Longtermist political philosophy: an agenda for future research

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Longtermist Political Philosophy: An Agenda for Future Research

Abstract: We set out longtermist political philosophy as a research field. First, we argue that the standard case for longtermism is more robust when applied to institutions than to individual action. This motivates "institutional longtermism": when building or shaping institutions, positively affecting the value of the long-term future is a key moral priority. Second, we briefly distinguish approaches to pursuing longtermist institutional reform along two dimensions: such approaches may be more targeted or more broad, and more urgent or more patient. The bulk of the chapter then addresses points of contact between longtermism and some central values of mainstream political philosophy, focusing in particular on justice, equality, freedom, legitimacy, and democracy. While each value initially seems to conflict with longtermism, we find that these conflicts are less obvious upon closer inspection, and that some political values might even provide independent support for longtermism. Finally, we provide a grab bag of other questions within longtermist political philosophy that we lack space to explore here.

1 Introduction

What we do now can affect future generations. And most people agree that, morally, we ought to consider their interests. But how far into the future do our obligations reach? Political debates typically focus on the near- to medium-term future. For example, climate policy often focuses on the next century. But while most CO_2 emitted today will leave our atmosphere within 200 years, the remaining 20-35% can remain for thousands of years longer (Emanuel 2016, 15). Shouldn't we care about such longer-term effects, too?

Longtermists answer that we should (Bostrom 2003; Greaves and MacAskill 2021; Greaves et al. 2019; Greaves, Mogensen, and MacAskill 2019; MacAskill 2022b; Ord 2020). They argue that we should care about the *entire* future, and that this has important and fascinating implications for what we morally ought to do. The standard case for longtermism rests on three premises.

First, far-future people matter morally. Economic models commonly discount future income or consumption. However, most philosophers deny that we should discount things, like well-being, that are non-instrumentally valuable (see the citations in Greaves and MacAskill 2021, n. 21). Future welfare should not be subject to a positive pure rate of time preference, or the rate should at least be small (e.g. Mogensen 2019) or subject to uncertainty (e.g., Weitzman 1998). Nowadays, we tend to think that one person's welfare matters just as much as anyone else's, no matter their race, gender, class, or *where* they are in the world. Arguably, the same holds no matter *when* they are—whether they exist now, in a hundred years, or even in a million years.

Second, there might be *lots* of far-future people. The typical mammalian species lives roughly 1,000,000 years, which would leave 700,000 years for humans. But we are not a typical mammalian species, and Earth could in principle sustain human life for another 500 million to 1.3 billion years (Ord 2020, 20; MacAskill 2022b, 14). At the more conservative end, estimates place the expected number of future people at 10^{14}—that is 10,000 persons for every person alive today (Greaves and MacAskill 2021, 6–7). And if we assign even small probabilities to humanity settling the stars, or to future sentient life being digital, this causes the number of expected future people

to greatly magnify: estimates here range from 10^{18} to 10^{45} (Greaves and MacAskill 2021, 7–9). Exact numbers are neither possible nor necessary. What matters is that, in expectation, future people *vastly* outnumber people alive today. The value at stake in the long-term future is massive.

Third, longtermists argue that we can predictably affect the value of the long-term future. Most obviously, we can mitigate "existential risks" that threaten to severely curtail our long-term potential by causing our extinction or irrecoverable civilization collapse. These might be, for example, risks due to nuclear war, pandemics, climate change, or artificial intelligence (Ord 2020). But we can also affect the value of the long-term future, conditional on avoiding such dramatic scenarios, by launching ourselves on a higher-value trajectory, for example, one less ravished by climate change or repressive governments. After all, it would be surprising if we were already doing everything we can to benefit future generations. Unlike most other groups, future people cannot advocate for their own interests, for example, through participating in politics or markets.

This leads to the following thesis:

Longtermism: Positively affecting the value of the long-term future is among the key moral priorities (weak longtermism) or the key moral priority (strong longtermism) of our time (see MacAskill 2022, 4).

Most discussions of longtermism focus on individuals—for example, on where philanthropists should donate (Greaves and MacAskill 2021). However, institutions also affect the long-term future. Longtermism may thus be an important topic for *political philosophy*: positively affecting the value of the long-term future may be a (or the) key *political* priority of our time.

Now, political philosophers have produced valuable work on future generations, involving climate change, environmental ethics, and intergenerational justice (Barry 1997; English 1977; Gardiner et al. 2010; González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2017; Gosseries and Meyer 2009; Moellendorf 2015; Rawls 1971, sec. 44). But these discussions focus mainly on the near-to-medium term. Moreover, while longtermists often invoke consequentialist or 'beneficence-based' reasoning,

political philosophers focus more on non-consequentialist considerations and on political values like justice and legitimacy. So, to date, there is almost no political philosophy explicitly engaging with longtermist thought. This is a striking lacuna, as longtermism might radically challenge mainstream political philosophy, and, conversely, political philosophy might offer challenges or insights for longtermists.

In this chapter, we outline some central questions in *longtermist political philosophy*. Our aim is to set out longtermist political philosophy as a research field and to motivate readers to pursue questions and arguments we here only broach. We believe more work in this area is both theoretically and practically important. Longtermism has spawned a thriving research field but also a flurry of philanthropic activity moving hundreds of millions of dollars each year. It is important to understand what institutional implications longtermism might have, as well as how political values might constrain, challenge, or support longtermism.

In section 2, we tentatively defend 'institutional longtermism,' suggesting that the standard case for longtermism is more robust for institutions than for individuals. In section 3, we distinguish approaches to pursuing longtermist institutional reform along two dimensions. In section 4, we turn to points of tension and convergence between longtermism and some values that loom large in mainstream political philosophy. Section 5 provides a grab bag of other questions we lack space to explore here.

2   The Case for Institutional Longtermism

We begin by distinguishing individual from institutional longtermism:

> *Individual longtermism*: positively affecting the value of the long-term future is among the key moral priorities (weak longtermism) or the key moral priority (strong longtermism) of our time, when undertaking individual actions or projects.

> *Institutional longtermism*: positively affecting the value of the long-term future is among the key moral priorities (weak institutional longtermism) or the key moral priority (strong institutional longtermism) of our time, when building or shaping institutions.

Institutions are the "rules of the game" that shape human interaction (North 1990). These include both formal institutions, such as laws and public policies, and informal institutions, such as norms and conventions. Functioning formal and informal institutions often depend on one another and overlap in various ways; for example, laws may command compliance only in the presence of appropriate social norms (Barrett and Gaus 2020). However, for reasons of space, we primarily focus on formal institutions here.

The standard argument for longtermism is beneficence-based. The basic idea is that, given the vast number of far-future people that may exist, and assuming they have (roughly) comparable moral standing to present people, one's effects, in expectation, on far-future people often outweigh one's short-term effects (typically by many orders of magnitude). To get to the deontic conclusion that we morally *ought* to promote long-run value, we might appeal to an all-things-considered *consequentialist* duty to do the most good. However, the standard case for longtermism only requires the weaker premise that we have a weighty *pro tanto* duty of beneficence to promote impartial value. This case can be made for individual but also for institutional longtermism. The latter requires that we endorse *social beneficence* (or 'instrumentalism'): how much impartial good institutions do is (at least) one central consideration when choosing between them (Barrett 2022; Schmidt 2022a).

We will have much to say about the conflict between beneficence and other values later. But first, we present four empirical reasons, and then four more 'philosophical' ones, suggesting the case for longtermism is more robust for institutional than for individual longtermism.

2.1 Institutions Affect the Long Run

The first reason is the sheer *scale* of the power and influence of institutions. Consider states. The 2022 United States federal budget had roughly $6 trillion in outlays, with yearly defence spending

alone of $754 billion ('Budget of the U.S. Government - Fiscal Year 2022' 2021). The Chinese Communist Party is arguably the most powerful organisation in the world, ruling over roughly 1.4 billion people and influencing many more. The budgets of longtermist philanthropic organisations have grown at an impressive pace, but they remain dwarfed by governments and transnational organisations like the EU. Furthermore, government budgets underestimate the power of states, which also exert influence through legislation. And the monopoly on legitimate violence alone makes the government an actor like no other.

Second, institutions' impacts are *broad*. Good institutions are arguably *all-purpose goods* that are valuable when dealing with most large-scale societal challenges – such as pandemics, international crises, or climate change. What makes institutions 'good' depends on various factors, including collective epistemic qualities and decision-making procedures, suitable conditions for collective action and public good provision, low corruption, and so on. Conversely, bad institutions can be 'all-purpose bads'. For example, a kleptocratic system that extracts resources to benefit a small corrupt elite may not only be bad for its contemporaries, but may, in expectation, deal poorly with major risks that come its way.

Third, institutions have *long-term* impacts. Some institutions are deliberately designed to be long-lasting, such as constitutions. But more generally, functional institutions tend to be sticky – or to 'reproduce themselves' – simply because they are functional. Social scientists talk of *path dependence*: past events, decisions, technologies, and institutions constrain later ones (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000). Such institutional persistence can take drastic and far-reaching forms. The US Constitution still greatly influences and constraints decisions in the US today. Former colonized countries still struggle to shake off the dysfunctional institutions colonizers installed. At the far end of the spectrum, work in 'persistence studies' uses explanatory variables hundreds or thousands years old to explain social and economic outcomes today (See Abad and Maurer 2021; Giuliano and Nunn 2020, and especially Sevilla 2022 for critical reviews of such work).

Path-dependence means that institutions affect not only later outcomes and decisions, but

also what institutions we come to have. For example, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson argue that countries sometimes display virtuous and vicious cycles in their long-term development (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Countries with inclusive economic systems often generate more inclusive political systems which in turn beget more inclusive economic systems (a virtuous cycle). Countries with 'extractive' economic systems might see organised extractive interest capture political influence, which in turn begets more extractive economic institutions (a vicious cycle).

A fourth considerations strengthens the other three: under some scenarios, the scale, breadth, and stickiness of institutions may *intensify* in the future, as new technical capabilities and organizational forms increase the extent and persistence of institutional impact. Longtermists sometimes worry about *totalitarian risk*: a totalitarian government locking in its power over the long term. Bryan Caplan, for example, argues that future technological developments (such as AI-driven surveillance and life extension) might allow dictators to cement their power for a very long time (Caplan 2011). Alternatively, an Artificial General Intelligence might become all (or very) powerful, such that the goals or values it receives at inception might get locked in long term (MacAskill 2022b, chap. 4). If that happens, it is crucial we have good institutions and values when this lock-in occurs.

2.2 Institutional Longtermism is Robust

Empirically, then, the case for institutional longtermism seems quite strong: institutions have large, broad, long-term, and plausibly intensifying impacts. However, the case for institutional longtermism also assumes consequentialism or a *pro tanto* duty of beneficence. Various worries have been raised about such duties (e.g., in response to Singer 1972). As we will now argue, however, institutional longtermism sidesteps or at least mitigates many of them.

First, a duty to do good often falls short in collective action cases, where we can have a large impact as a collective but no (or little) impact as individuals. For example, consequentialists often argue we should go vegetarian because factory farming causes so much suffering. However, critics suggest that individual consumption decisions make no causal difference (Budolfson 2019;

also see Barrett and Raskoff 2022; Schmidt 2022b). It is controversial, yet not implausible, that such collective action problems arise for individual longtermism, given the need for collective action to achieve many longtermist goals. But this challenge is less severe for institutional lontermism: one function of institutions is to overcome such problems.

Second, one consequentialist response to collective action worries is that even when individual actions seem to make no difference, they may have a tiny chance of making a huge difference. Refraining from buying chicken usually saves no one, but it may occasionally trigger a threshold in the supply chain that saves a huge number of chickens. If so, beneficence may demand vegetarianism because it does a lot of good *in expectation* (Matheny 2002; Kagan 2011; Norcross 2004; Singer 1980). However, for individual longtermism, this raises a new worry: *fanaticism* (see Greaves and MacAskill 2021, sec. 8 and references therein). Suppose you must choose between saving a hundred lives for sure and saving a quadrillion lives with a one-in-a-trillion probability. According to 'expected value theory', you should choose the latter, since a one in a trillion chance of saving a quadrillion lives is just as good as certainly saving a *thousand* lives. But this verdict is often seen as counterintuitively 'fanatical' in its pursuit of tiny probabilities of enormous value.

 Now, predicting and controlling the long run future is difficult, and many attempts to do so may have slim chances of success. For example, donating to an AI safety organisation may only have a tiny chance of making a (huge) difference. Individual longtermism might therefore require fanaticism (see Tarsney 2022). Of course, responses are available: one could defend fanaticism (Beckstead and Thomas 2021; Wilkinson 2022; see Russell 2021 for responses) or argue that, empirically, longtermist actions have a non-fanatical probability of doing long-run good. Regardless, institutional longtermism largely avoids such difficulties, as institutions have a much larger chance of making a difference than individuals.

Third, consequentialism is often criticised for being too demanding: it does not leave room for personal pursuits, relationships, and projects (see Sobel 2020). And even a somewhat stringent *pro tanto* duty of beneficence can raise similar worries. Now, if individual longtermism is implied by

consequentialism or beneficence, this worry may intensify: the huge stakes associated with the long-term future may render beneficence even more demanding, and certain familiar strategies for avoiding demandingness problems may no longer be available (Mogensen 2021). However, institutional longtermism softens such demandingness problems, as there is less reason to worry about too much being demanded of *institutions*. Moreover, institutions might lighten the total burden individuals face by promoting longtermist aims more effectively, for example, due to economies of scale or a division of labour (compare Buchanan 1996; Goodin 2017).

Fourth, many of our most meaningful projects and priorities involve relationships with others, such as our friends and family. Consequentialism or a strong duty of impartial beneficence might unduly shrink the space for partiality. Of course, consequentialists respond to such worries (e.g., Jackson 1991; Railton 1984). But institutional longtermism can again sidestep them. Rather than individuals, it applies impartial beneficence to institutions. And, as Robert Goodin argues, while being partial towards one's family and friends carries intuitive ethical weight for individuals, such partiality is objectionable at the institutional level. We expect private citizens to be partial but expect legislators to set aside personal relations and allegiances when designing or enacting law and policy (Goodin 1995; also see Pettit 2012).

These arguments are not conclusive, as several rejoinders are available. For example, perhaps concerns about causal inefficacy, fanaticism, and demandingness still apply to individuals trying to design or shape institutions (even if they do not arise for institutions themselves). And perhaps considerations of *national* partiality count against longtermism (even if it is hard to know what national partiality requires over the long run). Nevertheless, we hope to have shown that these worries arise more directly and with greater force for individual than for institutional longtermism, as institutional longtermists have greater resources available for replying to them. So, overall, the beneficence-based argument seems more robust for institutional longtermism, as it at least mitigates worries concerning causal inefficacy, fanaticism, demandingness, and partiality.

3   Varieties of Longtermist Institutional Reform

Assume for now that institutional longtermism holds. How, then, should we proceed? Two major choice points stand out.

The first choice is how targeted or broad to be when thinking about the long-run effects of institutions. *Targeted* approaches aim to design or shape institutions with an eye either to achieving specific long-term outcomes or to averting specific threats or obstacles to achieving long-run value. For example, they might aim to combat existential risks arising from engineered pandemics, or, slightly less targeted, all specific existential risks we currently know about. *Broad* approaches aim to promote long-run value more generally, often by improving 'general conditions' for long-run value promotion. Such approaches might, first, try to improve fundamental social values, for example by expanding society's moral circle; second, try to improve formal institutions' decision-making, for example through democratisation; and third, try to make institutions more explicitly longtermist, for example by combatting sources of political short-termism or erecting institutions that represent future generations (González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2017; John and MacAskill 2021). Of course, there is really a spectrum here, as some of these approaches are concerned with broader ranges of long-term outcomes, threats, or obstacles than others.

The second choice point concerns how *urgent* or *patient* we should be when designing or shaping institutions. Urgent approaches focus on designing institutions for the long run (that is, with good long-term effects) that can be implemented as soon as possible. Patient approaches, by contrast, aim to achieve good institutions *in* the long run, even if it takes a long time to get there. Notably, this distinction cuts across the targeted/broad spectrum. For example, an urgent targeted approach might aim to implement pandemic preparedness institutions right now. A broader but still urgent approach might implement future-oriented democratic reforms immediately – for example, by installing ombudspeople for the future (which already exist in some jurisdictions) more widely, or by combatting democratic backsliding. Similarly, we can interpret part of "the ideal/non-ideal theory debate" as concerning whether patient approaches should be targeted or broad. Should

we follow some ideal theorists in focusing on a conception of an ideal institutional arrangement to serve as a (very) long-term target for reform (e.g. Rawls 2001; Simmons 2010)? Or should we forget the ideal, and instead promote long-run institutional reform broadly by trying to make institutions more "progressive"—that is, better at getting better—for example, by facilitating institutional experimentation and learning (Barrett 2020b; MacAskill 2022b, 99–102)?

Which approach to adopt depends on several factors. For example, more targeted approaches typically look more plausible when we can be more confident about how to promote long-run value. And urgent approaches seem more plausible if we give greater credence to the "hinge of history hypothesis" that we live at a crucially important time in history with an unusual degree of control over the long-run future (Parfit 2011, 616; MacAskill 2022a; Mogensen 2022). However, since longtermist political philosophy is only at its inception, we favour pluralism and encourage work that is targeted and broad, patient and urgent.

4   Institutional Longtermism Meets Mainstream Political Philosophy

So far we have focused on the beneficence-based case for institutional longtermism and on what institutional reforms it might imply. However, most political philosophers are more concerned with other values, like justice, legitimacy, or democracy. Might these defeat institutional longtermism?

4.1   The Stakes-Sensitivity Argument

Here, a standard longtermist argument (adapted from Greaves and MacAskill 2021) is the Stakes-Sensitivity Argument:

A. When the axiological stakes are very high, non-consequentialist considerations are outweighed, such that consequentialist reasons (largely) determine which institution we should choose.

B. When choosing among institutional options that affect, in expectation, the value of the long-term future, the axiological stakes are very high.

C. So, when choosing among institutional options that affect, in expectation, the value of the long-term future, consequentialist reasons (largely) determine which institutions we should choose.

Premise A allows for weighty non-consequentialist reasons of (say) justice and legitimacy but claims that they are overridden when the axiological stakes are high. This is intuitive. In emergency situations, when many lives are at stake – because of a war or a natural catastrophe, for example – overriding 'non-consequentialist' concerns often seems justified. Premise B adds that the stakes are indeed very high, since literally trillions or quadrillions of lives are at stake in the long-run future.

While simple and powerful, many find the Stakes-Sensitivity Argument hard to accept. For example, premise B is open to challenges from views on which large *numbers* of future people don't necessarily produce large *stakes*. Consider non-aggregative views on which "the numbers don't count": we should be more concerned with a larger harm to one person than any number of smaller harms to others (Scanlon 1998). Or consider "person-affecting" views in population ethics on which non-existing people don't count the same as existing people: it is neither good nor bad that we bring new people into existence (Narveson 1973). Such views, and more sophisticated variants of them, are often thought to challenge longtermism (see Curran 2023; Heikkinen 2022 on non-aggregative views, and Lederman and Frick 2023; Thomas 2022 on population ethics).

These debates are well explored elsewhere. So here, we instead investigate how distinctively *political* values interact with longtermism. The Stakes-Sensitivity Argument shows that even non-consequentialists cannot brush aside long-term consequentialist considerations so easily. But many political philosophers think that non-consequentialist considerations weigh very heavily. John Rawls, for example, famously identifies *justice* as the first virtue of institutions (Rawls 1971). If such values are indeed very weighty then they might, for example, lead us to reject strong longtermism but still accept weak longtermism: though not *the* key priority, positively affecting the long-term

future may be *a* key priority to weigh against others. Alternatively, political philosophy may furnish new arguments in favour of longtermism, since many political values also call for the consideration of future people. For example, we might care about intergenerational justice or about the freedom and equality of future people. And how compelling is an ideal of democracy that disenfranchises most people, namely all those still to come?

In the remainder of this paper, we therefore focus on how longtermism interacts with five mainstream values in political philosophy: justice, equality, freedom, legitimacy, and democracy. In each case, we first consider possible tensions with longtermism and then arguments pointing toward greater convergence.

4.2 Justice

T. M. Scanlon distinguishes between morality in general and *interpersonal morality* which is concerned with *what we owe to each other* (Scanlon 1998, 6–7). Justice, according to Scanlon, falls within interpersonal morality, whereas at least some forms of impartial beneficence do not. Beneficence involves *impersonal* reasons to promote value. But justice is distinctively concerned with what people are *due* (Barrett 2022; Gilabert 2016; Miller 2021)

Already, this generates a tension between longtermism and justice. The beneficence-based case for longtermism moves from axiology to reasons for institutional design. Such reasons at least *prima facie* appear to be impersonal rather than interpersonal: they are not owed to any particular person or group, as their justification is based on possible people in the far future (though more on this shortly). Justice, in contrast, is owed to someone.

In addition to this *structural mismatch*, there might also be an *intuitive conflict* between justice and longtermism. Why should we worry so much about possible people in the far future when there are so many pressing injustices in the here and now? Shouldn't we address ongoing and historical injustice first?

However, several considerations lessen these tensions.

First, many longtermist priorities may perform well in terms of near-term justice. Consider pandemic preparedness. As the COVID-19 pandemic shows, pandemics are supremely bad in the near term and lead to massive injustices, involving unnecessary death, illness, and poverty. And their burdens tend to fall disproportionately on disadvantaged individuals and social groups. Similarly, there might be some convergence in AI safety work and the prevention of near-term injustice (for example, due to algorithmic discrimination). More generally, Carl Shulman and Elliott Thornley argue that most longtermist interventions that reduce existential risk also come out as high priority from the perspective of only present people (Shulman and Thornley 2023).

Second, there might be institutional convergence: institutions that are more just, at least in particular ways, may tend to promote more long-term value. For example, states that protect human rights, secure some decent economic minimum, and observe principles of legal justice probably have institutions that perform better by longtermists' lights. Furthermore, from a patient perspective, unjust institutions may be sticky and involve feedback loops that stand in the way of further institutional improvements (Barrett and Buchanan forthcoming). For example, those who benefit from unjust power inequalities tend to shape institutions in ways that further their short-term interests. And societies subject to epistemic injustice may be worse at institutional learning.

In addition to these empirical arguments there are also more philosophical considerations.

First, justice gives us 'interpersonal' duties we owe to others. But, like beneficence, it may also give us 'impersonal' duties: duties to *promote* justice. For example, imagine a button that would immediately remove injustices in some far-away country. Regardless of whether you have interpersonal duties of justice to people there, it seems you ought to press it. Rawls, too, thought that we have a 'natural duty' of justice to promote or sustain just institutions (Rawls 1971, 98–99).

If there is an impersonal duty to promote justice, then presumably we have stronger reasons to promote justice to a greater extent. Roger Crisp and Theron Pummer thus suggest that we should focus on reducing injustice in developing nations, since, at the margin, we can typically reduce injustice more effectively there than in high-income countries (Crisp and Pummer 2020, 401–2).

However, if longtermists are right, our expected impact might be largest on future people, given their great number. An impersonal duty to promote justice might push us to be 'justice longtermists.'

What exactly justice longtermism implies, however, is complicated. For example, some suggest that injustice is primary and that justice is merely the absence of injustice (e.g. Shklar 1990; Schmidtz 2011). If so, we can have a duty to prevent injustice, but no additional duty to promote justice. Does justice longtermism then imply that we have a duty to hasten human extinction, since without people, there can be no injustice? This may strike many as a reductio. Alternatively, we might have a duty to promote justice rather than to prevent its opposite. But does that imply we ought to bring as many people into existence as possible, to increase aggregate justice among them? We are not used to thinking of larger countries as more just simply in virtue of their greater population. Clearly, some work is needed on the 'population ethics of justice'.

A second type of convergence argument zooms in on interpersonal duties of *intergenerational justice*: duties we owe to future people. There is some debate about whether we can owe future people anything in light of the non-identity problem: what we do now affects not only how well off future people are, but also *which* future people exist (see Meyer 2015, sec. 3 for an overview). But many political philosophers believe that we at least owe it to future people not to bring them into existence beneath some threshold of sufficiency or in circumstances where their rights will be violated (Caney 2018). Moreover, conditional on there being future people, we might still have interpersonal duties towards them, if we think of these duties as owed to 'types of person' or persons 'de dicto' (Hare 2007; Kumar 2015; 2018). However, it is harder to see how we can have interpersonal duties of justice *to* future people to bring them into existence in the first place. To *whom* have we acted unjustly if none come to exist? The tension between intergenerational justice and the longtermist priority of avoiding human extinction may therefore persist (Barrett 2022).

Another issue is that many global justice theorists argue that (certain) duties of distributive justice are owed only to those we bear special relations to. For example, Michael Blake and Laura

Valentini argue that we only have duties of (egalitarian) justice towards others if we share *coercive* institutions with them (Blake 2001; 2013; Valentini 2011a; 2011b). Andrea Sangiovanni argues that the relevant relation is *reciprocity* (Sangiovanni 2007). Can such relations also exist across generations? Intuitively, direct reciprocity cannot hold across generations (Heyd 2009), although recent work argues that more indirect forms of reciprocity might (Brandstedt 2015; Gosseries 2009; Heath 2013; Scheffler 2018). Yet even if such relations extend across generations, they are unlikely to get us all the way to longtermism. Intergenerational coercion, reciprocity, and so on are likely weaker across than within generations. Furthermore, such relations may weaken and eventually disappear as we peer further and further into the future (compare Mogensen 2019).

Finally, even if our duties of intergenerational justice extend into the far future, they might require something different than our impersonal duties to promote valuable or just outcomes. Many theories of intergenerational justice are sufficientarian, only requiring us to ensure that future people meet some minimal standard (Meyer and Roser 2009). Impersonal duties to promote justice and the good within future generations might not be limited in the same way. However, whether this is so ultimately depends on our particular theory of justice. Although we cannot provide a complete survey of such theories here, we now turn to the two most common values used to fill out theories of justice, but which may also matter for other reasons: equality and freedom.

4.3 Equality

Equality is a central value in political philosophy, perhaps because there are so many reasons to care about it (Miller 1997; O'Neill 2008; Scanlon 2018). We here focus on three, which are distinct though not mutually exclusive.

First, a more equal distribution of income and wealth might be instrumentally valuable by contributing to more well-being, trust, education, better political institutions, social mobility and the like (Schmidt and Juijn 2021; Woodard 2019, chap. 7). Call this *instrumental egalitarianism*.

Second, *relational egalitarianism* holds that what matters is establishing equal relations and

preventing problematic relational inequalities (see e.g. Anderson 1999; Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer 2015; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018; Schemmel 2021; Schmidt 2021b). Relations like domination and subjugation are the central enemies, while securing the conditions for people to live as equals is the positive ideal. For relational egalitarians, distributive inequalities are not bad in themselves, but they are objectionable if they constitute or contribute to relational inequalities.

Third, distributive egalitarians hold that distributive inequalities are instead non-instrumentally bad (or, perhaps, that equalities are non-instrumentally good). So-called luck egalitarians add that inequalities between individuals are only bad if they arise from brute luck but not if they arise from responsible choice (see e.g. Arneson 1989; G. A. Cohen 1989; Lippert-Rasmussen 2015; Stemplowska 2013).

How do these versions of egalitarianism bear on longtermism? To answer this, we must consider, (i) whether each view applies only within or also across generations; and (ii) what kind of reasons each view gives us: impersonal reasons to promote good outcomes or interpersonal reasons owed to others?

First, answering (i), some *instrumental* egalitarian arguments apply to both intragenerational and intergenerational distributions. For example, more equal distributions of economic resources between generations might lead to more well-being because of their decreasing marginal utility. Other arguments apply more to intragenerational distributions, such as arguments around relative standing and status anxiety. On (ii), instrumental egalitarianism is about good outcomes and not about interpersonal claims of justice. So there is no obvious tension between instrumental egalitarianism and longtermism.

However, Tyler Cowen argues that for longtermists, economic (in)equality is mostly irrelevant (Cowen 2018): sustainable growth is far more important, as it compounds over the years. Andreas T Schmidt and Daan Juijn disagree, arguing that reducing (intragenerational) economic inequality is probably valuable (even assuming a utilitarian axiology) whether one takes a short, medium, or longtermist time frame (Schmidt and Juijn 2021). Central arguments here are that more

equal societies likely have lower greenhouse gas emissions, enjoy lower risk of elite capture of political institutions, and have better all-purpose conditions for public good provision and for dealing with long-term risks.

Consider *relational* egalitarianism next. Regarding (i), most relational egalitarians focus on intragenerational inequalities, but some relational inequalities might obtain across generations too (see, e.g., Bengtson 2019). Regarding (ii), relational egalitarianism is sometimes considered a theory of interpersonal justice and sometimes a more axiological theory. Insofar as relational egalitarianism is about interpersonal justice, it might conflict with longtermism: the strongest relationships will likely be intragenerational, and stronger intergenerational relationships will be near-term rather than long-term. However, insofar as relational egalitarianism issues impersonal duties to promote justice, it might not clash with longtermism but merely affect its shape: preventing relational inequalities among future people would become a longtermist priority.

Finally, consider *distributive* egalitarianism. Regarding (i), the theory can be both intra- and intergenerational, though a concern with intergenerational equality sometimes leads to counterintuitive verdicts (Schmidt 2021a; Temkin 1995, 99). Derek Parfit, for example, asks whether it really matters that 13th century Inca peasants were worse off than people alive today (Parfit 1991, 7; though see Segall 2016). Regarding (ii), distributive egalitarianism is typically understood as concerning the value of outcomes. So there is no structural conflict with longtermism, and distributive egalitarianism might only affect longtermism's shape. Arguably, however, this effect will be slight, as plausible versions of distributive egalitarianism allow large increases in total welfare (as are at stake in the very long run) to outweigh equality (Barrett 2020a).

4.4   Freedom

Freedom is another central value in contemporary political philosophy. On first glance, it seems to conflict with longtermism: freedom is often thought to place limits on how far the government can

use state power to bring about certain outcomes. Longtermism, however, might require that we infringe the freedom of existing people.

Nick Bostrom provides an extreme example of a potential clash (Bostrom 2019). He asks whether we may have been lucky so far to have only discovered ways of causing global disasters that are costly and difficult to implement. But what if it became possible to build nuclear weapons or something equally damaging in your garage? Or what if future technology allows anyone with an undergraduate degree in chemistry to build pathogens that could wipe out humanity? To reduce the risk that such developments occur, Bostrom suggests we might have to violate people's freedom and privacy on a massive scale, for example, by having cameras track people's movements. Beyond such drastic scenarios, there are more mundane reasons why longtermism might conflict with freedom. For example, might preventing long-term damage from climate change require restricting people's freedom now?

To see whether freedom and longtermism converge or conflict, we need a better handle on what freedom is and why we should care about it. Contemporary political philosophy often distinguishes between liberal, republican, and libertarian conceptions of freedom (Schmidt 2022d). Liberal theorists hold that freedom is primarily about having *options*. Some liberals hold that the absence of interpersonal interference with your options is sufficient for freedom (Kristjánsson 1996; Miller 1983; Steiner 1994). Others hold that freedom requires not only the absence of interference, but also the genuine ability to pursue an option (Kramer 2003; Parijs 1997; Schmidt 2016; Sen 1999). Recent neo-republican theories argue that even this is insufficient: freedom also depends on not being subject to domination, where someone dominates you if they have the uncontrolled power to interfere with you—regardless of whether they actually intervene (Pettit 2014; Lovett 2010; Schmidt 2018a; Skinner 2012).

Practically, liberal and republican theories of freedom mainly converge, because (most) republicans think option-freedom is necessary (but insufficient) and, second, because most liberals think republican institutions and relations of non-domination tend to increase liberal option-

freedom (Carter 1999, chap. 7.5; Kramer 2003, chap. 3). Interestingly, recent theorizing in this tradition often treats freedom as a scalar good rather than something imposing a deontic constraint.

If we go with liberal or republican theories, longtermism and freedom might seem to converge: reasons to care about the freedom of existing people are also reasons to care about future people's freedom, whether this is understood as option-freedom or non-domination (Schmidt 2022c; Vercelli 1998). Some republicans add that there can also be domination *across* generations (Beckman 2016a; Katz 2017; Schmidt and Bengtson 2021; Smith 2013). Previous generations dominate future people, as they have the uncontrolled power to influence their lives. All this suggests that freedom might not speak against longtermism but only affect its shape.

But perhaps we are assuming an overly consequentialist view on freedom. Rather than promoting other people's freedom, aren't we required to respect it?

There are different deontological theories on offer but the most influential are libertarian. Libertarians see freedom as intrinsically linked to *property rights*: we are unfree to the extent that our property rights are violated, including our right of self-ownership (Fried 2004; Nozick 1974; Otsuka 2003; Vallentyne and Steiner 2000). If such views are interpreted as issuing deontological constraints, they might limit the scope within which institutions can permissibly pursue longtermist causes. But even this is not clear.

First, libertarians often allow interfering with person *A*'s actions if this interference is necessary to prevent interference with person *B*'s freedom. For example, if *A* threatens *B*'s physical safety, libertarians might endorse restricting *A*'s option to do so to safeguard *B*'s freedom. So perhaps some restrictions now might be necessary to reduce the risk of restrictions on future people's freedom. Second, even if we see freedom as issuing interpersonal demands, it might also give us impersonal duties to promote it. Shouldn't libertarians try to bring about libertarian institutions for future people? Furthermore, most libertarians are not entirely insensitive to axiological stakes. Even Robert Nozick held that preventing 'catastrophic moral horrors' might override freedom and property rights (Nozick 1974, 29 footnote). Longtermists could argue that

they are concerned with preventing such horrors from occurring, or with promoting outcomes that it would be equally disastrous not to achieve.

Leaving philosophical considerations aside, there may also be strong empirical reasons why longtermists should safeguard freedom (of both current and future people), regardless of our theory of freedom. First, at least in the medium term, empirical evidence suggests societies with more freedom are, on the whole, happier countries (Bavetta et al. 2014; Inglehart et al. 2008; Veenhoven 2000). Moreover, most rich countries (other than tax havens and petrol states) are broadly speaking liberal democracies. If institutions are sticky, this suggests freedom has benefits at least in the medium term and perhaps in the very long run. Second, the risk of 'value lock-in' might generally give longtermists reason to prefer freedom as a default. If we are uncertain about what the correct values are, we should be cautious not to lock in values for a long time that later might turn out misguided. Free societies are less likely to lock in particular values and may offer better epistemic conditions for experimentation and moral progress. Finally, and relatedly, longtermists are worried about totalitarian risk. A strong societal and institutional commitment to freedom might reduce such risk.

4.5 Legitimacy

So far, we have seen that while justice, equality, and freedom pose *prima facie* challenges to longtermism, various arguments also suggest convergence. However, when it comes to legitimacy, the tension with longtermism seems quite stark. On common theories of legitimacy, a state is legitimate only if it rules by the consent of the governed (Locke 1690; Simmons 2001), or if its constitution or laws are "publicly justified" (that is, justified *to* all reasonable people it rules over, in light of their diverse values and beliefs) (e.g. Rawls 2005), or if its actions are the output of a fair democratic procedure (e.g. Christiano 2008). Many actions favoured by longtermists might therefore prove illegitimate in modern societies, where citizens do not generally consent to, agree with, or vote for longtermist policies or institutions.

Moreover, the *structural* tension with longtermism also seems greater for legitimacy: unlike the values discussed above, legitimacy is uncontroversially deontological. A government or other entity is legitimate when it has the "right to rule." Minimally, this involves a "permission-right" implying that it permissibly wields its political power over its citizens (and perhaps others); more controversially, it may also involve *authority* or a "claim-right" that implies individuals have an obligation to obey. Although we might also have some reason to promote legitimacy (or prevent illegitimacy), legitimacy's force is widely assumed to be deontological, so repeating the above move of making the value an object to promote seems less promising.

Nevertheless, we might try to resolve this tension.

First, we might argue that, empirically, certain longtermist priorities are indeed legitimate, at least on some theories. For example, perhaps efforts to combat existential risks are publicly justified, since they also severely threaten present people. Less speculatively, Kevin Tobia et el. present survey evidence that most legal professionals and laypeople believe the law both can and should protect future people much more than it currently does (Tobia, Martinez, and Winter 2023).

Second, and more philosophically, we might offer a modified version of the Stakes-Sensitivity Argument where stakes-sensitivity is built into the very concept of legitimacy (rather than, as on the standard argument, such stakes potentially outweighing legitimacy). Ross Mittiga argues that, when the stakes are high enough, ordinary notions of legitimacy allow the state to employ "emergency powers" that would be illegitimate in normal times (as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example) (Mittiga 2022). On his view, climate change may represent an ongoing state of emergency such that, in tackling it, governments can legitimately act in ways we would normally view as illegitimate or even authoritarian. Longtermists might generalize this argument, claiming that the same applies to our current threat from existential risks. However, most theorists would likely deny that legitimacy really is stakes-sensitive in this way: while many agree that states can render themselves *illegitimate* by acting very badly or unjustly (e.g. Rawls 2005, 428), few agree that they can legitimate themselves by doing enough good. Furthermore, as seen

above, societies that value freedom are likely to promote long-term value better than those that do not. And as we will see, the same may be true of democratic rather than authoritarian states. Indeed, a government that effectively declared a perpetual state of emergency should raise red flags to longtermists due to the risk of bad value lock-in, abuse of power, and long-term totalitarian capture.

Third, and again related to stakes, longtermists might challenge the arguments underlying popular theories of legitimacy and push them in a more longtermist-friendly direction. Allen Buchanan, for example, ties legitimacy to justice, defending the "functionalist" thesis that a state is legitimate when it meets minimal standards of justice. One of his central arguments is that the state is such a dangerous and powerful entity that only justice is weighty enough to legitimate its establishment (Buchanan 2003, 247). Longtermists may retort that the value at stake in the long-run future is of even greater weight, such that similar arguments should lead one to view a state as legitimate only if it appropriately pursues long-run value.

Finally, and most radically, we might challenge existing approaches to legitimacy as being too focused on present people. The demand for legitimacy arises given some relation between the ruler and the ruled. Might this relation also obtain between the state and future people? Tyler John argues that whatever relation grounds the demand for legitimacy in the intragenerational case—be it coercion, domination, or subordination, say—the same relation holds intergenerationally (John 2022, chap. 1). But others disagree. Ludvig Beckman, for example, argues that present governments cannot 'rule over' future people at all, because future people can repeal or modify any laws we pass now (Beckman 2009, chap. 7). Furthermore, it is not obvious how states *can* legitimate themselves to future people, at least on certain theories. Future people cannot consent to what present states do, for example. But perhaps we can appeal to notions like hypothetical consent instead.

If states must indeed legitimate themselves to future people, then legitimacy arguably provides an argument *for* longtermism. Consider democratic conceptions on which states derive legitimacy from the participation or representation of its subjects in appropriate decision-making procedures. If future people need to be represented too, then this might radically change which

actions are legitimate, perhaps suggesting that longtermist institutions and policies are not only consistent with, but mandated by, a concern for legitimacy. This leads into our next topic.

4.6 Democracy

Intuitively, respecting the voice and preferences of existing people might constrain how longtermist political institutions can be. Kenneth Arrow, for example, appealed to democracy when defending a positive discount rate, given that individuals' preferences typically reflect one (Arrow 1996). Yet, as we have seen, it might also be undemocratic that the vast number of future people are entirely disenfranchised. So, does democracy push us towards or away from longtermism?

The answer partly depends on *why* we should endorse democracy. Democracy is defended on two main sorts of grounds: intrinsic (or "procedural") and instrumentalist (though see Ziliotti 2020 for more fine-grained distinctions). Intrinsic defences point to features of democratic decision-making procedures that are valuable independently of the outcomes they produce. For example, such procedures may realize values of freedom, equality, collective self-rule, or fairness. Instrumental defences appeal to the beneficial consequences of democracy. For example, democracies may have good empirical track records or have epistemic properties that yield better decisions than other systems of government.

In practice, "pure proceduralists" are rare. Most theorists endorse both intrinsic and instrumental arguments. John Halstead thus argues that nearly all major theories of democracy are committed to high-stakes instrumentalism: when the moral stakes are very high, the intrinsic value of democracy is outweighed, and we ought to employ whatever political procedures yield better outcomes (Halstead 2017). Given that longtermist decisions involve high stakes, the Stakes-Sensitivity Argument therefore threatens to collapse all democratic theories to instrumentalism.

Suppose, however, that this collapse can be avoided. Do intrinsic theories of democracy then conflict with longtermism? On the one hand, as we have seen, the conflict between democracy and longtermism seems obvious: democratic bodies may predictably decide against longtermist

priorities. On the other, actual democracies might fall short of the intrinsic ideals of democracy. Assume democracy implies, roughly, that all constituents enjoy an equal say or representation in decision-making. The question now arises *who* should be included in this constituency.

The two most prominent approaches to answering this "boundary problem" involve the "all-affected" and the "all-subjected" principles. According to the former, all individuals whose interests are (actually or possibly) affected by a decision should have influence over or representation in the decision (Arrhenius 2005; Goodin 2007). According the latter, all those who are bound by, subject to, or coerced by a decision should be included (Beckman 2014, 257; Goodin 2016, 370–73).

Do these principles imply we must include future people? Initially, it seems so: future people seem both affected by current decisions and bound by them. However, the non-identity problem may suggest otherwise for the all-affected principle (Tännsjö 2007). And Beckman's above argument that we cannot rule over future people threatens the application of the all-subjected principle (Beckman 2009, chap. 7). Further, several theorists now argue that we should look beyond the two principles and adopt more theory-driven approaches to the boundary problem that connect to a theory of what democracy is and why it is valuable (Bengtson and Lippert-Rasmussen 2021; Miller 2020; Saunders 2012; Song 2012). For example, some recent work explores whether and how republican theories of democracy should include future people (Schmidt and Bengtson 2021).

Turn now to *instrumental* defences of democracy. In general, longtermists should care about at least some of the ways democracy is instrumentally valuable. For example, democracies arguably facilitate economic growth (Acemoglu et al. 2018), have better human rights records (Herre and Roser 2013), and correlate with better education and health (Ortiz-Ospina 2019; Herre and Roser 2013), and higher happiness and life satisfaction (Orviska, Caplanova, and Hudson 2014; Owen, Videras, and Willemsen 2008). Insofar as those benefits and real and institutions are sticky, democracies may provide steady streams of such benefits over time. More directly pertinent to longtermism, 'democratic peace theory' holds that democracies go to war less, especially with each

other (Chan 1997). They might also better deal with certain disasters (see Sen 1982 on democracies and famines and Rubin 2009 for a response). Some also argue that democracies improve and adapt faster since they are better at experimenting and gathering feedback (Anderson 2006; Dewey 1927; Knight and Johnson 2011); others argue that they are better at resisting elite capture (Bagg 2018; forthcoming).

Still, are democracies really well-equipped to handle longtermist problems, including low-probability/high-impact risks that require long-term strategy? Electoral incentives notoriously focus politicians on the next election cycle, and mechanisms of democratic accountability generally hold politicians to account to present citizens rather than to future people (Caney 2017; John and MacAskill 2021). Some thus argue for more centralized or even authoritarian forms of governance to respond to the climate crisis (Mittiga 2022; also see Shahar 2015 for an overview and critique of "eco-authoritarianism"). However, as defenders of this view themselves often acknowledge, existing authoritarian governments have poor track records on environmental issues (Mittiga 2022, nn. 1, 2; Shahar 2015, 354–56). Furthermore, the only systematic attempt we are aware of to quantify how well governments pursue long-run goals finds a strong *positive* correlation between democracy and "Intergenerational Solidarity" (Krznaric 2021, chap. 9). If we also consider the above instrumental arguments plus worries around 'totalitarian risk' and value lock-in, longtermism seems more likely to reinforce rather than challenge the instrumental case for democracy.

Finally, longtermism raises questions for so-called "epistemic" defences of democracy, including those that invoke formal results rather than empirical evidence (Anderson 2006; J. Cohen 1986; Estlund 2009). The most famous defence rests on the Condorcet Jury Theorem, which says that under certain conditions the majority is more likely to be right than any individual (Goodin and Spiekermann 2018; List and Goodin 2001). Others have invoked the Diversity Trumps Ability theorem (Landemore 2012), which says that under certain conditions more diverse groups outperform groups composed of experts (Hong and Page 2004; Page 2008). Both theorems have their limitations, but the basic idea that democracy can harness the wisdom of crowds or diversity

has staying power. Might longtermism challenge this?

Speaking roughly, the key insight behind both theorems is that decision-making bodies face a trade-off between the greater competence (or expertise) of their members, and their greater diversity. Crucially, however, the benefits of diversity only kick in if all members are "competent enough." Now, figuring out how to promote long-run value is very hard. This might seem to undermine the "competent enough" condition and thus suggest an argument for epistocracy ("rule by the knowers"): if lay people are incompetent, we must leave longtermist governance to experts rather than "the people." Conversely, however, longtermist problems might be tractable enough that most individuals do count as "competent enough." Instead, the real challenge might be that no one is *very* competent to pursue them: even "experts" aren't much better than laypeople. If so, this might reinforce epistemic arguments for democracy, since it suggests we must rely on diverse crowds rather than (only on) expertise (see Ahissar 2022)

5   What Next?

We have presented the beneficence-based argument for institutional longtermism, outlined different approaches to longtermist institutional reform, and – as a framing device for investigating other issues – explored various points of tension and convergence between longtermism and central values in political philosophy. In each case, we have found that while certain tensions initially seem manifest, on closer inspection things quickly get complicated, leaving it far from obvious whether political values conflict with, or perhaps even support, longtermism.

Of necessity, our survey of these topics has been superficial as well as incomplete. Further research is clearly needed, including more careful investigations of both the arguments we have floated and of what longtermism might imply for particular theories of justice, legitimacy, and the like (for example, how does longtermism interact with Rawlsian justice?). This work might also more carefully distinguish stronger from weaker versions of longtermism, which we have largely

run together here. But rather than diving deeper into the topics already discussed, we end with a "grab bag" of other important questions, starting with more theoretical and broader questions:

Global justice and global governance: as noted above, global justice and longtermism intersect in interesting ways. But longtermism also raises fascinating questions about global *governance*. Effective longtermist action – on issues like climate change, pandemic prevention, AI safety and more – likely requires international action (Ord 2020)). However, some worry that centralizing political authority would raise totalitarian risk (Caplan 2011). So, should longtermists favour more or less international coordination or centralization, and of what sort? Such work is pressing: marking its 75th anniversary, the United Nations released a report that explicitly includes longtermist goals as central to the UN's mission ('Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General' 2021). With more meetings and public deliberations planned, the UN will also consider concrete proposals to represent future generations, including a Trusteeship Council, a Futures Lab, a Declaration on Future Generations, and a Special Envoy.

Political Morality: we have focused on institutions rather than on how individual citizens should act. Bud how does longtermism affect political morality? For example, if longtermism holds up yet states fail to meet their longtermist duties, what does that imply for citizens and their political obligations and potential civic duties to effect change?

Diversifying: we have focused on contemporary analytic philosophy. But we might also gain insights from other periods and traditions. Take some examples from the history of Western philosophy. John Stuart Mill (Mill 1866, cols 1525–8) argued that we should leave coal in the ground for future generations—an argument recently taken up by William MacAskill (MacAskill 2022b, 138–41). Edmund Burke provided a conservative political argument for concern for the future (taken up by Ord 2020, 49–52). Hans Jonas developed a Kantian variant of longtermism several decades ago (Jonas 1979; 1985). And religious

thinkers might offer interesting views on future generations and existential risk as well (Riedener 2022). Beyond the "Western" tradition, the oral constitution of the Iriquous confederacy (*Gayanashagowa*) dates back centuries and includes concern for future generations, often interpreted as the "seventh generation principle." There is also much to learn by investigating points of contact between longtermism and other traditions, such as Buddhist ethics (Baker 2022, sec. 3.2.2.), Confucianism (Hourdequin and Wong 2021), Latin American thought (Vidiella and García Valverde 2021), and African thought (Mbonda and Ngosso 2021).

Nonhuman animals: nonhuman animals remain neglected in both political philosophy (Barrett 2022; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Garner 2013; Schmidt 2018b) and longtermism (Browning and Veit 2023). This is unfortunate, since serious efforts to promote long-run institutional reform must take animals into account. It also raises challenging questions (MacAskill 2022b, 208–13): given humanity's impact on non-human animals and ecosystems, is the value of our survival really positive on balance? Furthermore, bringing nonhuman animals and longtermism together might uncover sources of insight, since the political issues confronting nonhuman animals and future people have much in common: despite their massive numbers, neither group has political influence.

Distinctively longtermist values: we have discussed how longtermism interacts with existing values in mainstream political philosophy. But might longtermism also require new, specifically longtermist values to shape our institutions? If so, what might those be?

Longtermist institutional reform: what longtermist political reforms, if any, should we pursue (González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2017; John and MacAskill 2021)? For example, should we focus on *constitutions* (Araújo and Koessler 2021; Beckman 2016b) or more on the legislative or executive? Or can we forgo formal changes and have civil society and voters pressure decision-makers into longtermist actions? Or, instead of institutional design, should we

focus more on "institutional selection": shaping the selection mechanisms that determine which sorts of institutions are more or less likely to persist and spread over the long run?

Besides questions around 'broad' interventions, important questions focus on targeted interventions:

Space governance: many longtermists view space settlement as a crucial step in humanity's future, since it may allow humanity to massively expand its population and fortify itself against certain existential threats. The field of space governance, however, is in its infancy. Political philosophers could help.

AI governance: for longtermists, Artificial General Intelligence presents both vast opportunities and risks. AI governance should thus be an important area for targeted interventions, and political philosophy could make valuable contributions to this growing field (see, for example, Bullock et al. forthcoming).

Pandemics and public health ethics: public health ethicists have already written much about the ethics and politics of infectious diseases and pandemics (Boylan 2022; Hirose 2022). Integration and further work might be important for targeted interventions to reduce pandemic risks that threaten long-run value.

Nuclear weapons: in the heyday of the Cold War, several philosophers wrote about nuclear weapons (A. Cohen and Lee 1986; Goodin 1980; Kavka 1987; Lewis 1986). Renewed interest – with a view towards longtermism and existential risk – might be valuable, particularly in evaluating specific interventions (see e.g. Rendall 2021).

Population ethics and demography: population ethics throws up challenging questions that have received much attention in the literature on longtermism. But applied political questions around demography also demand our attention. Near-term worries tend to cluster around overpopulation. For example, given the climate crisis, political philosophers discuss how many children one can permissibly have and what, if anything, states should do about

overpopulation (e.g., Conly 2016). However, if current trends continue, demographers predict that *depopulation* will replace overpopulation in the next century (Bricker and Ibbitson 2019; Jones 2020). If so, what would a long-term perspective imply for institutions that affect fertility and demography?

Besides broad and narrow interventions, there are also some normative questions about *how* longtermism is (or should be) pursued and promulgated:

Longtermism as ideology: some worry that longtermism serves (or could come to serve) as an ideology that justifies maintaining problematic features of the status quo, or even making it worse, in the name of achieving a long and glorious future. Notably, this criticism does not assume that longtermism is false, but only that it is ripe for abuse (either intentionally or due to bias or motivated reasoning). Is there anything to this worry? If so, how can we guard against this?

Democracy and billionaire philanthropy: currently, much investment into longtermism comes from private donors, including billionaires associated with effective altruism. Some worry that such funding structures are undemocratic and elitist (Lechterman 2019; 2021; Reich 2018; also see Matthews 2022). Are such worries justified? And, if so, can longtermists devise social and political structures that make the project more democratic and inclusive?

This list remains only a sampling of the many questions and research avenues in longtermist political philosophy. Our goal has been to show that there is important work to be done here – work that we hope both longtermists and their critics will feel compelled to pursue. After all, the stakes are very high.

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