

2. Three dimensions of generational justice

In this chapter we investigate the moral significance of generational welfare contracts. We will lay out a justice-based argument for why it matters whether the welfare state is balanced in the sense that it provides equally comprehensive social protection against different age-related social risks. This argument establishes a normative starting point for our empirical investigations on how welfare states affect people belonging to different age groups, and defines welfare-related outcomes that are important to analyse from a generational point of view.

The question about generational balance/imbalance helps to situate our empirical contribution in relation to normative debates on generational justice and the welfare state, that is, debates on the values and principles of justice that should guide decisions on how to (re-)distribute resources between persons born at different points in time. The past few decades have seen important developments in the political philosophy of justice between age groups (McKerlie, 2013) and justice in relation to future generations (Gosseries and Meyer, 2009). There is also a growing body of empirical research on the effects of generational politics (Vanhuysse and Goerres, 2012), and specialized debates on how to advance the sustainability and fairness of welfare states in response to ageing societies (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2006).

Yet, discussions of intergenerational justice and the welfare state have too often been conducted in separate compartments. If principles of justice are to provide any sensible practical guidance, it is crucial to link the fundamental values and principles at stake not only to empirical findings about the causes and consequences of the generational structure of social citizenship, but also to specific questions of policy design. Thus, while the emphasis of this book is firmly placed on an empirical analysis of the institutional structures and social outcomes of the generational welfare state, it is also motivated by an explicit aim to connect normative and empirical research more closely, thereby promoting a more holistic treatment of these issues.

The theoretical bases of our approach are developed in two steps. In this chapter, we introduce central concepts and values in political phi-

losophy by linking our empirical contribution to considerations of justice between age groups and generations. In the next chapter (Chapter 3), we then advance our analytical framework for the study of generational welfare contracts in the context of ageing societies and further outline the hypothesis about positive-sum solutions. This framework is subsequently used to evaluate the explanatory role of generational policies for a diverse set of social outcomes of immediate relevance for generational justice.

ASSESSING GENERATIONAL WELFARE CONTRACTS: WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The ambition of this book is to explore how different institutional designs of generational politics are related to a wide range of social outcomes. As will be more fully elaborated in Chapter 3, the working hypothesis is that balanced generational welfare contracts, providing evenly distributed social protection across the age-related risks associated with different stages of life, will generate more favorable welfare-related outcomes in all age groups. The central idea is that social policy institutions that are encompassing in generational terms have great potential to promote a stronger and more widespread commitment to the social protection of all (age) groups. This follows the same kind of logic that has underpinned the notion of a “paradox of redistribution” (Korpi and Palme, 1998; Nelson, 2003). Social policy institutions that provide adequate protection for a broad political majority of citizens will also sustain wider political support for raising enough taxes to pave the way for higher levels of provision to disadvantaged people. As outlined below, this institutional perspective on social policy can be fruitfully aligned with philosophical arguments on generational justice.

What is the relevance of age-related inequalities from the point of view of justice? How, more exactly, is the distribution of social citizenship rights between different age categories morally significant? In addressing these issues, it should be acknowledged that philosophical debates on the morality of intergenerational relations are highly complex and that our general discussion in this chapter of course cannot do them full justice (see e.g. Gosseries and Meyer, 2009; Laslett and Fishkin, 1992; McKerlie, 2013; Thompson, 2009; Tremmel, 2009). To be clear, we have no ambition to formulate a new theory of justice on these matters, or to develop a philosophical justification of one particular conception of generational justice. Readers with different normative views should be able to recognize the moral relevance of the distribution (inequality) of both social entitlements and social outcomes that we are focusing

on. However, because this book develops an empirical contribution that speaks to key concerns expressed in theories of justice between age groups and generations, it is important to establish the nature of these connections between principles of generational justice and our empirical analyses.

We identify and analyse three distinct types of considerations in normative debates on generational justice and the welfare state: (1) the prudential lifespan approach; (2) relational equality; and (3) just savings for future generations. We argue that these three perspectives all capture important and widely shared values that should be taken into account in analyses of the generational structure of social citizenship, and that all of them actually call for close examination of the empirical questions addressed in subsequent chapters of this book. Specifically, they direct our attention to the question of whether (and to what extent) generational welfare contracts can be designed to:

1. enhance people's overall life prospects
2. enable relational equality between all age groups at all times
3. promote and preserve just institutions for future generations.

While these three perspectives express different types of considerations and appeal to different values, they do not necessarily lead to conflicting practical recommendations. Indeed, if our hypothesis about the benefits of generationally balanced welfare contracts proves correct, they may well suggest different reasons for similar policy conclusions. The remainder of this chapter will explain the meaning of these three perspectives on generational justice and discuss their implications for the empirical study and moral assessment of generational welfare contracts.

As should now be clear, we believe that mere descriptions of how social entitlements are distributed across different age-related social risks, and how benefits and transfers for these purposes are defined by law, are insufficient for enabling empirically informed judgments about how best to apply principles of generational justice (although this is, of course, an important first step). It is also essential to address the additional question of whether any particular generational structure of social citizenship is more successful than others in supporting a wide range of social outcomes that we have reasons to value. This is the motivation for this book's main task, that is, to explore the potential for positive-sum solutions through what we call a balanced generational welfare contract.

INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION FOR MUTUAL ADVANTAGE: ENHANCING PEOPLE'S LIFE PROSPECTS

As noted in Chapter 1, discussions of intergenerational justice have often focused on the obligations between non-contemporaries and, in particular, what current generations may owe to future generations (Meyer, 2014). We shall address such considerations later in this chapter when discussing how generational welfare contracts between contemporaries may also have implications for justice in relation to future people. However, in the debates on intergenerational obligations of more immediate relevance to our concerns, the main focus is not so much on our duties to posterity (De-Shalit, 1995) as on questions about justice between younger and older members of a given political community (Daniels, 1988; McKerlie, 2013). These are also the questions that pave the way for our empirical approach.

How should we specify the requirements of justice between overlapping generations, and what are the implications for the generational welfare state? We start from the perspective formulated by Daniels in what is perhaps the most influential answer to this question: what he calls the prudential lifespan account of justice between age groups (Daniels, 1988, 2008). This view begins with the observation that all humans face similar age-related needs and risks at different stages of our lives. We all age and we all have a shared interest in catering for age-specific vulnerabilities and risks in a prudent way that supports our long-term prospects. Thus, in response to worries about intensified disagreements and conflicts between young and old in ageing societies, Daniels has offered the following “unifying vision”:

we must not look at the problem [of justice between age groups] as one of justice between distinct groups in competition with each other, for example between working adults who pay high premiums and the frail elderly who consume so many services. Rather, we must see that each age group *represents* a stage of our lives. We must view the prudent allocation of resources through the stages of life as our guide to justice between groups. (Daniels, 1988, p. 45, emphasis in the original)

Our approach is inspired by Daniels's emphasis on the potential to make all successive generations in a political community better off by enabling them to benefit from stable cooperation and risk-sharing between different overlapping generations instead of relying solely on their own savings. Prudential lifespan considerations demand taxes and transfers between persons who are presently at different stages of their lives and, therefore, belong to different generations. However, according to this view, the

motivation behind these arrangements for justice between age groups is not to save resources for future generations or to redistribute between rich and poor (although this is required by other considerations of justice).¹ Instead, the key task for justice between age groups is something more uncontroversial, namely to identify a rational allocation of resources between the different stages of a normal lifespan, that is, between our younger and older selves.

The aim is thus to help enhance the life prospects of all citizens over time by identifying and supporting stable forms of intergenerational cooperation that improves overall living conditions, taking all age groups (or life stages) into account: "If these institutions are prudently designed, we *each* benefit throughout our lives" (Daniels, 1988, p. 155, emphasis in the original). Our investigation of generational welfare contracts in this book can be seen as a kind of partial test of this claim, as well as an analysis of potential political conflicts associated with the design of prudent institutions for mutual long-term benefit. The simple motive for this is: why is it so difficult to establish such institutions that potentially benefit everyone?

In this unifying vision, it is central to approach the institutions of the generational welfare state not as a divisive competition between age groups for scarce resources, but as a (potential) means to establish and maintain a stable contract between all generations to help provide for each other, as they are moving through the different stages of life. Allowing welfare states to redistribute resources between members of different generations as they pass through different age groups (or life stages) should be conceived as an arrangement for borrowing from our later selves in the early stages of our lives, and to save for old age during the more economically active years in life in a way that effectively serves the long-term interests of all citizens. For this purpose of mutually beneficial intergenerational cooperation to enhance people's overall life prospects, we may reasonably be expected to "support our parents and expect our children's support in return" (Daniels, 1983, p. 514; see also Lindh et al., 2005).

To understand the basis of this view, it is important to see that Daniels (like most others in scholarly discussions of social justice) thinks that justice primarily concerns people's life prospects, that is, how we expect people to fare over complete lives and not just with the distribution of resources between persons at a particular point in time (Nagel, 1991; Rawls, 1971). From this follows that inequality between age groups is not always wrong. If some people are denied valuable opportunities only because of their sex or skin color, this will normally strike us as unfair. However, it seems that age-related inequalities are different because age is not always morally irrelevant in the way that sex or skin color normally is (Daniels, 1988, pp. 41ff.). We all age and have different needs

at different stages of our lives. It is reasonable to think that the level of support, and the types of resources that welfare states devote to each life stage, should reflect these differences and changing needs. And if we, to simplify matters, assume that the welfare state consistently treats age groups unequally in some respects (for example, with respect to the extensiveness of income protection linked to specific life stages, such as child benefits, parental leave or retirement pensions, or services to particular age groups, such as education of the young or health care for the elderly) this does not imply that they treat persons unequally over complete lives as long as citizens pass through all the stages of a life from childhood to old age.

Of course, in the real world things are more complex. Institutions are not always stable. Some people die when they are young, people migrate between different political communities and so on. However, the central point is that in the prudential lifespan perspective, the main question to ask when evaluating generational welfare contracts is not whether the welfare state treats members of different age groups equally in all respects, or if it achieves equal living standards for all age groups. Instead, the fundamental question is if the welfare state allocates resources between life stages (in practice between different age groups) in a way that enhances people's overall life prospects as much as possible.

The application of this perspective leads into many difficult philosophical questions, such as when and why age-based rationing of health care may be acceptable or required. To explain this idea of justice between age groups and bring out some of its more controversial implications, consider the use of very expensive high-technology medical services that may extend our lives beyond that of the normal lifespan for a very limited time at a very great cost. If we are focusing on the optimal allocation of a fixed share of resources across complete lives, it may seem more sensible to prioritize access to such costly medical services to improve the chances that young people will not be prevented from leading a life of normal length (Daniels, 1983, pp. 512–13). More broadly, with such an emphasis on improving life prospects, it may seem more important to help provide young people with an education from which they may benefit very greatly throughout the rest of their lives (Dworkin, 2000, pp. 314ff.).

For the purposes of this book, however, we find it enough to stress that the prudential lifespan account of justice between age groups, and the idea of generational welfare contracts for mutual benefits, demands close attention to empirical questions that have received limited consideration in debates on generational justice. When considering how to specify the content of age-related social entitlements of the welfare state, Daniels's perspective suggests that we should try to identify and support stable

forms of cooperation between overlapping generations that can help enhance living conditions over all life stages.

The working hypothesis in this book, concerning the potential of promoting gainful cooperation through generationally balanced welfare contracts, speaks directly to this objective. In exploring how age-related forms of social citizenship rights can be designed to improve people's overall life prospects, we must move beyond political philosophy and also take on the empirical task of examining the social and economic outcomes associated with different types of generational welfare contracts. How are, for example, different forms of intergenerational cooperation for addressing age-related social risks related to poverty, subjective well-being and trust in different age groups? To shed empirical light on the possibilities for positive-sum solutions through intergenerational cooperation, in line with Daniels's unifying vision, is a central task for the chapters to come.

INTERACTING AS EQUALS HERE AND NOW: THE DEMANDS OF RELATIONAL EQUALITY

While the prudential lifespan account of justice between age groups articulates important values and considerations, this does not mean that it should be our sole guide to a justice-based evaluation of generational welfare contracts. McKerlie has argued (against Daniels) that we have reasons to look at how people fare at each single stage of their lives "independent of how they fare in terms of their lifetime as a whole" (McKerlie, 2013, p. 17). Similarly, there is a category of social justice conceptions focusing on how resources can be distributed in a way that helps citizens relate to one another as equals at all stages of life (Anderson, 1999; Pettit, 2012; Satz, 2010), by counteracting fundamental power asymmetries, relations of exploitable dependency and vulnerability to abuse. These concerns are also very much in line with T.H. Marshall's (1950) notion of the civil, political and social dimensions of how citizenship may develop, which has made such a strong imprint on comparative welfare state research.

Arguments on relational equality, focusing on the preconditions for citizens to interact and relate to each other as equals at all times, are not explicitly advanced as a particular account of justice between age groups. However, from our perspective they are important by capturing another relevant set of considerations when discussing whether the distributive profiles and social outcomes of generational welfare contracts satisfy justice between people born at different points in time. To be more precise, conceptions of relational equality – with their emphasis on how resources, power and social status are connected – are not primarily driven by argu-

ments about long-term prudence, or general enhancement of people's overall life prospects (although they do not need to deny the latter's relevance). Rather, they emphasize the more specific concern of ensuring that all citizens have sufficient resources to effectively exercise their basic liberties at all times and to interact as equals – with dignity and mutual respect – here and now, regardless of age (Bidadanure, 2016; Jecker, 2013, p. 10). Considering these values and aims provides additional motivations for our choice of central outcomes and distributive patterns to address in the empirical analyses.

To explain the core idea of relational equality more fully, Pettit, an influential proponent of such a conception of justice, formulates the main objective in terms of freedom as non-domination. Being free from domination here is associated with having the power and independence that allows us to effectively exercise our basic liberties without having to live at the mercy of another and, thus, without being exposed to others' arbitrary interference in our personal lives. As Pettit puts it, "free persons can walk tall, and look others in the eye. They do not depend on anyone's grace or favour for being able to choose their mode of life" (Pettit, 2012, p. 82; see also Pettit, 2014). From this point of view, we should thus ascribe great importance and priority to continuous and sustainable poverty prevention to ensure that everyone – regardless of age – will have the resources necessary to "appear in public without shame" according to the prevailing standards and social conditions of their community (Sen, 1991, p. 71; see also Anderson, 1999; Jecker, 2013; Nussbaum, 2000).

To be fair, Daniels's theory is also concerned about "income preservation" throughout a person's life in order to maintain her access to the "normal opportunity range" for each specific life stage (Daniels, 1988, p. 121). However, in Daniels's theory we should always fix the levels of support to cope with age-specific risks based on how this may affect our overall life prospects (Van Parijs, 1995, pp. 45ff.). In contrast, if our main concern is relational equality at all times, conditions of relative poverty and unequal living conditions between people of different age groups are always a source of concern, insofar as such conditions erect barriers for maintaining relationships of equality (Bidadanure, 2016). Thus, to prevent relations of servility, and vulnerability to abuse, philosophers in this tradition tend to argue for structural restrictions of socio-economic inequality and institutions that sustain personal independence by way of social citizenship rights for all the stages of life (Pettit, 2012, pp. 90–91; Satz, 2010, pp. 100ff.).

For example, when we lack a genuine exit option from a destructive relationship or a very bad employer because we depend on that particular relationship for satisfying our basic material needs, we must be prepared to strategically anticipate and adapt to the will of those we depend on in

order to satisfy our basic needs (Goodin, 1988; Okin, 1989). We are vulnerable to their changing moods and shifting judgments, and we may need to stay silent even if this means that we are being constantly bossed around or being treated as a nuisance to others (Birnbaum, 2012). In the welfare state literature, the concepts of decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and defamilization (Lister, 1994) have been used to capture the potential of social citizenship rights to strengthen the weaker part in asymmetric power relationships, be it on the market or in the family. It is natural to assume that a lack of empowering security is harmful to our capacity to articulate or express our own views with strength and confidence. Interestingly, Daniels also concedes that there are certain power-related goods (such as voting rights or power in a marriage) “that we should insist we have equal shares or rights in over our whole lives”, and that we need to move beyond the prudential lifespan account to fully capture such egalitarian concerns (Daniels, 2008, p. 482).²

However, while we find theories of relational equality to develop important additional considerations for discussions of justice between age groups, we must again emphasize that many of the policy recommendations associated with arguments for this ideal depend on assumptions that call for empirical scrutiny. There are reasons to assume that more comprehensive forms of income protection should help prevent relative poverty, and thereby support people’s control of their lives and general life satisfaction. Yet, many critics of high levels of income protection have argued that there is in fact a sharp conflict between comprehensive income support and ensuring access to a context of participation and social recognition. For example, despite all the good intentions, higher benefit levels for working adults may affect their prospects for social inclusion and general well-being negatively if discouraging active efforts to seek gainful employment or reducing the availability of employment, thereby doing more harm than good (Mead, 1986). Such welfare-related outcomes are central to the values of relational equality, given their emphasis on providing resources that support people’s sense of being valued and respected in the wider community and, thus, to walk tall in their interaction with others. These are issues we shall address empirically in Chapter 6 (subjective well-being) and Chapter 8 (employment), respectively.

When we approach the generational welfare state from the perspective of relational equality across age groups, an important task for empirical research is also to examine whether the structure of income protection for age-related risks seems to affect the distribution of desirable social outcomes among people in different life stages. If all that matters is cooperation for improving overall life prospects, we may be primarily focused on the potential for general enhancement of well-being in all age groups, and

not so much on whether favorable outcomes are distributed more equally between different age groups. However, for relational equality, the distribution among people in different life stages of objective outcomes (such as poverty, analysed in Chapter 5) as well as more subjective outcomes (such as life satisfaction, happiness and trust analysed in Chapters 6 and 7) has more direct moral relevance. Such analyses may all provide valuable clues about the extent to which generational welfare contracts also have systematic repercussions on the (relative) social standing of different age groups.

SAVING FOR THE FUTURE: JUSTICE BETWEEN NON-CONTEMPORARIES

This book focuses on the relations between overlapping generations and the interaction between different age groups in mature welfare states. Thus, we can only speculate about the workings of social institutions in the more distant future. Still, questions on how the generational structure of social citizenship may be developed to enhance overall life prospects, or to serve relational equality over time, are not isolated from questions about our obligations also to future generations.

Which obligations of justice do we have to future generations, and how does the empirical study of the institutions and outcomes of generational welfare contracts speak to such considerations? Rawls's views on this topic provide us with a useful starting point for addressing these issues. His treatment of justice between generations has helped define this branch of the philosophical literature and it offers what is probably the most well-known account of just savings for future generations. Rawls's seminal contribution famously distinguished between the two stages of accumulation and maintenance. Before the material preconditions for just institutions have been established, there is a duty to accumulate and save to promote just institutions for present and future generations. However, once we have reached a level of development that makes just institutions possible, he argued that any further net accumulation for the sake of future generations is no longer mandatory: "once just institutions are firmly established, the net accumulation required falls to zero. At this point a society meets its duty of justice by maintaining just institutions and preserving their material base" (Rawls, 1971, p. 287).

In addressing relatively stable and economically advanced democracies, in which social citizenship rights are well developed, the Rawlsian duty to preserve may appear more relevant than the duty to accumulate. At the same time, we need to understand the idea of just savings broadly. For example, the relevant agenda to satisfy such requirements may ascribe a

key role to investment, something that may be particularly important when addressing intergenerational relations in ageing societies. In ageing societies investing in younger generations may facilitate the handling of future intergenerational relations, and promote sustainable welfare states over time, not least by supporting the present youth to become future taxpayers. In this vein, it has been suggested that massive human capital investment (now) is a viable strategy to deal with future changes in the age structure of populations (Lindh and Palme, 2006) and the notion of a social investment approach can be seen as an attempt to work out a broader policy template for sustainable, welfare-enhancing policies in ageing societies (Morel et al., 2012).

When Rawls's requirements of just savings for maintaining just institutions are summarized, most authors focus on the required level of savings in terms of real capital. Thus, "people ought to leave their descendants at least the equivalent of what they received from the previous generation" (Meyer, 2014) or to make sure that the situation of coming generations "is no worse than its own" (Van Parijs, 1998, p. 294). The various formulas of sustainable development that have emerged since the Brundtland Report in 1987 also express views that are broadly in line with this norm.³

However, for the empirical purposes of this book, we wish to bring out an important and frequently overlooked implication of Rawls's account, namely that the target of just savings in Rawls's theory is always specified in relation to the institutional and social capacity for justice. As he points out: "it should be kept in mind here that capital is not only factories and machines, and so on, but also the knowledge and culture, as well as the techniques and skills, that make possible just institutions and the fair value of liberty" (Rawls, 1971, p. 288). If Rawls is correct, a society can be just without being very wealthy but a society can also be wealthy without being just. This means that we should avoid approaching the question of just savings as accountants, by focusing narrowly on a comparison of what we receive from past generations and the living standard enabled by the wealth that we pass on to future generations. In considering whether a proposed design of social policies is consistent with the aim of preserving the material base of just institutions (Rawls, 1971) we need to take into account whether it is likely to promote (or harm) the institutional and social pre-conditions for the norms of social justice to viably take root and flourish over time.⁴ Of course, Rawls's view is not the only conception of justice between non-contemporaries but any reasonable approach to these issues will need to accept the strategic priority of such considerations.

One possible objection to the view that just savings for the future should be linked to the promotion of specific social outcomes is the lack of consensus on relevant indicators of welfare or the more exact requirements

of social justice and, therefore, on how to interpret the general aim of furthering just institutions. While a commitment to the general idea of social justice implies a concern for addressing the distribution of advantages and disadvantages from a relevantly impartial viewpoint (as opposed to brute force or bargaining power), there is of course a wide range of reasonable views on how to flesh out the notion of justice and its many dimensions. As argued by Sen, there is also a strong case for the view that a compelling account of justice between non-contemporaries should respect the members of each generation as “agents” rather than “patients”. Not only do people have interests, but they also have views about their interests, and we ought to respect the freedom “to decide what to value and how to pursue what we value” (Sen, 2009, p. 252).

However, in specifying the demands of intergenerational duties to build and preserve the long-term capacity of political communities to become and remain responsive to norms of social justice, there is no need to define the relevant target of that duty with reference to one very specific or complete conception of social justice. In the case of Rawls, we note that the content of just institutions is repeatedly defined with reference to especially fundamental requirements of justice, such as sustainably ensuring “the fair value of liberty” – including the political liberties – from one generation to the next (Rawls, 1971, pp. 288, 290, 298).⁵ In line with Sen’s emphasis on agency interests, this would require that citizens must not only have the formal freedom to define and pursue their own projects, and to participate as equals in political life, but also the resources to effectively exercise these fundamental liberties. In this view, formally equal political liberties – such as voting rights, liberties of thought and speech, the opportunity to hold office and influence democratic politics – are insufficient to ensure political equality. To realize such an agenda it is, for example, also essential that poverty is prevented to ensure that all citizens can actively and meaningfully participate in social and political life, and that inequalities are not allowed to concentrate social and political power in so few hands that the polity comes to serve sectional interests or the power of money (O’Neill, 2012, pp. 82–3; Rawls, 2001, p. 139; Schemmel, 2015).

Moreover, whatever specific conceptions of social justice we may have, it will be hard to make much progress unless there is a social climate that is open to justice-based ideals and an institutional capacity to act on the desired principles and objectives. The social and political foundations of just institutions are thus weak where social divisions paralyse the emergence of solidaristic relations across different groups in society, or where corruption and distrust stand in the way of effectively implementing the relevant policies (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Thus, our interpretation of how (best) to act on the duty to promote and preserve just institutions

over time needs to be informed by empirical evidence about the actual impact of different generational welfare contracts on conditions of central importance for creating a cooperative environment that is hospitable to the idea of social justice. A social and political context of trustful relations is desirable in its own right (and likely to be of great importance to relational equality across groups). However, there is also much to suggest that trust, and particularly political trust (high confidence in political institutions), is indispensable for the capacity of political communities and institutions to effectively serve the ideals of social justice from one generation to the next.

In relating the requirements of just savings to our empirical purposes, it is thus crucial not to move directly from abstract principles of justice to practical policy prescriptions, or to focus efforts to leave enough for the future narrowly on the aggregate level of savings. In order to know how to act on intergenerational obligations, we need to connect the duty to promote and maintain just institutions to empirical research on the links between institutional arrangements and social outcomes of importance for the long-term capacity of political communities to support the ends of social justice. Even if there are widespread intentions of social justice, they will not get far if citizens lack the resources needed to effectively exercise their political liberties, if political communities are too divided to be receptive to such ideas, and if political institutions cannot effectively act to realize them. In this context, the impact of generational welfare contracts on social outcomes such as poverty (addressed in Chapter 5) and trust, both between citizens and in relation to political institutions (analysed in Chapter 7) are thus particularly relevant to take into account.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has situated the empirical contribution of this book in relation to three perspectives on generational justice that together constitute a normative starting point for our analysis of generational welfare contracts. One of the most influential contributions in scholarly debates about justice between age groups, Daniels's prudential lifespan account, focuses on how to facilitate stable intergenerational cooperation to enhance the life prospects of all successive generations as they move through the different stages of life. In order to make empirically informed decisions about which particular institutional set-ups may best help to achieve this objective, it is important to sort out the relationship between different kinds of generational welfare contracts and major socio-economic outcomes for age-related social risk categories, from childhood to old age.

A second source of arguments is the ideal of relational equality. The prudential lifespan account, and its emphasis on cooperation for improving people's life prospects, mainly directs us to study the overall outcomes in all age groups. The ideas of relational equality provide reasons to focus more strongly on inequalities between people in different life stages, especially with respect to goods that matter to their relative power and social status. From this point of view, it becomes important not only to examine the impact of generational welfare contracts on poverty in different age groups, but also to investigate whether other desirable social outcomes (such as high levels of well-being and trust) are distributed equally.

Finally, a third layer of considerations was derived from principles of justice between non-contemporaries, focusing on requirements of just savings for (or investments in) future generations. These principles demand us to pay close attention not only to the resources passed on to the future, but also how to support the social preconditions of just institutions from one generation to the next. Answers to such questions depend importantly on empirical evidence about the sustainability of welfare states, including the welfare-related outcomes associated with different generational welfare contracts. A central task is thus to shed further light on how the generational welfare state can prevent poverty and support trustful relations so that people are able to effectively exercise their equal political liberties in an environment of cooperation and cohesion.

NOTES

1. This account of justice between age groups is only meant to address one particular fragment of social justice (Daniels, 1988, p. 15). It focuses on the intra-personal redistribution between life stages (as distinct from inter-personal redistribution between rich and poor, that is, net redistribution between different persons that aims to make life prospects more equal). However, as Daniels rightly points out, the prudential lifespan account would not offer sensible policy prescriptions unless it is placed in the context of a wider notion of social justice where efforts to address inequality of people's life prospects plays a key role (Rawls, 1971). To enable a focused discussion, we do not analyse how justice between age groups relates to social justice in all its dimensions. Still, we certainly share Daniels's view – and find it important to emphasize – that prudential lifespan considerations must not be interpreted as providing anything near an exhaustive account of social justice and of when or why inequalities are objectionable.
2. To appreciate this point, Daniels's critics point out that the prudential lifespan account, and its case for focusing on prospects over complete lives, does not necessarily rule out a social order in which there are fundamental inequalities between age groups (Jecker, 2013; McKerlie, 2013). An example to illustrate this is a situation in which people access the normal opportunity range for their age but where this opportunity range is so very low that it will place them in a position of subordination in relation to other age groups. Assuming that these arrangements are stable and people will pass through all the stages of life, this is not necessarily rejected by the prudential lifespan approach provided that

those who live in subordination in one stage of life will be the dominant category in another life stage (see also Bidadanure, 2016; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015).

3. Sustainable development has been specified as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43), leaving for the next generation “whatever it takes to achieve a standard of living at least as good as our own and to look after their next generation similarly” (Solow, 1992, p. 15), or as encompassing “the preservation, and when possible expansion, of the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people today without compromising the capability of future generations” to have similar – or more – freedom (for a discussion of these different suggestions, see Sen, 2009, pp. 248ff.).
4. Interestingly, this is a particularly fundamental requirement in Rawls’s conception of justice because it offers an interpretation of the “natural” duty to uphold and further just institutions (Rawls, 1971, pp. 289, 293).
5. While Rawls’s account of this duty is clearly introduced within the wider framework of a complete and lexically ordered set of principles, this particular component of his theory – that is, on duties to promote and uphold just arrangements – should thus be acceptable to a great variety of conceptions of social justice.