

Egalitarianism across generations

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Abstract: For some time now, philosophers have been developing egalitarian theories that seek to elucidate why and when distributive inequalities are morally problematic. However, surprisingly little attention so far has been paid to how egalitarians should deal with intergenerational inequalities. One egalitarian theory is (telic) distributive egalitarianism, according to which equal distributions of some good are intrinsically better than unequal distributions, other things being equal. I first argue that distributive egalitarianism yields implausible judgements when applied to distributions between non-overlapping generations. I then argue that this result implies we should be more sceptical of distributive egalitarianism in general. Instead, I suggest, we should adopt a non-distributive version of egalitarianism that attends to the instrumental and relational reasons against inequality without positing that distributive inequality is intrinsically bad. I then show how this non-distributive alternative provides a plausible egalitarian approach to intergenerational distributions.