

Il tema

The role of time for the transgenerational *civitas*¹

Il ruolo del tempo per la *civitas* transgenerazionale

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Abstract. In the first part of the paper, we offer a definition of the term “transgenerationality” and illustrate some of its manifestations in the social spheres. In the second part, we describe the structure of transgenerational acts and show why they play a fundamental role in the construction of social reality. By introducing transgenerational actions into the fundamental domain of social actions, we reflect on the rule of time in making societies enduring. A reconsideration of the meaning of time also leads us to rethink the concept of *civitas* and extend it to the three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future.

Keywords: transgenerationality, social reality, temporality.

Riassunto. Nella prima parte dell'articolo proponiamo una definizione del termine “transgenerazionalità” e ne illustriamo alcune manifestazioni nella sfera sociale. Nella seconda parte descriviamo la struttura degli atti transgenerazionali e mostriamo perché essi svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nella costruzione della realtà sociale. Introducendo le azioni transgenerazionali nel dominio fondamentale delle azioni sociali, si riflette sulla regola del tempo che rende le società durature. Una riconsiderazione del significato del tempo ci porta anche a ripensare il concetto di *civitas* ad estenderlo alle tre dimensioni temporali: passato, presente e futuro.

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Parole chiave: transgenerazionalità, realtà sociale, temporalità.

1. Foreword

Augustine rightly stated that it is a very difficult task to define time. This difficulty relates not only to the definition itself, but also to the many aspects of reality that have to do with time. In other words, the idea that things can be analysed in their synchronic dimension, as if they could be dissected along the timeline to the exclusion of past and future, is cherished by many philosophers when they engage with the understanding of reality;² and it is an idea that many social ontologists have certainly cherished in the belief that it is possible to understand what concerns the structure of social reality by somewhat artificially isolating certain parts that are detached from relations to reality and time. The same methodological approach has been used to understand the social reality whose constituent structures we study, such as the notion of the subject, the plural subject, individual and collective action, attachment, relationship, norm, value and so on.

To introduce us to the reflections that will be made in this article on actions, institutions and their connection with time, I will use a concrete case that is well known to Italian citizens. We will therefore use an experience that represents a highly detrimental case to formulate some general observations and justify the obligation to adopt some ruthless ontological constraints.

These are the so-called “baby pensions” introduced by the government of Mariano Rumor who decided in 1973-1974, with the approval of Parliament and virtually unopposed, to grant civil servants with children access to their pensions after they had worked for 14 years, six months and one day, including repayments for maternity and studies. A recent study presented in the latest report by the *Itinerari previdenziali* study centre shows that today, in spring 2025, there are still 400 thousand people in Italy who have been drawing a pension for more than forty years; almost half of them are “baby pensioners”, people who have benefited from the Rumor law.

It does not take much analysis to realise that this measure was very negative for the Italian state for several reasons: the first, perhaps less central to our considerations, concerns the policy of gender equality. More specifically, it concerns the dubious appropriateness of introducing early

² Seebass and Tuomela, *Social Action*; Searle, *Construction of Social Reality*; Bratman, *Shared Agency*.

retirement for a very large number of women of working age in a context where female labour force participation is already low. It was a measure that was not intended to promote the emancipation of women, but to incentivise the re-entry of working women into the family context. The second observation that interests us most for the continuation of our argument concerns the sustainability of the system. The idea of the pension system is based on intergenerational co-operation: each worker and each generation sets aside part of their income to enable the generations that are no longer of working age to maintain a certain quality of life, meaning that each individual who reaches old age will be dependent on subsidies. It is therefore a form of co-operation that extends over a longer period of time without interruption and should be beneficial for all involved.

What we have described, then, is a genuine intergenerational pact that presupposes the recognition of a common goal – guaranteeing a good quality of life at all stages of life – and the definition of a series of actions that extend uninterruptedly over time and are aimed at achieving and maintaining the common goal. The pact can, of course, be amended and is in fact amended every time the pension system is rebalanced according to changing economic and cultural circumstances. What must not happen, however, for the reasons we will try to explain below, is to amend it in such a way that it has manifestly negative consequences for those who have not signed it but who will participate in the Pact in the future.

It is clear that a decision like that of the Rumor government, with the support of the entire parliamentary spectrum, has blatantly violated the balance of the transgenerational pact, without the public knowing about it. A certain number of people in Italy enjoyed, for a certain period of time, resources that are disproportionate to those that people before and after them, who were in similar circumstances, have benefited from and will continue to. A redefinition of the intergenerational pact, as we have described it, thus raises two issues: that of intergenerational equity and that of the credibility of the political and governmental institution that has promoted and authorised such a redefinition of the democratic pact. Ultimately, therefore, this generates complications for the resilience of democracy. It is not difficult to imagine valid reasons for those who want to dismantle the transgenerational pact with accusations of injustice.

This, broadly speaking, is the concert case; all that remains for us now is to try – as we stated – to outline some general considerations. In the story we have just reported, there are some protagonists. First of all, political interests, in other words, the interests politicians have in satisfying the demands of the electoral body, representing its needs. Not all needs are equal, in particular some – such as that of having a part of their lives paid for by general taxation – are in conflict with the rights of others,

perhaps of those others who, for various reasons, have no way of expressing their opposition. Out of this tension arises the problem of transgenerational justice, which manifests itself in various ways, one of which concerns actions that are performed by individuals placed temporally distant that symmetrical relationships are not possible. Neither standard ontology nor traditional political philosophy have addressed these issues systematically, and this, we believe, for reasons of method.

With Rawls, for example, the political philosophy of the analytical method was based on communities of abstract individuals, removed from the flow of time, to whom he assigned the task of working out criteria of justice. Paradigmatic in this sense is the thought experiment of the original position, in which Rawls assumes that individuals in a position of complete ignorance work out rules of justice and equality. This of course also applies to temporal properties: it does not matter whether the individuals Rawls has in mind are young or old, it does not matter how long they have lived, and it does not matter – something Rawls will actually deal with in his writings after *A Theory of Justice*³ – considerations about the historical and thus temporal determination of a society. The irrelevance of many properties, including time, represents a fundamental methodological assumption that forms the background to the idea that ideal theory must normalise non-ideal theory in order to use Rawlsian language. In the context of standard ontology, things are not too different.⁴ One of the criticisms levelled by many is methodological: not much attention is generally paid to time.

Thus, we ask ourselves the following questions: if it is true that a community consists of a number of people who recognise themselves in the narrative and the values that characterise this community, what temporal extension must be taken into account in order to identify this community? In other words, does the community coincide with the people who occupy a particular political space here and now, or is it broader in time? And in the event that we choose the second option, i.e. that a political community does not coincide with the group of people who legally occupy a particular territory, how far can we extend this group in time? Will we include previous generations? And what attitude will we take towards future generations, including the unborn? Will we include them in the community we have in mind? To answer these questions, one must find reasons – if there are any, as we think there are – that reinforce the idea that communities have an extension in both time and space. We believe that such rea-

³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

⁴ Burman, *Nonideal Social Ontology: The Power View*.

sons can be identified by thinking about a particular kind of co-operative action that often mediates the content of political and social action.

I want to argue that it is necessary to make some preliminary ontological considerations in order to decide against one of the options I have mentioned. I will therefore put forward two theses in particular: First, that a political community does not coincide with the people who live here and now in a particular political space, but that it consists of all the people who exist, have existed and will exist and who have intended, intend and will intend to be part of that political space. Furthermore, I will argue that this totality is to be treated as a specific entity that is ontologically distinct from the individualities that constitute it. In doing so, I depart from the golden principle of ontological parsimony: I believe, however, that there are good reasons for proposing such a deviation because it ultimately makes it possible to better address a number of problems that plague Western democracies and that are related to the way in which institutions seek to relate to the future. Part of these good reasons concerns the structure of collaborative and extended social actions⁵ over time, i.e. transgenerational social actions. The description of the ontology that identifies such actions will serve us to raise the question of the temporal extension of institutions.

2. Transgenerational social actions

If time, especially the time object of common sense, i.e. perceived time, is difficult to define, a specific part of time – the future – is even more difficult to define. Indeed, like the past, it does not exist and yet, unlike the past, has not yet produced any traces that point to its existence. It, therefore, is configured as the dimension that uninterruptedly follows the present and is the object of planning action, both individual and institutional, from the present. Outside the projection of those who live in the present, the future, therefore, does not exist.

However, it is well known that human beings have a tendency to plan for the future, i.e. to organise complex actions that have a long or considerably long extension in time⁶ and, in parallel, to construct devices capable of acting effectively “from the future”. To give an example, let us consider the testamentary disposition: the testator objectifies his intentions and the

⁵ I have discussed the concept of transgenerational social action in numerous fora; for a detailed analysis I refer to Andina and Emmi, *A Philosophy for Future Generations*.

⁶ Bratman, *Intention, plans, and practical reason*; Bratman, “Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency.”

related dispositions and deposits them in a device – the will – which has the power to realise the testator's will when he is no longer alive.

Among the actions that have a considerable temporal extension are some that require co-operation between subjects. This form of co-operation is diachronic in nature, i.e. it takes place between subjects who are not necessarily in a position to enter into exchange relations. These actions have a particular ontological structure and have the characteristic of having consequences long after the time in which they were performed. Moreover, due to their considerable temporal extension, they require the participation of a multitude of subjects, some of whom are in an asymmetrical state with respect to those who planned the actions to be carried out. This particular type of collaborative action is called *transgenerational action*.⁷

Philosophical reflection on actions has traditionally been developed negatively,⁸ i.e. attempts have been made to find out what distinguishes an unconscious movement, e.g. a tick, from a deliberate, i.e. purposeful, movement. This applies to the basic actions:⁹ it is the difference between raising an arm to shoo away a fly and the same, identical movement to give directions to a passer-by, as Arthur Danto explains in detail in his reflections on the *Philosophy of Action*. Within the group of intentional actions, i.e. those that are directed towards a purpose, we can then refer to a group of actions that have a certain structure. The structure is of this type: suppose a group of people have a common long-term goal and therefore decide to undertake a series of actions to achieve that goal. Thus, we enter the realm of complex intentional actions.¹⁰

As this is a long-term goal, it can be assumed that the group of people who begin to act in order to achieve the goal are dependent on the co-operation of others who live at a certain distance from them. Temporal distance is a relevant element in this model for at least two reasons: because it is so great that it does not provide for reciprocity (i.e. more precisely, it does not provide for a direct relationship between the parties) and because the consequences of the actions may differ for the parties involved within a long period of time. In other words, it cannot be ruled out that a group will take action to achieve a particular goal for its own benefit without considering the long-term consequences that will follow. Time and asymmetry are therefore two fundamental concepts in the model we have described. Time creates asymmetry and asymmetry creates imbalance, as

⁷ For a more detailed explanation of the ontological model, I refer to Andina and Emmi, *A Philosophy for Future Generations*.

⁸ Anscombe, *Intention*; Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of action*.

⁹ Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of Action*; Danto, *The Body/Body Problem*.

¹⁰ See Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*; Gilbert, *Living Together*; Tuomela, *Theory of Social Action*.

one of the parties is in a state of epistemic and practical advantage over the other. This means that it has access to information to which the other party does not in fact have access, and that for this reason it can influence the life of the other party in every respect.

Thus, while in ordinary intentional acts the temporal extension of the act proves to be a feature that is not so central to the core, in transgenerational acts the temporal marker is probably the crucial point, precisely because it is the element that creates an unavoidable asymmetry between the parties. The structure of these acts implies that time is dissolved in asymmetry; they are therefore acts that take place only in asymmetry. The asymmetry between the parties in the performance of transgenerational acts is reminiscent of the original situation described by Rawls, only in a sense that reverses the Rawlsian model. In the original situation, as is well known, the veil of ignorance applies: none of the parties involved knows anything about themselves, let alone about others, so that they can judge as neutrally and impartially as possible when asked to make a decision. Conversely, in the area of intergenerational actions, the rule of superiority of those taking such actions applies in terms of access and choice of actions to be taken. If we consider subject *x* (individual or institutional) as the one who initiates complex intentional actions that have a transgenerational structure, and subject *y* (individual or institutional), i.e. the subject who is at a certain temporal distance and participates in the execution of the action, we will find that *x* is moved by the intention to pursue a certain goal that entails the execution of a certain action. *Y* assumes, at least in part, the goal and the way in which it is achieved.

In this scenario, time is the variable that requires an evaluation of the goals set by *X* in terms of meaning, values and consequences. So let us imagine two philosophers: *X*, who initiates the transgenerational action, and *Y*, who should act in the spirit of *X* in a collaborative spirit to finalise and bring it to completion. Let us further imagine that *X* intends to pursue goal *O* through asymmetric collaboration with *Y*:

1. *X* identifies an objective whose achievement not only involves, but is also of interest and benefit to *Y*;
2. *X* names a goal whose pursuit is exclusively beneficial to him, but whose consequences are also important for *Y*, in a negative sense
3. *X* identifies a goal whose pursuit exclusively benefits *Y*, but which *X* also pursues with the specific intention of favouring *Y*.

Baby pensions are fully covered under scenario no. 2 Scenario No. 3 is quite extraordinary, and that's a good thing. Of the many decisions and actions we make every day, only some benefit those who come after us. However, it is neither reasonable nor desirable for scenario 3 to become the rule that governs most people's decisions. Similar to the flight safety

demonstrations just before an aircraft takes off, where the flight attendants remind passengers that, in the event of a flight problem, each passenger must think of themselves by putting on their oxygen mask first, and immediately afterwards of their neighbour, transgenerational actions taken solely for the benefit of future generations could lead to neglecting the issue of distributive justice, which is instead of paramount importance.

Rather, we must hope that people will choose scenario no. 1. in the first instance. In other words, X must set goals that, insofar as he can see and foresee them, are also of interest and benefit to Y, because apart from moral considerations, X desires Y's co-operation in pursuing his goals.

Since it would be reasonable to desire the cooperation of someone who derives an advantage from the cooperation, X can only reasonably expect Y's cooperation in the pursuit of goal O if Y recognises advantages in the cooperation, i.e. only if the cooperation corresponds to Y's expectations.

It should be emphasised that the asymmetry caused by time entails a number of epistemic difficulties. Indeed, it is not certain that at time t_1 , the time at which X performs the transgenerational action, the knowledge "about the action" is the same or the same kind of knowledge as that possessed by Y, who evaluates the actions "at a certain point in the process"; if only because Y has to deal with the consequences of X's actions, which could force him, at least in part, to revise the judgement formulated by X at that time about the goal O. This point, which represents a fundamental epistemic difficulty, is a fundamental one. This point, which highlights a fundamental epistemic uncertainty when X decides on his transgenerational action, is crucial because it underlines how the asymmetry caused by the passage of time can turn into a cognitive advantage for Y, who can revise his judgement about the appropriateness of engaging in O in the light of it.¹¹

That is, assuming that X takes all possible precautions at the epistemic level to create the conditions for Y's participation in the action, it may be that Y decides – perhaps rightly – to withdraw from the transgenerational action and interrupt it, since the consequences of an action undertaken at time t_1 are not fully clear until some distance from the beginning of the action is taken. The temporal indeterminacy is constitutive of the structure of transgenerational actions. This means that we have no way of circumventing it.

Thus, if 1 is the most rational scenario among those available to us, and if even within this scenario it is always possible that the asymmetry leads to a cognitive advantage for Y that justifies Y choosing not to act, we

¹¹ See in this regard Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*.

can rightly ask ourselves whether it makes sense to pose the problem of justice in relation to actions of this kind.

We have thus established that a certain type of collaborative social action has the property of including reference to the future as a separate element in the ontological structure of the action. These are the types of collaborative actions that bind future actions to present decisions.

3. Democracy and transgenerational civitas

Cases such as the paradigmatic one of the baby pensions open up problems of diachronic justice: the hypothesis I want to test later in the article is that it is possible to be less exposed to such injustices if we subscribe to the idea of a temporally extended political community that includes a plurality of subjects. First and foremost, those who have lived and are no longer alive. Then, those who belong to this community even if they do not have the power of political representation, i.e. the youngest, and those who belong to this community and have the power of political representation, the so-called active electorate. Finally, those who are not yet, but who will be and who will contribute, for example, to the payment of our pensions. In other words, from the moment a political community decides to form itself by defining its identity and making the covenant to which it binds the will of the individuals,¹² this community is made up of the totality of all present, past and future individuals.

In our view, this totality constitutes an entity to which it is appropriate to make a specific ontological commitment. We call this entity transgenerational *civitas*. The transgenerational *civitas* is in many respects defined by properties similar to those of the people, one of the prominent objects of political ontology. However, we deliberately do not use the term “people” here. It happens that terms that have a long history and are very theoretically charged imply numerous cross-references and are often difficult to reduce to unambiguous meanings. In my opinion, the same applies to the concept of the people, which is permeated by a multi-layered and complex ideology.

The transgenerational *civitas* is similar to the people – at least in the sense that it emerges from a founding pact sealed to make the political identity and shared vision of a group of people objective and concrete – but unlike the people, it has a transgenerational character, so that it also includes entities that do not yet exist, possible future individuals, or no

¹² Ferrara’s analyses of the people and ontological commitment are exemplary on this theme. See Ferrara, *Sovereignty Across Generations*.

longer exist, i.e. ancestors. The concept of transgenerational *civitas* therefore aims to strengthen the balance between all the components that make up a community over time. Those who represent the living part of the *civitas*, and in particular the part of the *civitas* that coincides with the constituency that has the opportunity to exercise political power, enjoy the undeniable advantage of directing and determining political action. As we have shown in the previous pages, this is a real and pragmatic advantage, i.e. a factual advantage, but not a legal advantage. In the example of baby pensions, the generations coeval with the Rumor government enjoyed the advantages that came from having a majority and an opposition in Parliament that granted them untenable and therefore unjust rights, such as pensions at a young age, transforming a protection instrument into a subsidy. On the other hand, these benefits clearly violated the covenant underlying the transgenerational *civitas*, i.e. the agreement that each of the generations forming the *civitas* should be granted at least the same level of rights. Parliament, thinking mainly of its own welfare and that of its electorate, has disregarded one of the foundations that is crucial for justice in the social sphere, namely the idea that future individuals are fully part of the transgenerational *civitas*. In fact, in Italy, the retirement conditions of current and future generations are far worse than those of previous generations. The transgenerational *civitas*, understood as a political subject, thus binds the part of the *civitas* that corresponds to the electorate and holds the power to act to the respect of all its components, the past and the future part. This bond arises from the fact that all parts are their own parts, so that the active electorate uses both past and future segments to organise transgenerational actions.

Actions are thus an effective instrument for organising and directing transgenerationality; a certain kind of action also ensures this directly, in the sense that it could not be carried out outside a transgenerational perspective.

It is therefore useful to outline the standard structure of these actions: As we have already surmised, these are co-operative actions involving at least two groups of actors linked by non-reciprocal relationships and a biological and/or social bond.

The longer the consequences of a particular action are delayed and the more relevant they are, the more interesting the transgenerational relationship becomes theoretically and potentially problematic: the consequences can only be partially predicted reliably or with sufficient accuracy. Generally, they are only fully understood once they have taken place, *sometimes long afterwards*, i.e. when the effects have had time to unfold and determine what was predictable, but also what was not, or perhaps was, but certainly not without difficulty. We cannot subtract transgenera-

tional actions from a certain indeterminacy that is part of the structure of actions and that concerns the subjects who are part of the civitas and who have exercised, exercise or will exercise agency in the civitas.

For example, the identity of future generations is certainly very vague. We know very little about them. We only know with a fair degree of certainty that they will exist sooner or later. But we do not know how much they will look like us or what their desires will be. All other details about their identity are very vague and can only be very vague. A certain vagueness also characterises past generations, who express a remnant of agency through the documents they have written and the devices they have devised. In contrast, the identity of today's generations, who have full access to the power to act, is less vague.

If at least two temporal parts of the *civitas* are characterised by vagueness, the actions of the capable generations can have only two references: the background in which they move and the subjects, past, present and future. Since the future subjects have a very subtle identity, it is the background rather than the identity that determines the actions of those who have the power to act.

Therefore, in order to act fairly towards those who do not (yet) have an identity, the only option is to observe the background and keep the background conditions as open as possible so that those who will live can maintain their agency unchanged regardless of the specific identity; in other words, they can retain their full political agency.

The assumption of an ontological commitment to transgenerational *civitas* as well as to transgenerational acts is an important decision because it opens up a number of possibilities. First, (i) it makes it possible to establish a unified and coherent theoretical framework that is useful for answering some of the questions raised by the long-term issues. Moreover, (ii) it makes it possible to situate transgenerational acts within a coherent ontological framework in which the whole plays as significant a role as the individuals, since it is the whole – i.e. the totality of the traditions, norms and values elaborated by a given *civitas*, which enables each individual to develop his or her own specific identity. And finally (iii) it offers a set of conceptual tools useful to contain the populist risks inherent in democracies.

We have already discussed points i and ii. I would like to briefly try to address point iii, namely the issue of populism, which is clearly becoming one of the dangers to which Western democracies seem to be most exposed. It is closely linked to the idea that the living part of the *civitas*, especially the active electorate, can act by delegating its will to representatives, completely free of any obligation to the other two parts of the *civitas*, the ex-existing and the future. In the eighth book of the *Republic*, Plato describes democracy as a degeneration of oligarchy: a system of govern-

ment that emerges from degeneration, democracy is itself a degenerate regime, since both man and the democratic state are dominated by the concupiscible element.¹³ Now, there is some truth in this analysis, at least in the sense that it recognises that a political regime, in which the many rule without necessarily having enjoyed an adequate education and training, faces a very particular challenge: getting the multitude to master their passions and understand the idea of freedom differently.¹⁴ The problem for Plato lies first and foremost in the manifest inability of the people to govern their superfluous desires and in the belief that freedom, understood as the accommodation of praxis to the most varied desires, corresponds to the possibility of doing what one pleases, giving free rein to any direction of the will:

Imagine a young man who has been brought up in the uneducated and stingy way we described just now, but who gets to taste the honey the drones enjoy, and spend his time with wild, fiery creatures who can offer him pleasures of every kind, hue and variety. That's probably the point you must regard as the beginning of the change from the oligarchy within him to democracy.¹⁵

Indeed, according to Plato, it is the excessive and insatiable use of freedom that causes the corruption of democracy and prepares for tyranny; in other words, it is complete freedom that leads to slavery.

To summarise, the internal pitfalls of the democratic system – which for Plato are unavoidable in their nefarious consequences – are essentially three: (i) the concupiscible element that dominates the will of citizens who have not been educated to master the disorder of the will, (ii) the fact that these citizens have indiscriminate access to political offices, for example by drawing lots, and finally (iii) the fact that they have access to an excessive freedom that finds no limits either in themselves or in the laws. The fate of such a political system is tyranny.

If the analysis is appropriate, which we are convinced is, despite the cultic and historical distance that separates us from Plato, it becomes clear that a model that places not the people in one of its possible meanings, but the transgenerational civitas at the centre of political reflection, has two characteristics that correspond to Plato's critique in the Republic. Namely, the transgenerational civitas does not coincide with the living people, but is rather a more comprehensive whole that includes the totality of future individuals who possess a subtle identity because, as stated, they are future. This particular identity makes it possible to consider this part

¹³ Plato, *The Republic*, book VIII, § 555.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 557.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, § 559.

of humanity as an ideality against the background of which public practise can be normalised. In contrast, people act primarily for themselves in the function of satisfying their own will, which is usually determined by very specific and particular needs. It is precisely this mechanism that leads to tyranny, as the people are accustomed to placing a person at their head who leads them in the hope that they will fulfil their wishes. In addition to this issue, there is the equally fundamental theme of freedom. For people, in the Platonic sense, there are no limits that could restrict the unlimited exercise of their will; they are therefore uncontrollable and their freedom is unlimited. Hidden in this idea of freedom is the most insidious paradox, namely the idea that deep down it becomes slavery. In other words, the compulsion to self-gratification. Man in this time-limited dimension, which coincides with living human beings, sets no limits to himself and is therefore unable to educate his own will.

In a sense, the liberal democracies accept Plato's challenge: They let the masses rule in the belief that they can determine their own will by setting a limit outside themselves. This applies to the individual, but also to the community as a whole. The whole is made up of temporal parts whose existence is characterised by certain features. In particular, as we have already explained, the future part does not express a particular identity, but a norm of action: those who possess the power to act must assume the obligation to maintain the power to act unchanged for each future part of the civitas by orienting their individual will and their public action towards this ideal conceived as a constraint. In this way, the living *civitas* has set a limit to its own unlimited freedom, which lies in the assumption of the possibility of its own expansion.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to show some reasons why we need to pay more attention to time when developing considerations in the field of social and political ontology. We have shown that among collaborative social acts – which are fundamental to the organisation of societies over time – some have a peculiar structure. These are transgenerational social acts that presuppose the necessary co-operation between different generations with a considerable time lag. Such acts, which are intentional in nature, are particularly interesting because they presuppose the participation of persons in the act who were not in a position to consent to the act. Transgenerational social acts therefore refer to an atypical and problematic subject from both a philosophical and legal point of view, namely the future generations, including the unborn, who,

although they do not yet exist, are already taken into account in the planning of the transgenerational act.

This observation has prompted us to put forward a number of arguments to scrutinise the concept of community. Indeed, the succession of generations over time and the biological and social ties that develop this succession lead us to support the idea that the succession of people that makes up a society over time should be understood in its entirety, made up of the history already written and the history yet to come. This is what Matt McCornick has called the chain of generations and what we have termed the transgenerational civitas. The transgenerational civitas imagines the community as a temporally extended entity in which past, present and future citizens are political subjects playing different roles.

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