Vietnam. Second, if we assume that our ideals are appropriate for our grandchildren, there is no reason to assume that they are inappropriate for our great-great-grandchildren or that we are not as interested in their continuance for our distant descendants. Thus, by his arguments, Derr has not successfully refuted the effectiveness of self-interest in temporally extending our sense of responsibility.

However, having demonstrated the ineffectiveness of self-interest to his own satisfaction, Derr proffers an appeal to our moral instincts regarding the rights of future generations. He points out that we are responsible for our actions even if we are not around to witness their results. "The word 'responsibility' itself means that we must 'answer' to someone for our acts after we commit them."⁸ Of course, this answering does not literally mean that we must be able to communicate actively with our descendants, but that they will judge us according to decisions that we are making now. A further appeal is directed toward our moral instincts by emphasizing our indebtedness to our ancestors. Since we cannot repay our ancestors directly, Derr suggests that we demonstrate our thankfulness to our forefathers by laying the foundation for a good future for our descendants.

Someone might object that we are not responsible for future generations because we have no way of knowing what will be good for them. Derr answers this objection in three ways. First, he says that certainly future generations will differ from us, but the similarities will outweigh the differences. Second, the basic needs of posterity

⁸Ibid., p. 94.

will be the same as ours. They will require air, water, space, food and shelter. Third, he asserts that "These people will one day be alive; as their existence is not just hypothetical, they will actually experience the consequences of our acts."⁹ Therefore, we are responsible for providing future generations with at least the minimum requirements for a good life.

Derr's assumptions here are questionable. We do not know that future generations will be more similar than different to us. One could argue for instance that there are more differences than similarities in the lives of the Teutonic Tribes and present generations. Also, the basic needs may be redefined so that food or shelter or space may be totally different from what now satisfies our needs. Future generations may live in plastic domes and swallow one pill a day for nourishment. Finally, we do not know for a fact that future generations will exist. We certainly like to believe that they will, but we do not know that they will. Derr, however, wants to conclude that moral instincts are stronger motivations than self-interest so his reasoning here is rather tendentious.

Although Derr feels that he has established the power of moral instincts to expand our temporal responsibilities, he further attempts to strengthen the rights of unborn generations through religion. God is outside of time, history and natural processes. He cares for both past and future generations. Thus, we are responsible for future generations since they fall under God's care. God sees a unity in generations as demonstrated by his promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and

⁹Ibid., p. 95.

their descendants. There is a further unity of generations in the doctrine of communion of saints. Also, in a general sense, the generation gap is breached in that all generations are present in Christ. The divine love is love for all. As a result, God holds us accountable for the effects of our actions upon all generations. In Derr's words,

But if we really know and feel our answerability to a God who stands outside the processes of nature and the course of history, our responsibility in our actions has to extend forward in time as far as those actions have consequences. We are dealing with the Lord of creation, and his purposes extend far beyond our personal lives. Generations past and unborn are all part of this providence. To love such a God moves us powerfully to serve our future fellow humans, more powerfully, I suspect, than any simple rational reflections on the inherent nature of debt and repayment, or any direct reliance on our moral intuitions. Here is motivation capable of transcending the natural instincts of man and lifting us to new ethical dimensions.¹⁰

Here Derr's argument leaves philosophy, however, and becomes a matter of faith. It seems inconsistent to reject expanding our temporal responsibilities by identifying with the human race on the grounds of the selfish and shortsighted nature of mankind, and then subsequently to appeal to the teaching of a new ethic through Christianity. Certainly, if men can be taught humanitarian values through a Christian belief system, they can be taught humanitarian values on a secular basis as well. Furthermore, Derr is concerned with breaking the bonds of self-interest, but ultimately his appeal to Christianity is founded upon a self-concern for being held accountable by God for the lives of future generations.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Given the fact that we have some obligation to future generations, Derr asks how we are to choose between the present and the future when our obligations to them are in conflict. For instance, are we to allow premature deaths today so that tomorrow's world will not be overpopulated? The ecologists tend to argue for long-range responsibilities while today we have many poor and needy people who suffer. Derr concludes that the suffering of the present is real and known for sure while future suffering is less tangible. Hence, we should make our first priority answering the needs of the present, but also keep in mind the needs of the future. In his words:

The best course for the sensitive conscience would seem to be first the elimination of those evils which are certain and currently experienced, and then management of the longer-term consequences as well as possible.¹¹

In summary, Thomas Derr approaches the problem of our responsibility to posterity abstractly and practically. When Derr emphasizes the abstract aspect--namely, whether we ought to have a responsibility to future generations--he answers yes. However, when Derr emphasizes the practical aspect--namely, is it practically feasible for us to have a responsibility to future generations--he responds that present needs are more important than future needs.

Like Derr, M. P. Golding considers both abstract and concrete, practical issues when trying to answer the question, "Do we have an obligation to future generations?" Golding addresses this question in his article, "Obligations to Future Generations." Let us now examine his attempt to answer the question.

¹¹Ibid., p. 99.

Golding begins by analyzing the nature of claims made by unborn generations and suggesting the criteria for determining the validity of their claims. He considers what kind of obligations we might have for the future. Limits are set on the definition of future generations. Obviously, it excludes the presently living, but for Golding's purposes it also excludes our most immediate descendants--our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We will not share a common life with future generations as we will with our immediate posterity.

Having defined what he means by future generations, Golding next examines what obligations we have to them. He says that we do not have many, but a single obligation to the future. "Obligations to future generations are essentially an obligation to produce--or to attempt to produce--a desirable state of affairs for the community of the future, to promote conditions of good living for future generations."¹² Our obligation is not a list of specific duties, but a responsibility for the general well-being of future generations. This obligation parallels the responsibility of a parent for his child's welfare. The parent must use discretion and continually make decisions in attempting to raise his child. In the same way, future generations demand that we provide for their general well-being.

But future generations are unborn. How can they make claims against us? A distinction must be drawn between having claims and making claims. A person cannot establish a right by merely claiming it. Also, a person may have a right and not actively claim it or even be

¹²M. P. Golding, "Obligations to Future Generations," in The Monist, 56:1 (January, 1972), p. 86.

capable of claiming it, as in the case of the mentally disturbed. Thus, we should not confuse having a right with claiming a right. Golding proposes two criteria for establishing the validity of a claim to a right--the claim must measure up to the social ideal and it must be put forward by a person who is a member of my moral community.

If we want to establish the validity of a claim to a right, we must first ask the question, "Does this claim coincide with the social ideal?" Golding defines the social ideal as ". . . a conception of the good life for man."¹³ The claim must be judged according to this standard. It may not challenge the social ideal nor may it be frivolous. If the claim is not frivolous and agrees with the social ideal, then we must ask the second question which is, "Does the person making this claim upon me belong to my moral community?"

The concept of a moral community requires some elucidation. Golding points out that we are members of many different moral communities which demand varying responsibilities from us. Moral communities may be generated in three different ways. First, the members may draw up an explicit contract which specifies duties and responsibilities. Second, there may be a social arrangement in which each member derives benefits from the efforts of the other members. In this case there are specialized obligations based upon the self-interests of the members. Obviously, future generations cannot be members of our moral community in either of these ways. It is physically impossible to arrange an explicit contract or to have reciprocal relationships with the unborn.

¹³Ibid., pp. 89-90.

Perhaps, then, they are members in the third type of moral community which is one based upon altruistic impulses and fellow-feeling. The altruism must not be mindless or based upon vague feelings. Instead, it must be a conscious concern with a definite conception of what is good for the persons in question. Furthermore, what is recognized as good for the other person must also be good for me. Only then is the basis of obligation secure.

Thus, what must be asked in any particular case is whether the person making the claim is a member in my moral community. Golding sets up the hypothetical situation of a man from Mars or Venus arriving on earth and demanding to be treated the same as a human. We would undoubtedly be skeptical at first and wonder if our conception of the good life would be applicable to him. However, if he himself accepted our standards and demanded to be treated according to them, Golding concludes that we would be obliged to recognize his claims as legitimate and accept him as a member of our moral community.

The claims of future generations may now be considered. The same method of determining legitimacy applies here as above. The alien being is accepted because he adopts our values, our social ideal. In the same way, "Future generations are members of our moral community because, and insofar as, our social ideal is relevant to them, given what they are and their conditions of life."¹⁴ The basis of obligation for strangers, future generations and immediate posterity is the same.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 95.

Our obligation to immediate posterity is strengthened by our affection for them. Like our obligation to future generations, it is not based upon explicit contract or personal advantage. However, there is a crucial difference between immediate posterity and future generations--namely, we know what our immediate descendants' lives will be like, but we have no knowledge of the distant future. We do not know what the conditions of life will be so how can we know what will be good for future generations? In other words, future generations may not share our social ideal. They may even be as far removed from our values as to be programmed men who are electronically controlled and certainly we have no responsibility to such a human. Thus, Golding concludes by saying:

We would be both ethically and practically well-advised to set our sights on more immediate generations and, perhaps, solely upon our immediate posterity. After all, even if we do have obligations to future generations, our obligations to immediate posterity are undoubtedly much clearer.¹⁵

At this point, I would like to examine Golding's distinction between our knowledge of what is good for our immediate posterity and our knowledge of what is good for future generations. A common conclusion among writers on the topic of our responsibility to future generations is that we are not responsible to future generations because we cannot know what the future will be like. Yet invariably, like Golding, they uphold our responsibility to our immediate descendants. I find this to be an inconsistency.

The argument is fairly simple. Based upon the premise that we have some idea of the immediate future, Golding claims that we are

¹⁵Ibid., p. 98.

responsible for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Based upon the premise that we can have no knowledge of the distant future, Golding claims that we are not responsible for future generations. But, there is a serious problem with the above argument. To express the matter curtly, the future is one future, not future A and future B. Either we can have knowledge of the future or we cannot. The nature of the future is such that we can never have knowledge of it. We can no more know what the world will be like in two generations than in ten. For all we know, before our own lives end, we may see such striking changes that our current social ideal and our conception of the good life will be completely discarded.

To make my objection clear, in order to maintain consistency in our thinking, if we reject our responsibility to future generations because of our lack of knowledge of the future, we must also reject our responsibility to our children because of our lack of knowledge of their future. We will return to this topic later since I feel it is a crucial distinction which most writers on the subject seem to take for granted.

In summary, Golding employs both abstract and practical considerations in his discussion. For the most part he is concerned with abstract problems such as defining a right and a moral community and establishing the criteria for determining the validity of claims made against us. He also makes use of practical problems such as our lack of knowledge about the life style of future generations. Thus, Golding in general sets up the problem in an abstract framework and then answers it in a practical manner.

We have seen Derr and Golding take into account both abstract and practical issues when considering the question of our responsibility to future generations. In his book Man's Responsibility for Nature, John Passmore meshes abstract and practical considerations. The result is a confused argument in that he vacillates between asserting and denying our responsibility to posterity. We will examine in particular his treatment of the question of conservation.

Passmore says that the belief that we should be concerned with the needs of our descendants contains the following two assumptions: First, if we are not concerned with the needs of our descendants, they will suffer and second, it is our duty to prevent or mitigate the sufferings of future generations. Thus, the problem is presented in abstract terms in that it is claimed that we ought to prevent the sufferings of future generations. However, criticisms of the above position are stated in practical terms.

There are several practical responses. For instance, one response is that no matter how much we conserve resources, eventually our supplies will be exhausted. Another response takes the opposite position that we do not have to conserve because the development of future technology will enable posterity to utilize new sources of energy such as fusion power and solar energy. This argument is refuted nicely by Passmore in the following passage:

Men can learn to substitute one source of energy or one metallic alloy for another, the more plentiful for the less plentiful. But that is the most they can do. They cannot harness energy without machines, without radiating heat, without creating wastes. Nor can they safely presume that no source of energy, no metal, is indispensable; there is nothing either in the structure of

nature or in the structure of human intelligence to ensure that new resources will always be available to replace old resources.¹⁶

Returning to the criticisms of our responsibility to future generations, another objection is that we cannot provide for posterity's needs because we do not even know what those needs will be. Also, the existence of posterity is merely hypothetical so we have no commitments to it. These last two objections have already been rejected in our previous discussions of Golding and of Feinberg. Finally, one last practical objection is stated. Since we are not able to solve today's problems, we cannot be expected to expend our energy (or conserve it, as the case may be) in trying to solve tomorrow's problems. Passmore writes:

We are confronted, in the present, by evils of every kind: in some of the developing countries by precisely the starvation, the illiteracy, the abysmal housing, the filth and disease which we fear for posterity; in many of our own cities by urban decay, impoverished schools, rising tides of crime and violence. . . . One can easily be led to the conclusion that it would be better to let the morrow look after itself and to concentrate, as more than sufficient, upon the evils of our own time.¹⁷

Passmore continues by considering our view toward history and our control over the future. We have moved from a cyclical to a linear view of history as expressed in St. Augustine, who believed that God would provide for the future. Now, however, we believe that man himself determines what the future will bring. Passmore questions this assumption. He agrees that there is no guiding hand which assures a

¹⁶John Passmore, Man's Responsibility for Nature (Great Britain, Unwin Brothers Limited, 1974), p. 77.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 79.

good future, but he doubts whether ". . . the future lies entirely in men's own hands, if this is taken to imply that, given sufficient goodwill, men need not fear for the future--or, more generally, that once men decide what they want the future to be like they can bring it to pass."¹⁸ Continuing with this theme, Passmore points out that we may have good intentions and yet bring about more harm than good.

As to his first criticism, the conservationist does not have to make the claim that the future lies entirely in man's hand to defend his position. He can make the weaker claim that man has an effect upon the future and thus should act with this responsibility in mind. As to the second objection, again we see abstract and practical issues merging. Passmore asks the moral question if we ought to conserve and then answers no because practically our actions may bring about different results than those which we intend. By analogy, then, we should not teach moral values to our children since they may twist our teachings into perverted ethical beliefs and harm themselves and others. In other words, if we consistently apply Passmore's principle, we can never justify any act because the results are always unknown to us.

Finding all rational justifications lacking, Passmore attempts to ground his justification of conservation and concern for the future in love. He sees love as providing a link between generations. Because we love our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, we are concerned about the condition of the world in which they will live. In Passmore's words:

¹⁸Ibid., p. 81.

There is, then, no novelty in a concern for posterity, when posterity is thought of not abstractly--as "the future of mankind"--but as a world inhabited by individuals we love or feel a special interest in, a world containing institutions, social movements, forms of life to which we are devoted--or, even, a world made up of persons some of whom might admire us.¹⁹

Thus, we are concerned with the needs of immediate posterity. However, we do not have to concern ourselves with remote posterity. According to Passmore, Golding may be correct when he suggests that in the distant future man may live in totalitarian states and be entirely foreign to us. Therefore, we should make sacrifices for our immediate descendants, but not for distant posterity. Also, we may sacrifice our pleasures, but we are not called upon to sacrifice our loves for freedom, art, philosophy, science and personal relationships. "We should try so to act that our successors will not be wholly without electricity, but we need not, should not, close down our civilization merely in the hope that a remote posterity will have some hope of surviving."²⁰

Passmore states that his conclusions are limited and uncertain. I agree wholeheartedly. He exaggerates his case in the above quote for I do not think that any conservationists are asking that we close down our civilization. Furthermore, Passmore does not stipulate the boundaries of our concern. Where does immediate posterity end and distant posterity begin? Can we love for only three generations, or four, or six, or ten, and so on? Passmore does not define his terms carefully. If we can love our great-grandchildren who are mere

¹⁹Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰Ibid., p. 91.

possibilities to us now, why cannot we love our great-grandchildren's great-grandchildren? Where does our love end?

We have seen John Passmore invoke both abstract and concrete, practical considerations when considering the question of our responsibility to posterity. When he asks if we ought to be responsible, he answers that through love we are responsible to future generations. However, when he asks if we are practically capable of being responsible, he lessens our obligation to future generations. He concludes that our primary responsibility is to the present.

We have examined the attempts of several writers to answer the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" Let us now briefly summarize the conclusions reached by the writers which we have considered. First, Joel Feinberg treats the question of our responsibility to future generations primarily in an abstract manner by clarifying the concept of a right and concludes that unborn generations can rightfully make claims upon those of us living today. Second, Immanuel Kant adopts a purely abstract posture and argues that we do indeed have a moral obligation to provide future generations the conditions for a better life. Third, Thomas Derr tries to maintain a middle ground. When he takes an abstract approach to the problem, Derr asserts that we are responsible to future generations on moral grounds. However, when he takes a practical stance, Derr says that the needs of today are more important than the needs of tomorrow. Hence, our primary responsibility is to the present. Fourth, M. P. Golding also varies in his feelings on the matter. When he asks the abstract question "What is a right?" Golding suggests that we do have responsibilities to future generations. On the other hand, when he considers

practical problems such as our lack of knowledge of the future, Golding lessens our responsibility to future generations and emphasizes our responsibility to the present. Finally, John Passmore expresses different opinions on the subject. When he approaches the problem abstractly, Passmore says that through love we are responsible to posterity. In contrast, when he approaches the problem practically, Passmore says that we should be concerned with the present primarily and with the future only secondarily.

In summarizing the conclusions of these authors, it seems apparent that our approach to the question of our responsibility to future generations determines what our answer to the question will be. An abstract approach leads to the positing of an obligation to posterity while a practical approach leads to the weakening of our obligations to posterity. Everyone seems to want to say that we ought to be responsible, but many claim that because of practical considerations we cannot be responsible for the future. The question of our responsibility to future generations contains practical elements and we must deal with them. Yet, when we consider the practical complications involved, we inevitably lessen our responsibility to future generations. For this reason, the discussions we have considered are unsatisfying.

CHAPTER 4

A STEP BACKWARDS

We have looked at several attempts to answer the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" We found these discussions unsatisfying because all the writers claim that we ought to be responsible to posterity, but those writers who raise practical complications lessen our responsibility. What is accomplished by proclaiming that we ought to be responsible to future generations if we turn around and say that practically speaking we cannot have such a responsibility? Or what is gained if we address the question purely on an abstract level and never consider the problems involved in actually fulfilling such a responsibility?

We may find the source of these problems if we examine the common assumptions of Feinberg, Kant, Derr, Golding and Passmore. These writers share the following three assumptions. First, they all believe that responsibilities are assigned to man from a source outside of man. Second, they all view the individual and society as separate, antagonistic entities. And, third, they all treat time as a given. If we carefully consider these assumptions, we may find the cause of our difficulties.

Let us begin with the assumption that man's responsibilities are given to him from a source outside of man. Clearly, all the writers we have considered believe this to be true. This assumption becomes most clear when we note that our authors assume the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" has an answer which is already

determined and our goal is simply to discover the answer. They do not discuss the problem as if we have to decide whether or not we will assume such a responsibility. Instead, they act as if the question of our responsibility to posterity has already been decided for us and we simply have to find out what the answer is. They expect to find a simple "yes" or "no" as an answer which settles the question for all time. This attitude suggests that the answer to the question is ahistorical and, as such, beyond man.

We can develop this point by considering Kant's moral philosophy. Kant's official position is that man creates the moral law. The fourth formulation of the categorical imperative is the principle of autonomy which states, "Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same volition as a universal law."²¹ An act can only be moral if it is willed by an autonomous person. An act which is done to gain a result in the empirical world or done on a command from authority is heteronomous and therefore not a moral act. Such an act is not done from pure duty. Only an autonomous will can be free of all interest. The autonomous person wills the universal law and is subject to it only for that reason. Kant says that the moral law is a self-legislated law.

However, Kant's sole purpose is the establishment of an objective, necessary, moral law. Therefore, the moral law must be the same for all people or all times. But, if this is the case, the moral law has an existence of its own and imposes itself on the human will. In fact, Kant distinguishes the subjective principles of the will from

²¹Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, p. 59.

the moral law by saying that they are merely contingent and are discarded when they are no longer useful ". . . whereas the unconditional command leaves the will no freedom to choose the opposite."²²

In order to guarantee the objectivity of the moral law, it must be the case that the moral law gives itself to the individual. If the individual creates the moral law, then the moral law is merely contingent. However, the moral law commands respect because it is ahistorical and beyond the changing conditions of our subjective existence. Although Kant officially upholds the principle of autonomy, the individual is not free to reject the categorical imperative or to create an alternative moral law; instead, the moral law forces itself upon the individual. If Kant takes the principle of autonomy seriously, he has to allow the possibility of an alternative moral law. However, he refuses to do so. For Kant, responsibilities are not chosen by man; rather, they are commanded to him.

Hegel in his Phenomenology of Spirit argues that Kantian pure moral philosophy contains a fundamental contradiction. Kantian morality claims that what really matters is that an act is done from pure duty, but this claim cannot be intended seriously, for no human ever acts solely from pure duty. Kantian morality says that the individual carries out his duty on the basis of his reflection. All that matters is duty and duty is completely contained within the self-consciousness of the individual. In other words, an individual is moral when he chooses to act from pure duty.

²²Ibid., p. 38.

When the moral consciousness acts, the simple knowing and willing of pure duty give way to the complexities of the world, and so many laws are formulated. A distinction is made between the knowing consciousness and the non-conscious object, the moral laws. There is nothing about these various specific laws sacred to the moral consciousness, which is concerned only with pure duty. Therefore, there is another consciousness which makes these specific laws sacred. The first moral consciousness supplies the form while the second consciousness supplies the specific content. The second consciousness as the unity of form and content, the unity of the universal and particular, the harmony of morality and happiness is a master and ruler of the world.

In acting, the moral consciousness always behaves as a particular individual and contains a specific content. The moral consciousness can never completely escape the sensuousness of the world. The moral consciousness can only strive to will an act from pure duty; it can never actually succeed in doing so. As a result, pure duty in general is given to the other consciousness.

In the actual "doing," however, consciousness behaves as this particular self, as completely individual; it is directed towards reality as such, and has this for its purpose, for it wills to achieve something. Duty in general thus falls outside of it into another being, which is consciousness and the sacred lawgiver of pure duty.²³

The moral consciousness always depends on the other consciousness for the validation of duty. The absolute being gives happiness to the

²³G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Great Britain, Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 371.

imperfect moral consciousness to the extent that it is deserved.

Kant claims that an act is moral only if an autonomous individual chooses to act from pure duty. What really matters is that the individual will the moral law and remove the influence of his inclinations and sensuousness. Yet, it is not possible for an individual to escape completely the sensuousness of his existence, so the ultimate validation of morality is found in a perfect being of another world.

Morality, then, in the moral consciousness is imperfect; this is now what is put forward. But it is the essence of morality to be only the perfectly pure; imperfect morality is therefore impure, or is immorality. Morality itself thus exists in another being than the actual consciousness. This other being is a holy moral lawgiver.²⁴

In summary, in the Kantian moral world view of the world, consciousness knows that its object, that is, the moral law, is totally produced by itself so it does not have to go beyond itself. However, in placing morality in a perfect being of another world, consciousness does go beyond itself. The foundation of morality is not found in human activity, but in the perfect nature of a supreme being. Man does not create morality; rather, he seeks to conform to the one moral being who exists beyond this world. Therefore, moral acts or responsibilities are not created by man, but given to him.

Our approach to answering the question of our responsibility to future generations will differ depending upon whether we view responsibilities as created by man or assigned to man. If we believe that man's responsibilities are commanded to him, then first we should

²⁴Ibid., p. 380.

determine who or what is the delegator of responsibilities. Possible candidates for the assigning of responsibilities are nature, fate, God or moral laws which have an existence independently of man. Once we have established who or what is the delegator of responsibilities to man, then we should investigate whether this giver of responsibilities requires man to be responsible to future generations. We should also determine in what areas and to what extent man is required to be responsible to future generations.

Notice that our investigation moves from the general to the specific. We would waste our time debating in great detail in what areas and to what extent man is responsible to future generations if we do not have a firm foundation from which to begin. Given the belief that man's responsibilities are assigned to him, our first task is to determine who or what commands these responsibilities.

We need to ask ourselves how we would set out to determine that nature, fate, God or moral laws which have an existence independently of man assign responsibilities to man. If the delegator of responsibilities possesses an existence independently of man, if the delegator of responsibilities is outside of or beyond man, then the delegator and man exist in two different worlds. The commander of responsibilities and those who are commanded are severed. But if the delegator of responsibilities is isolated from man, then how could man ever gain knowledge of this delegator or of his responsibilities? Clearly, he cannot, for once we place impassable barriers between man and the commander of his responsibilities, then any communication between the two regions becomes impossible. At the first step, then, we find that the assumption that man's responsibilities are assigned to him from an

outside source leads to a serious problem; namely, man can never come to know what responsibilities are required of him.

Now, let us consider how we would approach the question of our responsibility to future generations if we believe that man creates his own responsibilities. First, we would investigate how man creates his responsibilities. Second, we would determine if a responsibility to posterity is presently required. If there is a responsibility to future generations, then we should consider in what areas and to what extent man is responsible. If there is not presently a responsibility to future generations, then we need to inquire why this is so and consider if such a responsibility might be required in the future.

As before, our investigation moves from the general to the specific. We begin by asking how man creates his responsibilities. Nietzsche writes, "My chief proposition: there are no moral phenomena, there is only a moral interpretation of these phenomena."²⁵ When there is no interpretation of events, there are merely events. Without man, there is no interpretation; without man, there is no responsibility. Man places a certain meaning on phenomena, thereby creating responsibilities.

Many thinkers reject the belief that man creates his own responsibilities. They maintain that mistakes are not allowable when a question of responsibility is under consideration. Either we have a particular responsibility or we do not and there must be a means by which we can determine which is the case. If we ask why mistakes are

²⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, Random House, 1968), p. 149.

not allowable they give the following reasons: (1) They want to have certainty in regard to questions of responsibility and (2) ethical relativism must be avoided.

These objections can be answered. The first objection is often made, but easily refuted. Certainly, the mere fact that we desire something to be the case does not guarantee that it is so. Furthermore, if the absolutist desires certainty, he should hold that responsibilities are created by man, for then, we could have certain knowledge of our responsibilities. If responsibilities are self-imposed, then we are not in doubt about them.

The refutation of the second objection requires more effort. The claim is often made that relativity must be avoided in questions of right and wrong. To avoid relativity, ethical standards are placed in a being or thing which exists independently of man. This does indeed guarantee the absoluteness of moral standards. However, it also guarantees the cognitive unattainability of moral standards. If moral rules are contained in a sphere which is severed from man, then how can man possibly gain knowledge of such a sphere and of rules contained within it? The absolutist solves one problem, but he creates a far worse difficulty.

One who says that ethical relativism must be avoided commits a second error. He claims that ethical standards must be true and by true he means absolutely certain. If an ethical rule is valid, then it is absolutely true; it never changes. If the truth of an ethical rule does change, then that rule is merely relative. The absolutist demands that the truth of ethical standards be permanent so that he can acquire certain knowledge of ethical rules. His desire for

certainty underlies his desire for permanence. This is an extremely restrictive view of ethical rules. Such an outlook demands that ethical principles and mathematical principles possess the same kind of truth. This seems an unreasonable demand.

Aristotle accepts mathematical proof as the ideal of proof. At the same time, he does not try to force mathematical proof upon non-mathematical objects of inquiry. All sciences cannot maintain the same level of precision. Mathematical objects are constant, thereby allowing the mathematician certain knowledge. Political and ethical activities are of a different nature. What is good for one man is evil for another. In speaking about ethics, we can arrive at conclusions which are only true for the most part because our premises are only true for the most part. We can only approximate the truth. To expect anything more would be foolish. In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle says,

. . . it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.²⁶

For Aristotle each object of inquiry demands a proof suitable to its nature. This is a deceptively simple notion. Unfortunately, it has been disregarded by some Anglo-American philosophers. For example, some philosophers in the analytic tradition attempt to force the mathematical model of proof upon all objects of inquiry. As a result, the raising of a counterexample is considered a legitimate means of

²⁶Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon (New York, Random House, 1941), Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, Chapter 1, 1094b, 24-27.

refuting an ethical position. This methodology assumes that ethical principles possess the same kind of truth as mathematical principles.

The ethical absolutist not only possesses an extremely restrictive view of ethical rules, but of truth as well. Truth is only that which is eternally valid. Anything that is not eternally valid is merely relative. The tremendous negative connotations of "merely relative" are well understood. All things which are not eternally valid are merely relative in this derogatory sense. Certainly fiction is not eternally valid. It follows, then, that The Brothers Karamazov is a mere novel because it is not absolutely true. Designating The Brothers Karamazov a mere novel jolts us--as well it should. We are offended by such a denigration of a great work of literature. However, the absolutist degrades ethical standards which change in the same way because he maintains a limited view of truth. The ethical absolutist holds that philosophical truth is like mathematical truth which is absolute, rather than artistic truth which is relative. His words do not seem so shocking to us only because he has uttered them repeatedly. As the Bellman cries in The Hunting of the Snark, "What I tell you three times is true."²⁷

In summary, the ethical absolutist makes three mistakes. First, he assigns ethical standards to a realm separate from man, thereby making it impossible for man to acquire knowledge of ethical standards. Second, he holds an extremely restrictive view of ethical rules which places unreasonable demands upon them. And, third, he maintains an

²⁷Lewis Carroll, "The Hunting of the Snark," in The Collected Verse of Lewis Carroll (New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1933), p. 271.

overly limited notion of truth which results in absurd consequences.

Having suggested in a general way how man creates his responsibilities and having answered possible objections, we can now be more specific. Man creates responsibilities in a social context. A society delegates and enforces responsibilities through its legal and moral institutions.

We need to consider how a responsibility to future generations would be created and enforced. The question of a responsibility to posterity has arisen as our awareness of environmental concerns has grown. The physical conditions of our existence have created this problem of a responsibility to posterity. What would such a responsibility be like? Would a responsibility to future generations be like a responsibility to respect private property? There are obvious legal repercussions for not respecting private property. In the same way, there are legal penalties for harming the environment. Businesses and individuals are held legally accountable for the effects of pollution on presently existing individuals. However, there are no legal penalties for the effects of pollution on posterity.

Would a responsibility to future generations be like a responsibility to be a good parent? If a person is a bad parent, there are moral repercussions. Family members, friends and associates reprimand those people who are bad parents. Just so, there is a growing movement which morally condemns those who pollute the environment for presently existing individuals as well as for future generations. We find, then, that at this time there is no legal enforcement, but there is an increasing moral enforcement of a responsibility to future generations.

We have seen that the approach to answering the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" differs greatly according to whether we hold that responsibilities are commanded to man or that responsibilities are created by man. A second difference is the attitude toward the temporal nature of responsibilities. If we maintain that responsibilities are assigned to man from on high, then it follows that it is already determined that either we have a responsibility to future generations or we do not. If we do not have such a responsibility, then that is the end of the question. In contrast, if we claim that man creates his responsibilities, then the question is not closed if we find that presently we do not have such a responsibility. It may be the case that we should have a responsibility to future generations or we may be in the process of developing such a responsibility. In other words, if responsibilities are assigned to man, then responsibilities are static phenomena, whereas, if responsibilities are created by man, then responsibilities are developing phenomena.

A third difference between the two views is the means by which responsibilities are established. If responsibilities are assigned to man, then responsibilities are created by an exterior source. A responsibility is established when we become aware that a particular responsibility is required of us. Philosophers debate a question of responsibility and if one philosopher can demonstrate through arguments that a given responsibility is demanded of us, then in fact that responsibility is established. On the other hand, if man in a social setting creates his responsibilities, then the debate among a few individuals is not so significant. A single individual cannot establish a responsibility through argumentation; rather, a society

through its legal and moral institutions establishes responsibilities.

Either man creates his responsibilities or he does not. Our answer to the question, "Do we have a responsibility to future generations?" varies considerably according to which alternative is the case. Our approach to answering the question, our attitude toward the temporal nature of responsibilities and our view of the means of establishing our responsibilities are affected by our stand on this issue. How do we choose between the two possible positions?

We have suggested in our discussion that the belief that man does not create his responsibilities involves serious errors. Perhaps we can further support this contention if we analyze the concept of responsibility. What does the notion of responsibility presuppose? The concept of responsibility presupposes at least three further concepts, namely, the individual, accountability and time. There must be an individual who is held responsible. The idea of responsibility without a person who is held responsible is nonsensical. The notion of responsibility entails accountability. An individual is responsible because he is held accountable for his actions. The idea of accountability requires a concept of time. A person is held accountable at $time_2$ for an action he performed at $time_1$. The lapse of time may be minuscule, but some passage of time is required.

Since the concept of responsibility presupposes an individual who is held responsible, we must investigate the notion of the individual before we can understand the nature of responsibility. For the purpose of our argument, let us assume that there are two basic views on the concept of the individual. One position maintains that the individual and society are independent entities while another view

holds that the individual and society are essentially related. By now we should not be surprised to find that our understanding of responsibility is greatly influenced by our attitude toward the relationship of the individual with society. And, indeed, this is the case.

Let us begin by looking at each position and its history. The nominalistic or, as I shall say, "atomistic" view of the individual treats each person as a unique, substantially independent entity. The individual is substantially independent in that the conception of the individual does not require the conception of another thing. An individual has a private, sacred existence in that his thoughts, his feelings, his very self are accessible only to himself, not to others. Each person goes through life encountering other persons and a world which remain forever alienated from him. His self cannot penetrate into other minds or into the external world; other minds and the external world cannot penetrate into his self. The self stands alone in a foreign world.

This atomistic view of the individual is commonly held today. From where did such a view arise? There are at least two sources. For hundreds of years, Christianity has been the basis of the Western world view. The Christian dogmas of personal salvation and immortality require that each soul be unique and substantially independent. As a result, a belief in an atomistic soul became embedded in the general consciousness. Thus, one source for an atomistic concept of the individual is Christian theology.

We find a second source in the beginnings of modern thought, namely, Cartesian philosophy. Descartes wanted to develop a method for establishing certain truths in philosophy. Before he could establish

truths such as the existence of an external world or the existence of God, he had to free his mind of all prejudice. He began by doubting everything. This meant he had to doubt even his own existence.

Perhaps he was only dreaming that he existed or perhaps a God or an evil demon deceived him into thinking that he existed. In a famous passage from the Second Meditation Descartes writes:

Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.²⁸

Having established that he exists, Descartes next demonstrates what he is. He is a thinking thing. So here, in the beginning of the modern age, we find philosophy proclaiming that the self is a thinking thing which is substantially independent. One individual's mind is completely independent from other minds and from bodies.

If we consider the passage cited above, we realize that Descartes did not fulfill his promise to doubt everything. He never doubts that some process of thinking is occurring within him or that the function of mind is to think. Throughout the First Meditation the word "I" and phrases such as "I believe," "I think" and "I am deceived" occur repeatedly. Descartes begins the Meditations by saying ". . . I shall at last seriously and freely address myself to the general upheaval of all my former opinions."²⁹ In even posing the

²⁸René Descartes, "Meditations," in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 150.

²⁹Ibid., p. 144.

problem this way, Descartes already assumes that there is an I which is thinking. In other words, he assumes that there is thinking within himself and, then, proceeds to prove that this thinking requires a self. Furthermore, Descartes assumes that the proper agent of verification of truths is the inner self which is distinct from all other selves. Despite these problems with his demonstration of the existence and nature of the self, Descartes' view of the individual persists today.

Having considered the atomistic position, let us now turn to an alternative view of an individual. What I shall call the "dialectic" view treats the individual and society as essentially related. An individual is defined in relation to a society and vice versa. This is the view of the Greek world. In the Republic Plato argues that a just man cannot exist in an unjust society. In other words, the individual is a reflection of the society in which he lives.

The modern age has proponents of a dialectic view as well. Hegel and Marx both see the individual and society as mutually definitive. According to Marx, the individual is a social being. Marx writes:

But again when I am active scientifically, etc., when I am engaged in activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others--then I am social, because I am active as a man. Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my own existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being.

My general consciousness is only the theoretical shape of that of which the living shape is the real community, the social fabric, although at the present day general consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such antagonistically confronts it. Consequently, too, the

activity of my general consciousness, as an activity, is my theoretical existence as a social being.³⁰

According to Marx, an individual is what he is because of the society in which he finds himself. His material existence, his thoughts, even his language are given to him by society. Anytime a person acts, he acts as a social being, thereby, producing both himself and society.

Marx says that society is not an abstraction which confronts an individual; rather, "The individual is the social being."³¹ Despite the fact that an individual exists as a particular, his individual and species life are not different. Marx does not deny the particularity of an individual. A man is a particular individual, but he is also an instantiation of the society. In Marx's words,

Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality--the ideal totality--the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human life-activity.³²

It is important not to read the causality in one direction only. Men are products of society, but also, societies are products of men. The relationship is dialectical, not one-sided. In the German Ideology Marx argues that the theoretical products and forms of consciousness arise from the material conditions of life. Each generation inherits a sum of productive forces which it modifies, but

³⁰Karl Marx, The Marx-Engels Reader, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 86.

³¹Ibid., p. 86.

³²Ibid., p. 86.

which also gives to the generation its conditions of life and its special character. "It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances."³³ Marx is not claiming only that circumstances make men, but that men make circumstances as well. In the same way, men are born into a given society, thereby inheriting a particular way of life which they will modify. Thus, the society makes men and men make the society.

In contrast to an atomistic view, a dialectic view of an individual holds that the essence of an individual is not independent of the activities of the individual. Through acting and interacting with others, the self emerges. A person is not born with a private inner self; rather, a person creates his self through his activities. Therefore, the self requires a society which provides the conditions in which it can develop itself. The society with its specific way of life furnishes the self with a content.

Now that we have set forth two opposing views of the individual, we can ask how the question of our responsibility to future generations would be affected by each view. First, Feinberg, Kant, Derr, Golding and Passmore all ask "Do we have an obligation to future generations?" In the very asking of the question, they refer to society by using "we" instead of "I." They ask the question from the perspective of society, yet they try to answer the question from the perspective of the individual. Since society and the individual are antagonistic, problems such as self-interest arise. On the other hand, if a dialectic view of society and the individual is maintained, problems

³³Ibid., p. 165.

such as self-interest disappear. What is good for the individual is good for the society because an individual is an instantiation of the society. Thus, an atomistic view creates problems such as self-interest which a dialectic view does not.

The claim that what is good for the individual is good for the society may seem untenable at first. However, we must remember that given a dialectical perspective, the individual and society are mutually dependent. The individual is the particular manifestation of the society, so the individual is a reflection of the society in which he lives. In the same way, the society is the general manifestation of the particular individuals who make up the society. Thus, what is good for the individual is good for the society and what is good for the society is good for the individual.

We find this claim unsettling because we perceive society as an abstraction which antagonistically confronts us as individuals. We might find this claim more plausible if we emphasize the fact that it is individuals living their particular lives which gives life to the society. Given this emphasis, it is quite reasonable to say that what is good for the individual is good for society and vice versa. We are not discussing two distinct lives; rather, we are discussing two different aspects, namely, the particular and the general, of one life.

In his defense as reported in the Apology Socrates is well aware of himself as an integral part of his society. Socrates is accused of impiety and of corrupting the young. He argues that he could not have intentionally corrupted the young because then he would live among bad citizens who would do him harm. Socrates reveals the foolishness of the charge when he confronts Meletus with the following:

Now, is that a truth which your superior wisdom has recognized thus early in life, and am I, at my age, in such darkness and ignorance as not to know that if a man with whom I have to live is corrupted by me, I am very likely to be harmed by him; and yet I corrupt him, and intentionally, too--so you say, although neither I nor any other human being is ever likely to be convinced by you.³⁴

A dialectic view, then, removes the problem of self-interest.

Second, an atomistic concept of the individual results in a responsibility to future generations being commanded to the individual from a force outside of himself. The society or the species demands this responsibility of him, but he may choose not to accept the responsibility because something foreign to him is making demands of him. The individual is sundered from the species and from society. In contrast, such a problem is not so sharply posed if the individual is essentially related to the species and to the society. Since the individual is the social being, when society or the species requires a responsibility, the command is internal, not external. If an atomistic concept of an individual is maintained, a responsibility to posterity is an external command, while, if a dialectic concept of the individual is maintained, a responsibility to posterity is an internal command.

We found that before we could understand the concept of responsibility, we would have to inquire into the nature of the individual. There are two opposing views of an individual, namely, the atomistic and the dialectical. If we accept an atomistic view of an individual, then we encounter problems such as self-interest and the external commanding of responsibilities. In contrast, if we

³⁴Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York, Random House, 1937), Apology, 25D.

accept a dialectic view of the individual, these problems do not arise.

Either an individual is essentially related to a society or he is not. The nature of responsibility varies depending upon which view of the individual is employed. Once again, we are faced with two alternatives, and we must choose one.

If we want to understand what an individual is, we would do well to ask ourselves what the notion of an individual presupposes. What makes an individual an individual? An individual is what he is because he possesses a continuity through time. Before we can comprehend the nature of an individual, we must first investigate the concept of time.

It appears that time is of crucial importance when a question of responsibility to future generations is under consideration. The idea of responsibility presupposes a concept of time because a person is held responsible at a given time for an action he performed at an earlier time. Also, the idea of an individual presupposes a concept of time since an individual is what he is by remaining the same through time. Our problem now is to investigate the nature of time.

What is time? Feinberg, Kant, Derr, Golding and Passmore all treat time as a given. Time lies outside of society and regulates relationships without regard to human activity. Time goes on its merry way regardless of what men do. Time is beyond the control of man; it is ahistorical. Time is a given in that man merely discovers time; he does not create it through any conscious activity of his own. In this sense, time is independent of man.

Someone might object that, for Kant, time is not independent of man. It is true that Kant maintains that time is transcendently ideal, that is, time cannot be ascribed to things in themselves. However, time is a necessary condition of all appearances; it is given a priori. Kant writes,

Time is therefore a purely subjective condition of our (human) intuition (which is always sensible, that is so far as we are affected by objects), and in itself, apart from the subject, is nothing. Nevertheless, in respect of all appearances, and therefore of all the things which can enter into our experience, it is necessarily objective.³⁵

Even if time is necessarily objective only within the world of appearances, it still follows that time is independent from man in that time is given to man. For Kant, time is a non-historical, non-developing, necessary condition for human intuition. Kant goes so far as to claim that it must be the case that time is one dimensional. Humans can have intuitions only given one dimensional time. In fact, Kant's claim is really that time is the result of the structure of the human mind; time arises because of the constitution of the human mind. If this is so, it seems that time is given to man, in that, time is a psychological condition which makes experience possible. Time does not develop historically through human activity; rather, time is a condition which makes human experience possible.

Perhaps, this point could be clarified by the following analogy. Suppose that the mind is a biological, rather than a psychological entity. If we claim that time is the result of the structure of the human mind, then time is ultimately the effect of the human biological

³⁵Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964), A 35/B 51.

condition. Thus, time is given to man in his biological make-up and is beyond his control. In the same way, Kant's position is that time is given to man in his psychological make-up and, as such, is beyond man's control. It seems that, for Kant, time is a given.

We might ask if it is reasonable to assume that time is a given. Does man discover time or does he consciously create time? Is time a natural phenomenon or a conscious phenomenon, that is, does time require only the natural order for its existence or does time exist as the result of the activity of conscious beings?

These are not easy questions to answer. However, let us ask what the notion of time presupposes. The notion of time presupposes a concept of past, present and future. These are not natural distinctions; rather, these are sentient distinctions. They are ways in which we give order to our lives. Such temporal distinctions arise from the human need for regulation. This suggests that temporal distinctions are the creation of conscious beings. Thus, the concept of time requires an activity of conscious beings. Man creates time.

Since men are the creators of time, it is a social concept. This becomes clear if we consider a small child. When a child is born, it desires nourishment. No one has to teach a child to be hungry; as a living organism, a child requires nourishment. Hunger is a natural phenomenon. In contrast, a child must be taught to think in terms of time. Small children are notorious for living completely immersed in the present moment. We adults teach children to divide their existence into past, present and future. In fact, the concepts of yesterday, today and tomorrow are among the first concepts which we teach to our children.

The concept of time appears to be a self-contained notion. When we say that the concept of time presupposes a concept of past, present and future we are saying that time presupposes temporal concepts because past, present and future are temporal concepts. It seems impossible to talk about time without using temporal language. The problem of reflexivity that appears when we discuss the concept of time suggests that time is one of the basic concepts by which we order experience.

If time is created by man, then we need to consider how the concept of time is enforced. Here, we have to invoke the social setting. Time is a means by which a society regulates the lives of its members. The members of a society have a common perception of time which provides a smoothness and coherence to their interactions. This common perception of time is enforced through training and socialization.

Consider how time functions in the life of an individual. A person knows who he is because of his position in time. He is a certain age which places him in a particular group. Being a member of a particular group requires that he conduct his life in a certain way. An individual also views his occupational existence in terms of time. He may be beginning, in the middle of, or nearing the end of his career. Again, how he perceives himself and how he conducts his life are greatly influenced by his temporal position in his career. In a more general sense, time places a person in a given historical epoch. This placement also gives an individual a sense of identity.

Let us apply this analysis of time to a nineteen-year-old college student of today. Our student acquires a sense of who he is

through his relationship to time. Because he is nineteen, he is a young adult. As a young adult, he wears blue jeans and tennis shoes. For entertainment, he listens to rock music and disco music and frequents campus drinking establishments. His only concern is with the present so he has a care-free attitude toward occupational and financial matters. Of course, he is alienated from his parents and the status quo. He is a 20th century kid, so he knows he will be living in a highly industrialized, technologically advanced society. His personal relationships will be subject to interruption because of the mobile nature of our society. He will live a life relatively free of worries about the basic needs of survival and he will possess a fair amount of leisure time. All these factors merge in determining who this student is and what his life will be like.

We could just as easily construct a scenario of a fifty-year-old engineer who is five years away from retirement. Clearly, the picture would be quite different. The point is that a person's relationship to time greatly determines who and what that person is. A society categorizes people and things in terms of time. Society defines time, which in turn defines individuals.

Our society defines time as linear. The past is gone forever, the present is here today, and the future lies ahead of us, awaiting our arrival. We cannot change the past, escape the present, or know the future. If we accept this concept of linear time as absolutely authoritative, then we are neglecting both the history of the concept and the nature of time.

Because from a very early age we are socialized to perceive time as linear, it is not surprising that we accept linear time as a

given. However, an awareness of history teaches us that the concept of time itself has a history. In ancient Greek civilization, time was believed to be circular. Christianity brought to Western civilization a new conception of time. In the beginning of time God created the world, in the present God watches over his creation, and in the future God will destroy the world and establish an eternal paradise. Thus, time has a beginning, a middle and an end.

This linear conception of time treats past, present and future as static moments. The past, present and future are rigidly determined. These moments never overlap or penetrate into one another. It is not, however, the nature of time to be fixed; rather, time is a movement from one moment to another. A minute ago is the past, now is the present, and a minute from now is the future. But now, what was the present is past, and what was the future is present. So past, present and future are constantly changing. They do not remain fixed, but continually move from one moment to another. In other words, past, present and future are not objective, inert moments in the natural world; rather, they are moving moments in the conscious ordering of experience. Time is an activity of consciousness.

We investigated the concept of time so that we could determine whether man discovers or creates time. We find that time is a product of consciousness. A society uses time to perpetuate its own existence and the individuals within a society use time to define themselves. The concept of time changes as consciousness develops. Humans create time and time creates humans.

How does the knowledge that humans create time affect the question of our responsibility to future generations? If we perceive

time as linear and past, present and future as objectively static distinctions, then in some way the future is already determined. On such a view, the future is a specific moment which is completely severed from the past and the present. The future is objectively determined in that it is already out there beyond us, waiting for us to catch up with it. The future is beyond our control.

If the future is out there, awaiting our arrival, then our relationship to the people of the future is already determined. We are in the present, they are in the future, and an impassable gulf separates us. As a result, we cannot know what their lives will be like and we cannot feel any continuity between our world and theirs. Our problem is that the future is completely beyond us, so we are not able to know the future.

If, on the other hand, we view time as an activity of consciousness, then temporal divisions are not rigidly fixed. There is not a chasm between present and future because we are the ones who make such distinctions. Our consciousness provides a continuity between past, present and future. The future is not waiting for us; rather, we create the future. As a result, the future and our relationship to the people of the future are not already determined. When we are aware that we are the creators of time, then we claim the future as ours because the future is nothing more than a projection of ourselves beyond ourselves. We are no longer alienated from the future because it belongs to us.

CHAPTER 5

AN ATTEMPT AT AN ANSWER

We have tried to gain an understanding of the question of our responsibility to future generations. We began by looking at the attempts of Feinberg, Kant, Derr, Golding and Passmore to answer this question. Feinberg and Kant opt for an abstract approach. They simply consider if we ought to be responsible to future generations without taking into account the details involved in the actual realization of such a responsibility. We have seen that this type of abstract approach is unsatisfying because it ignores the particular conditions of our existence. In contrast, Derr, Golding and Passmore choose to emphasize these particular conditions. As a result of their emphasis on practical complications, however, they lessen our responsibility to future generations.

We suggested that Feinberg, Kant, Derr, Golding and Passmore share common assumptions which lead to this confusion. They view responsibilities as assigned to man from an external source, they perceive the individual and society as antagonistic, and they see time as a given. They either emphasize the external nature of responsibilities by employing an abstract approach or they emphasize the practical complications which arise if we try to enact this responsibility. In the former case, they avoid the problems of individualism and the remoteness of the future. In the latter case, they concede that these problems lessen our responsibility to posterity. We have tried to suggest an alternative approach

based upon rejecting their assumptions.

When we consider the nature of responsibility, we find that a concept of responsibility presupposes the concept of an individual. When we investigate the nature of an individual, we find that a concept of an individual presupposes a concept of time. Then, when we inquire into the nature of time, we find that a concept of time presupposes an activity of consciousness within a society.

In reverse order, there must be conscious activity within a society before time can exist. There must be time before an individual can exist. And, finally, there must be an individual before responsibility can exist. Thus, a question of responsibility presupposes consciousness and a society. Responsibilities are created by men in a social context. Ethical inquiries are a conscious activity which take place within a society. Ethical inquiries, by their very nature, presuppose consciousness and society.

The question of our responsibility to future generations presupposes man in a given historical society. As a result, an abstract approach which tries to treat responsibilities as ahistorical phenomena is necessarily inadequate. The question of our responsibility to future generations presupposes the existence of individuals as social creatures. Thus, the problem of individualism is softened.

In his essay "The Old and the New Logic," Rudolf Carnap writes,

There is no such thing as speculative philosophy, a system of sentences with a special subject matter on a par with those of the sciences. To pursue philosophy can only be to clarify the concepts and sentences of science by logical analysis. The instruments for this is the new logic.³⁶

³⁶Rudolph Carnap, "The Old and the New Logic," in Logical Positivism, edited by A. J. Ayer (New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1959), p. 145.

Despite the decline of the Logical Positivist movement, some of the ideas of Logical Positivism remain influential. Some Anglo-American philosophers maintain that philosophers are technicians whose function is the analysis and clarification of concepts and sentences. They urge us to avoid traditional metaphysics. The result of such a view is that philosophers merely do philosophy; they do not reflect upon their doing of philosophy. As a result, a philosopher is trained to reformulate arguments, but not to account for the process through which he reformulates arguments. In other words, given this view, philosophy cannot explain its own activity. This means that philosophy does not possess an understanding of itself.

When we are faced with ethical questions, it is certainly helpful to analyze and clarify the concepts and sentences with which we are concerned. However, it is crucial that we understand the nature of ethical inquiry before we attempt to answer a particular ethical question. If we shun traditional metaphysics and eagerly debate the burning questions of our time, we may find we have built our mansion upon shifting sand. Our turrets and gables may be impressive, but our foundation may be unsound. If this is so, our beautiful mansion will inevitably collapse. As we strive to develop the details of philosophical analysis, we should also take heed of the ground upon which we build. Our metaphysics defines what is real and supports our philosophical endeavors.

In considering the question of our responsibility to future generations, we had to investigate the presuppositions contained within the question. Two crucial concepts in the question were responsibility and the future. When we investigated the nature of these two concepts,

we found that this question presupposes conscious activity within a social setting. With this in mind, we can now try to answer the question of our responsibility to future generations.

If we want to decide if we have a particular responsibility, we first have to consider the nature of responsibilities. We have found that responsibilities are created by man within a social setting and enforced through moral and legal institutions. A single individual cannot establish a particular responsibility; rather, society as a whole creates and enforces obligations.

Since a question of responsibility is a societal concern, it is a question which only our society as a whole can answer. An individual may have his personal view, but a responsibility to future generations will exist only when society upholds and enforces such a responsibility. Clearly, at this time, there is no legal enforcement of a responsibility to future generations. However, there is a growing moral awareness of such a responsibility.

Three objections are frequently raised against our having an obligation to posterity. First, it is claimed that the selfish nature of man makes having such a responsibility practically impossible. This objection is legitimate only given an atomistic conception of the individual and a static conception of responsibility. Second, it is said that even if we want to provide the conditions for a good life to future generations, we cannot know what the future will bring, so we are not responsible to future generations. However, if we deny our responsibility to future generations on the ground of our lack of knowledge of the future, we must also reject our responsibility to raise our children since we do not know what their future will be like

either. And, third, the claim is made that we are not responsible to posterity because future generations belong to a future which is inaccessible to us. This objection is convincing only if we perceive past, present and future as static moments which are given to us. These three attempts to deny our responsibility to future generations seem unconvincing.

We found that there is no legal enforcement of a responsibility to future generations, but there is a growing moral awareness. It may well be that we are in the process of widening our sense of responsibility to include future generations. The very fact that we are seriously starting to debate the matter might be an indication that we are. Furthermore, it seems that we can only answer in the affirmative, because to deny a responsibility to future generations is to deny a responsibility to ourselves. Once we are aware that an individual is essentially related to his society, then any individual should strive to perpetuate human society. If we choose not to be responsible to future generations, then we are willing the destruction of humanity. In other words, we are willing our own self-destruction. However, the decision is in our hands. We create our ideals and our responsibilities. We can not look to some superior being or state of affairs, but must look within ourselves. We can will a commitment to the future or we can deny it.

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