

Post Script

Tiziana Andina and Jacopo Domenicucci
STATES AND INTERGENERATIONAL BONDS

Institutions are naturally seen as the stable and relatively fixed backbone of the social world. While the structural role of institutions is usually discussed in social ontology, the temporal implications of this regulation are often overlooked. It is indeed tempting to take a present-centred approach to institutions. The latter clearly are instrumental in stabilizing and structuring the social coordination between a number of actors. But it is all too easy to focus only on their role in synchronic regulation, within a society frozen at a given time t . When diachronic considerations are brought into the picture, they generally deal with the past of a society, the roots of the social order and its conditions of emergence. In a sense, the modern political philosophy stemming from Hobbes didn't help, bringing in conceptual devices such as the 'social contract' or the 'state of nature', whose temporal and historical features are ill-defined if not ruled out by definition (e.g. a-historicity, fiction). Nowadays, political philosophy is catching up with the debate around the idea of 'intergenerational justice', while social ontology is still subject to a presentist approach.

In her (2016: 105-178) presentation, Turin-based professor Tiziana Andina clearly departs from this a-temporal approach. She sets the scene for a temporally conscious social ontology and uses a distinctive diachronic approach in her understanding of the pillars of social reality. More precisely, Andina argues that institutions can't be made sense of unless we take into account the way they shape the future and are oriented towards it. Specifically, Andina's analysis is interested in what we may consider a meta-institution – an institution of institutions, fundamental for the very possibility of a number of other crucial institutions – namely the State. The State has its distinctive diachronic presence. It has a cross-generational lifespan and is able (and expected) to bring about 'intergenerational actions', i.e. actions that either have effects over several genera-

tions or that themselves need an effort that spans over different generations. The future-directedness of this meta-institution is brought to the fore by Andina's ontology. This transgenerationality further carries specific normative demands that States have to face and that should be taken into consideration when analysing the appropriate mandates for a State, and a government within a State.

J.D.: You persuasively argue that to understand institutions we need to take into consideration their temporal features. You don't just mean, I take it, that we need to consider their duration –the fact that they have a certain lifespan– but also that their very social function cannot be understood if we don't focus on the specific cross-temporal effects they are meant to bring about. This seems especially relevant for the State and its intergenerational actions.

To what extent do you think that the cross-temporal dimension of the State plays a role in the development of trust at a social level? This boils down to asking how much you think that Hobbes' take on the necessity of a central sanctioning authority is relevant and may be enriched, or spelled out more fully, in temporal terms: do States play a significant role in building trust precisely to the extent that they carry the promise of transgenerational stability?

T.A.: *To understand our social life we have to break down the enquiry at least into two strands: one in which we explore the pillars of social reality, and how they work; another in which we examine their modalities of perduration. As you correctly note, as human beings and as philosophers, we are usually much more interested in the first aspect. I guess this is due to a biological constraint: our interests lie in survival and in the preservation of life in the short-term, that is for a period including our life and that of our family and friends. Hume has observed this point very clearly. However, the ways our societies have been conceived and built require different forms of collaborations between people extending over a very long time. This fact needs, I think, further investigation. A starting point could be a reflection on what type of entity a State is and on what functions it has.*

States, as well as other political entities like meta-States (e.g. the European Union), are here to last for a potentially infinite time. As such, they have, in my view, the obligation to take care of what I term 'transgenerationality', that is, a diachronic bond merging different generations that belong to the same political entity. I think that respect of this transgenerational bond is necessary to increase the trust in institutions and between people. I also believe that one of the main ways for States and meta-States to create and improve trust is precisely to recognize and take care of their transgenerationality. The bond between generations is crucial for any institution that wants to – and has to – perdure in time. It is even more crucial when it comes to ensuring the welfare of people living in a State or meta-State.

J.D.: Do you already have a view on whether your temporal approach can be put to work to shed some light on the specific forms of trust that States are meant to build, or even to allow for?

T.A.: *The social and political world is now as complex as ever. For example, the model of State and State sovereignty is not the only one we use, especially in Western societies. Beside States, we can see meta-States, such as federations, or political entities which are trying to set up a different political model, such as the European Union. In a word, the State model is something that must be rethought, at least partially, to face the transformations that are profoundly changing the world today. I'm not saying that we can live in a world without a political authority. I'm rather claiming that, as philosophers, we must rethink the model of social and political institutions. These institutions are currently protecting people and their rights while bearing in mind only a very short timeframe. But the same institutions regularly perform long-term actions requiring a very long time to be accomplished. These actions, which are necessary to contemporary political and social systems, typically need more than one generation to be performed. Above all, they require consent from people whose opinion cannot be consulted. If this analysis is correct, we have to conclude that we need a political entity to guarantee the rights of yet-to-come people involved (the unborn and the next generations) and the fairness of the political system over the years.*

J.D.: As you say, you are interested in the modalities of perduration of the pillars of our social life. I suggest we distinguish two issues here. It is one thing to focus on the transgenerational dimension of civil society, community, civic association, citizenship. It seems to be another thing – though I guess the issues are deeply intertwined – to focus on the transgenerational dimension of the State apparatus itself, or of State-like bureaucratic and political institutions. In our modern conception we may indeed struggle to see the one (civil society) without the other (State apparatus). However, I believe that framing the question from the point of view of the State or from that of the society does make a difference – a difference that to a certain extent corresponds to the gap between (Andina 2016) and (Andina forthcoming). It is one thing to say that State-like institutions have a long-term perduration and bring about actions that span over different generations. It is another thing to say that there are specific ties between non-contemporary citizens, and that a society is a unique temporally extended body. Do you agree that your work could be categorized along these two distinct lines? Do you privilege one of the questions? Or do you think that one of the answers supervenes on the other? Or else, do you think this classic distinction should be reworked under the terms of your own social ontology, your own understanding of the pillars of social life?

T.A.: *Yes, it is essential to be careful in drawing the difference. We can put things this way. If we think about the transgenerationality regarding actions, I guess it is possible to understand the reasons why it is important for me to pay attention to two types of transgenerationality. The one bonding individuals, the other bonding institutions. Psychology talks about a primary transgenerationality bonding the individuals belonging to the same family and different generations. This transgenerationality is something we may observe well in all those situations – like traumas – in which the*

relationship between people belonging to different generations becomes problematic. I believe that we may argue for the idea that these bonds also exist in a much broader context, which includes people sharing only a social and political context. This is so, in my view, because it is not possible to make a definite disjunction between people and institutions. The two things depend on each other and people must be considered responsible for the consequences of their actions, primarily because some of them may have implications in a broader, institutional framework.

Let's take an example. Suppose a community is asked to vote to elect the new parliament – an action which is not merely institutional. Now suppose a citizen – say, Mrs. X – among the various options, decides to give her preference to a party supporting the idea of massive exploitation of non-renewable resources (e.g. oil) to produce the energy necessary to the State. This choice will have consequences in terms of the advantages for the generations that will carry out that intensive exploitation. For example, the increase in wealth will be reasonably very appealing to the citizens of that community. On the other hand, Mrs. X knows that this choice has at least two very problematic consequences. The first consequence is that an extensive use of some of the natural resources to produce wealth will progressively decrease the ability for future generations to do so. Furthermore, this exploitation will create a substantial modification of the environment in which those resources exist. It is evident, I think, that Mrs. X's individual choice, at the very moment of voting, will make a significant difference regarding the preservation of transgenerationality. In other words, her decision will make a significant difference in at least two domains: the preservation of the environment, and the equal opportunities between generations. In a word, her choice makes a significant difference in terms of fairness.

J.D.: Now, I believe we can find an analogous difference on a normative level as well. On the one hand, you may want to say that States' actions should take seriously into account the fact that they should not act only in response to the present demands of their citizens but also with the aim of satisfying, anticipating, or preventing certain demands from future generations. This is a thesis about how we should hold institutions accountable for what they are doing not only for the current generation but also for yet-to-come citizens. It is thus a thesis about the social function, the mandate, the purpose of the State. On the other hand, you may want to say that the current members of a civil society, the citizens at a given time, should honour specific obligations regarding the future members of that society (of course, part of honouring these obligations is channelled through votes and institutional activities, but presumably not all of it). How do you articulate these two levels? *Who* is obliged, exactly, and in *whose* respect? Should the very design of institutions – and/or civic education – take that into consideration?

T.A.: *When it comes to transgenerationality, each of us has obligations, just as every institution of the State or meta-State we belong to. We are obliged toward all that matters and has or may have consequences in terms of the relationship between*

generations. This obligation is mandatory in those cases in which individual, social or political actions necessarily require the cooperation of subjects whose opinion was never asked for in any form.

I want to say that a State must seriously take into account the bonds between generations because most of the people and institutions daily perform actions involving a form of cooperation between different generations. The metaphysical status of these actions is particular because it implies that one of the parts involved in accomplishing the action, was never asked to consent to those actions. To be clear, this consent is de facto presupposed by people and institutions subscribing to public debts or declaring wars.

J.D.: The normative ties between generations could be construed in two ways. You may think of these ties strictly in terms of distributive justice, as they are mainly being discussed under the term ‘intergenerational justice’, and frame transgenerational ties in terms of rights (of future generations) and correlative duties (of present-day citizens). But you use the term ‘bond’, intergenerational bond, which echoes a contractualist vocabulary. And indeed, another way to construe the normative ties between generations is to think of them in terms of some sort of cross-temporal social contract, in which case the idea really seems to be that one should think of different generations as belonging to the same community and sharing substantial ties. Where do you locate yourself in this landscape?

T.A.: *Each social contract has a cross-temporal structure. My question is the following: Is it possible for a community to live outside a political or social contract? I think it is impossible, especially for large enough communities. Once we have recognized this practical necessity, it is also important to realize that political institutions are the way they are not only to protect people, but also to enable the evolution of society in a long-term perspective. Just think of Giambattista Vico’s New Science. His political model was grounded in the idea of the development of human beings and society as well. In this respect, Vico’s model was different from the model offered by Hobbes. It seems very plausible that humankind has gone through an evolutionary path involving the essence of sociality and the political structures as well. In my view, this evolution has been possible precisely thanks to transgenerationality, that is, the existence of a bond between people from different generations. This bond in some cases has a natural basis (as in primary transgenerationality). In other instances it derives from particular decisions, incorporated in actions (secondary transgenerationality). In my view, both bonds are substantial: the first is something present in nature, the second is something ‘we’ decide to introduce in the dynamics of our societies. Once it is brought into being, we must consider it, taking care of transgenerationality in terms of consequences, intergenerational justice, and fairness.*

J.D.: As for the idea of a substantial intergenerational bond, I’d like to ask you how you conceive of its specificity, given that it involves trust between parties

that share no reciprocity, have no active exchange in a standard sense, and are in a position of a strong power imbalance (our actions have serious implications for our descendants, their actions can't have which for us).

T.A.: *The point is precisely this: in many actions we act as if a subject (future generations) participated in a decision (while this participation does not occur in any way) and will participate in the actions necessary to implement that decision in the future. That of future generation is apparently a problematic concept under various aspects. Indeed, my sense is that we have to proceed to a precise metaphysical analysis of this concept. To do this, it is essential to consider a few things. Namely, if and how it is possible to talk about future generations instead of future individuals; if it is useful to introduce the concept of future generations in our ontologies; finally, what we mean by future generations.*

My view is that there is a serious case to be made for treating 'future generations' as particular types of groups, that is, as groups which are not yet 'active'. Nevertheless, they are to be considered as active groups by all those people and institutions acting as if future generations already existed. That of 'future generation' is a very intriguing notion, and its application in our daily lives is even more intriguing.

J.D.: Can you tell us more about the distinction between a 'primary' and a 'secondary' transgenerationality? What is its normative meaning? Are those two radically distinct sources of normativity, or are they part of the same continuum?

T.A.: *'Primary' transgenerationality is the biological tie between members of the same family, belonging to different generations. There is relevant psychological evidence in this respect. These bonds are biological, and through these bonds people shape their personality and their identity. As a philosopher, I am mainly interested in secondary transgenerationality, which governs many aspects of our social life. I guess both types of transgenerationality imply a form of normativity, but, clearly, these two types of normativity differ. The first mainly concerns the sphere of the unconscious; the second is a kind of normativity that institutions have to adopt and apply as a guarantee for the subjects (future generations) involved or presupposed as a condition for the realization of particular actions. This normativity, to be incisive, requires the rule of law.*

J.D.: You reflect both on debt inheritance as an important transgenerational problem and on the European Union as a meta-State institution with obvious transgenerational ambitions. Can you say a word about the meaning of each in terms of a social ontology with social implications? Do your considerations on transgenerationality carry a takeaway as for what a European debt policy could be (and *whether* there should be one at that level)?

T.A.: *This is an interesting question. My sense is that philosophical analysis – especially in the domain of descriptive metaphysics – does not imply that philosophers are suggesting political solutions. It implies, though, that we provide politicians with good arguments to adopt some decisions instead of others. The problem of the high public debt of many highly industrialized democracies of the Western world is a critical issue. Economists*

know that a large part of public wealth is now used to pay debts usually contracted by States in the past. This economic dynamic – i.e. to use a significant amount of money to keep promises made in the past – is breaking down the possibilities of development for today's democracies. These States' populations – especially in the weaker social strata suffer from that. Kant was optimistic about the relationship between generations; we – with Rawls – are much more conscious of the fact that transgenerationality is something neutral, neither positive nor negative. It is a bond that acquires a connotation depending on the decisions of the people and institutions that handle it.

Post Script

Talking to Tiziana Andina, I have realized how, in the analytical literature on trust, we often overlook the temporal dimension of institutions, along with its descriptive and normative implications for trust – beyond evolutionary discussions and repeated games modelling. This is significant for the trust *we invest* in certain institutions, as well as for the trust that *is produced* or facilitated by these institutions. This leaves us with at least two directions for the debate on trust. First, when we cast our trust in institutions in terms of a mandate, of a specific form of entrusting, we can hardly take into consideration longer-term dimensions of the State's mission. If we take seriously the idea that States carry out both intragenerational and transgenerational actions, we will realize that the sort of trust we may or may not place in them is of a more sophisticated and open-ended kind: the trusters themselves (society members, but also other stakeholders) and their particular demands are changing, while the trustee (viz. the State) and some of its complex mandates may stay the same. The future-directed dimension of States cannot be ignored when it comes to the nature of the trust we may place in them – and how it departs from the trust invested in a government, for example. Second, when we contemplate the institutional conditions of social trust, we tend to focus on the past and the present workings of socio-political institutions: how they 'originally' allowed for the emergence of trust and how they 'currently' sustain the conditions of social and political trust. But certain institutions seem to produce social trust also by shaping the horizon of our common long-term future. Intergenerationality may shed some light on the diachronic extension of the communities of trust, whether this is understood *contractually*, as a temporally extended social contract, or *constitutively*, as a form of belonging.

References

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