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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Charting just futures for Aotearoa New Zealand: philosophy for and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The global pandemic needs to mark a turning point for the peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. How can we make sure that our culturally diverse nation charts an equitable and sustainable path through and beyond this new world? In a less affluent future, how can we ensure that all New Zealanders have fair access to opportunities? One challenge is to preserve the sense of common purpose so critical to protecting each other in the face of Covid-19. How can we centre what we have learnt about resilience within Māori and wider Pacific communities in our reforms? How can public understanding of Covid-19 science create a platform for the future social valuing of expertise? How can we ensure that the impact of Covid-19 in New Zealand results in a more sustainable, and inclusive workforce – for instance by expanding our perceptions of the value of our workers through promoting digital inclusion? To meet these challenges, we must reimagine our existing traditions of thought, breathing new life into perennial concepts and debates. Our paper indicates some of the ways that Philosophy is central to this collective reimagining, highlighting solutions to be found across our rich philosophical traditions.

The global pandemic threatens to entrench further a much less affluent future for both our descendants and environments. Pre-Covid-19 future ethics had already acknowledged possible broken futures where the affluent ways of life that some of us enjoy are no

longer possible (Mulgan 2011, 2018; Jamieson 2014). In this much less affluent future, ensuring that all New Zealanders have fair access to rights, resources, and opportunities takes on new meaning. If existing rights – property, employment, or financial – are privileged in a broken future, then intergenerational inequality will be exacerbated because younger generations will be unable to acquire and exercise similar rights. In Aotearoa New Zealand, we have an opportunity to chart a different pathway through and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic – positively transforming the lives of current and future generations in the process. To do this, we must be courageous enough to examine some of our deepest convictions about our lives together. Our radically changing socio-environmental landscapes will leave our descendants vulnerable in ways so far unseen. We need a much broader suite of critical tools to meet these new challenges. In particular, and as this paper contends, we need to construct an intergenerational ethical framework able to reimagine our values for the post-pandemic future. Such a framework will (among other things) reimagine our responsibilities, enable (investigative, transformative, and communicative) innovation and change, and recognise the rich conceptual landscape beneath our feet.

Intergenerational responsibilities

Understanding responsibilities to future generations requires both knowledge and imagination. Existing ethical frameworks provide some starting points. Possible futures methodology extends what is known as Darwall's second-personal ethic (Darwall 2009). On this account, our decisions are justified, not merely against some impartial standard, but to particular affected individuals. To make sense of our responsibilities, we must imagine answering directly to distant future people living in different possible futures. This leads to the realisation that we cannot expect future people to respect rights today that they themselves cannot hope to enjoy (Mulgan 2011, 2018). Similarly, intergenerational veil of ignorance methodology extends Rawls's original position (Rawls 1971). On this account, parties to a hypothetical social contract select principles for the post-pandemic future without knowing when they will live. Intergenerationally fair principles are selected because parties seek fair treatment no matter when they are born. As a result, principles that embody ethical business-as-usual, entrench current rights, and privilege current interests, will be rejected (Mulgan 2011, 2020). Alternatively, intergenerational community methodology develops the communitarian idea that society is a contract between past generations, present generations, and future generations (e.g. Burke 1790; De-Shalit 1995). We owe it to our ancestors to leave our descendants the opportunities, resources, and traditions we ourselves inherited. With any of these methodologies, albeit for various reasons, we must justify the actions we undertake now to our future descendants, and we have a responsibility to ensure that our descendants are able to achieve an appropriate level of well-being themselves.

One upshot of the intergenerational community methodology is that current generations are merely one part of an intergenerational community extending backwards in time and forwards into the future. Intergenerational justice is just as much about the past as it is about the future. Indeed, our experiences of Covid-19 continue to demonstrate how the decisions we face today are shaped, in part, by the choices of our predecessors. More specifically, many of the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead are defined by unjust past actions and prevailing social structures. Our post-pandemic

ethic must grapple not only with charting new futures but also with rectifying these historical legacies. One way to do that is to ensure that all voices are included in conversations about what our future should look like and what is valued nationally, regionally and within local communities. This requires that we develop inclusive, participatory, and enabling procedures. That is, procedures that ensure that everyone *affected* by a decision is able to *influence* that decision. Not only will this enhance any policies intended for national application, but will reflect the need to acknowledge our shared histories, and in so doing recognise Māori as real partners rather than (mere) stakeholders in planning and policy (Moore 2007; Matike Mai Aotearoa 2016; 350 Aotearoa 2020, 2021; Kukutai et al. 2020; Watene 2020).

Procedural justice must, however, be complemented by substantive justice. A central theme of all talk about justice is fairness – the idea that everyone should have equal rights, genuinely equal opportunities, and the ability to enjoy a meaningful life. How we measure fairness, and who decides, however, depends on what we value. One aspect of our cultural diversity is the diversity of our philosophical traditions and approaches. Any inclusive, participatory, and enabling procedure must be inclusive of Māori concepts and practices. Movements advocating for just societal change provide a great opportunity to take stock of values across society and to ask whether our default, often colonial, models, are truly inclusive of everyone's interests. The Black Lives Matters movement, for instance, has once again highlighted racial inequities here in Aotearoa – resulting in calls for a just recovery where people are at the centre (350 Aotearoa 2020). These movements also remind us of the need for just outcomes. Our just procedure must deliver a frame of justice to guide decision-making about what actions to take, which groups to prioritise, and how these decisions will be made.

Enabling change

Pre-Covid-19 future ethics recognized that we have very demanding obligations to future generations (Gardiner 2011; Lane 2011; Mulgan 2011; Jamieson 2014). If the post-pandemic future is fair, then the comparatively affluent will enjoy much less wealth, freedom, and opportunity than we have (hitherto) reasonably expected. Such demands raise an issue of motivation on the part of the present generation: How can we ensure that these unprecedented demands are pursued?

Our collective lockdown experience in Aotearoa, which saw the introduction of one of the most extreme sets of restrictions on the planet, reinforces several themes of pre-Covid-19 future ethics. First, we must combine compassion-based ethics with reciprocity-based ethics. Younger people – with more precarious incomes and less luxurious living conditions – often sacrificed more in lockdown than middle-aged professionals working from comfortable homes. Principles of reciprocity thus reinforce the demands of intergenerational fairness – providing additional motivation to sacrifice our present rights and expectations to preserve those of future people. Secondly, any demanding ethic needs some self-transcending motivation. Many philosophical traditions agree that human beings truly flourish only if our lives connect to *something* beyond our own brief lives – a transgenerational community, an identification with particular places, or a relationship with God (Watene 2013, 2014, 2020; Mulgan 2015). In our pluralist post-colonial society, not everyone will endorse the *same* transcendent ethical

foundation. But perhaps we must each ground our post-pandemic ethic in something beyond ourselves. This raises the contention that, thirdly, ethical motivation must be grounded in metaphysical or pragmatic leaps of faith beyond the available empirical evidence (Bishop 2007; Mulgan 2015). Philosophically, our Covid-19 response itself constitutes a leap of faith where we must all trust one another to cooperate. Contemporary pluralist philosophy of religion acknowledges a *religiously ambiguous* universe. Radically different interpretations are equally reasonable; every worldview demands a leap of faith; and some worldviews provide deeper ethical motivation than others (Mulgan 2015).

Aotearoa New Zealand is well placed in this pluralist context – already home to diverse philosophical traditions that have their roots in wider Pacific (i.e. Moana Oceania) connections and separations (e.g. Kawharu 1989, 1997; Jackson 1992; Hau'ofa 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Helu 1999; Smith 1999; Jones et al. 2000; Kawharu 2000, 2008; Marsden 2003; Matiu and Mutu 2003; Thaman 2009; Potauaine and Māhina 2011; Smith et al. 2016; Bhagwan et al. 2020). Māori philosophies, for instance, emphasise the importance of sustaining relationships over generations – of being connected to a past that we were not part of and a future we will not live to realise ourselves. This view is captured in narratives that chart relationships with people and other parts of the natural world in a complex genealogical or whakapapa network. These relationships generate responsibilities for remembering what has come before us, realising well-being today, and creating the conditions for the pursuit of, ideally, even better futures tomorrow. Practices that nurture and enhance the importance of these relationships for collective continuance (Whyte 2013, 2017) are central to Māori conceptions of care such as notions of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga (Watene 2016). The concepts and ideas of all of our communities and many of our philosophical commitments have a role to play in charting pathways through and beyond these challenges. In order to do this, we must be able to recognise both the value of the places where our diverse philosophical commitments converge, and the opportunities for learning and innovation where they do not. By broadening our suite of concepts and practices, we will provide ourselves with additional tools and perspectives for reimagining and rebuilding all our communities.

Trusting expertise

Trust is central to the post-pandemic leap of faith just described. Trust is, at least in part, about finding common ground and collective purpose amidst reasonable disagreement about some of our fundamental values. Therefore, recognising our wide-ranging philosophical commitments is important for living well together. Trust is, however, also about the social value of various kinds of leadership and expertise. This leadership varies from community leaders, who we discuss further below, to scientific expertise, which we discuss here. Indeed, Covid-19 starkly underlines the social value of scientific expertise, the need to transparently communicate this expertise to a wider public, and how easily it can be misunderstood or misrepresented. One key lesson is that the best defence against misunderstanding is a citizenry that understands not just the content of a message, but also the nature and limitations of the methods which produce it (Lombrozo et al. 2008; Kovaka 2019). Revisions of empirical claims and publicised disagreement between experts can appear to undermine scientific authority, until it is recognised that systematic scrutiny and ongoing revision actually form the very basis of that authority (Longino

1990; Godfrey-Smith 2003). As a further example, mathematical models that predict possible outcomes under different possible near-future scenarios continue to play a key role in our Covid-19 response. Modelling provides an invaluable source of flexible forward-looking insights based on the best available knowledge at a time. But abstract models omit the rich complexity of the natural world. They aim, not to nail down 'the truth', but (in this case) to explore possibilities, identify key causal processes, and generate action-guiding predictions (Matthewson and Weisberg 2009; Weisberg 2012; Matthewson 2017, pp. 226–229; Potochnik 2017; Parke and Plutynski 2020). This feature of model-based science needs to be widely recognised, to avoid misunderstandings when such models are found to not perfectly mirror the post-intervention reality.

All our leaders and experts make decisions about what information they communicate, who they communicate that information to, and how that information is presented. For example, values are inherently a part of the scientific process, especially when the stakes are high (Rudner 1953; Douglas 2000; Steele 2012). Leaders and experts (scientific and otherwise) have a position of trust in the community, enabling them to act as advocates – but how and when they choose to play this role is a moral decision. Philosophers have a role to play here, as we'll shortly elaborate – by offering insights about procedural, substantive, and intergenerational fairness. At this juncture, we must ask what role our scientific and other leaders and experts should play in facilitating societal change beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some new directions

Responding to Covid-19 has been an unprecedented challenge, but it is also an opportunity to implement a just transition to an equitable and sustainable future. The search for a truly just recovery highlights the need to move away from traditional frameworks and pursue something new. In Aotearoa New Zealand, such a transition is centrally about protecting our complex network of socio-environmental relationships now and in the future. This commitment grounds the pioneering legal protections for rivers and other natural entities, environmental co-management approaches, and our rich Māori and wider Moana Oceania socio-environmental values (Ruru 2014; Wehi, Whaanga, et al. 2020). Our starting point is the web of life inclusive of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity – recognising the rich and varied ways in which people are intimately connected to each other, with land- and seascapes, and all that is contained within them (Rayne et al. 2020; Wehi, Brownstein, et al. 2020). This network provides an integrated perspective of our relationships and highlights the significance of people and communities for realising justice.

Indeed, the Covid-19 crisis has drawn much-needed attention to the long-standing importance of our local communities for positive transformation and change. The role of communities as providing the groundwork for equity and justice is widely appreciated. In Moana Oceania philosophy, communities exist at the intersection, or connection and separation, of tā and vā, out of which emerges a set of philosophical concepts and practices – such as fakahēhē mahaki and fakaakeake faingata'a (resilience). These notions are central for building capabilities for recovery from such human-environment and socio-ecological crises as the covid-19 disease and peau kula (red waves or tsunami and tidal waves) (e.g. Māhina 2004a; Māhina 2004b, 2010, 2017a, 2017b; Potauaine and Māhina

2011; Ka'ili et al. 2017; Ka'ili 2017a, 2017b; Lear 2018). Similarly, for Māori, communities are complex systems of intergenerational socio-environmental relationships out of which our capabilities and responsibilities emerge. Māori tribal responses to Covid-19 – such as iwi checkpoints (See: Harris and Williams 2020) and the distribution of food parcels for vulnerable members of communities (See for example: De Graaf 2020) – are examples of movements grounded in community resilience. Pacific communities provide us with similar examples of community resilience in the face of Covid-19, by adjusting to ensure vulnerable members were safe and ensuring that information was being communicated in ways conducive to ensuring safety (Alefaio 2020). A key lesson is that our communities are well-practiced and therefore well placed to enable resilience and innovation to meet the needs of our people, and to inform and shape the policies that serve to create the conditions in which we are all able to live and grow (Matheson et al. 2020).

Put another way, our communities are key determinants of our individual and collective practices (Grix 2019). What our local communities have shown us is, however, that our practices must embed resilience *before* major turbulence hits. We must be able to anticipate plausible threats (e.g. based on past events like pandemics), adjust to the need to create resource buffers (e.g. emergency supplies), and develop more fitting activity patterns. More resilient collective and individual practices require new communal structures, especially in urban areas. The way our communities are organised is, therefore, central to their ability to cope with such turbulent events. Access to self-grown produce may require community gardens; social interactions may require protection measures such as tracing technology, mandatory mask-wearing in public, and other restrictions on social gatherings; and unethical activities such as stockpiling and price-gouging are less likely if our values, rules, and norms are collectively established in advance. If resilience is the capacity to maintain an acceptable level of functioning despite threatening or challenging circumstances (Wolff 1995), then we also need agreed thresholds for minimally necessary consumption. Nor can our consumption practices remain unchanged in the post-pandemic future. Our focus must shift to ensuring that everyone's basic needs are met. This requires philosophical reflection on what our basic needs and basic requirements are – to reorient our values toward what we truly need to flourish as human beings (Grix and McKibbin 2015).

Ensuring our communities are inclusive through and beyond these turbulent times is also significant for collective and individual well-being. The New Zealand government's 2019 Digital Inclusion Outcomes Framework [DIOF] defines digital inclusion as (a) convenient access to the internet, and (b) the ability to confidently use the internet. Within (b), we must distinguish (c) the person's capacity from (d) their capability or skills in effectively utilising online opportunities or services. Digital inclusion can increase accessibility, particularly for people living outside main centres, people with caring responsibilities, and people with disabilities. Digital inclusion *increases* personal well-being if more opportunities and services are available online than face-to-face (DIOF 2019). However, well-being can be *reduced* by malware, misinformation, hackers, or online harassment (DIOF 2019). People need 'digital literacy' skills to navigate online environments safely and easily. Increased digitalisation of work and community life can also *exacerbate* existing inequities. For instance: closing schools and childcare facilities during lockdown forced working parents – particularly mothers of young children – to juggle increased caring responsibilities without any decrease in workplace expectations (Prickett et al.

2020, p. 31); increased workplace flexibility should not create expectations that we will work all the time; and substituting digital events and resources for face-to-face inter-actions may disadvantage those unable to access resources online.

All these considerations – rights, capabilities and capacities, well-being, and inequality – are areas in which philosophers can make an important contribution. Philosophers can help with questions about which approach we should take to digital inclusion, and what that might look like (see for example Johnstone 2007). Philosophers can also help explain the ways in which inequality might be increased or decreased by different approaches to digital inclusion (for example, by taking an approach that centres on disability – see Goggin et al. 2019). Covid-19 increases the need to cautiously achieve digital inclusion – accompanied by digital literacy, and changing workplace attitudes and expectations. We can, for instance, build on what we have learned in lockdown to improve outcomes for those who stand to benefit the most from digital inclusion, while recognising the need to provide alternatives to online resources for those who require it.

As much work as we have to do *within* Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region, we should not forget that the pandemic is an opportunity to rethink our country's place and role internationally too. For example, given how successful we have been in keeping the virus out (as well as managing and quickly eradicating it when it crept in), we find ourselves in a position to consider our responsibility for ensuring that the most vulnerable peoples worldwide have access to Covid-19 vaccines first. Indeed, the global community as a whole is forced to reflect on the just distribution and availability of the vaccines, the ethics of immunity passports, and other global health bioethics and global health justice concerns (see: Acharya and Reddy 2021; Emanuel et al. 2021; Hassoun 2020; See also: Independent Resource Group for Global Health Justice 2020: irg-ghj.org). Aotearoa New Zealand is well-positioned to be a leading voice.

The future of philosophy in Aotearoa

The discipline of philosophy in Aotearoa New Zealand is heavily influenced by main-stream Western thought, and is an increasingly siloed field. Professional philosophers, however, now find themselves in an environment where different philosophical tra-ditions, different academic fields, and local communities have to be able to speak to each other and together. Coupled with finding themselves face to face with issues that they have spent their lives devoted to exploring, many philosophers are making impor-tant contributions amidst this radically transforming world. For the discipline of philos-ophy in Aotearoa New Zealand, then, Covid-19 compels us to seek out much richer conversations, much richer collaborations, and ultimately to pursue solutions more likely to lead to positive local and global change.

Indeed, beneath this mainstream Western philosophical platform, there is fertile soil with conceptual roots stretching back to and around the Pacific (Durie 2003; Māhina 2004b, 2010, 2017a; Hau'ofa 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Helu 1999; Jones et al. 2000; Bhagwan et al. 2020). Exploring the potential for learning between these, and other, systems of thought is critical. Mainstream Western philosophy, for instance, has tended to focus heavily on human and non-human individuals as the subjects of well-being. In Aotearoa New Zealand, however, scholarship about well-being also resonates with well-being and development thinking that is becoming more and more widespread

globally. Such approaches contend that well-being ought to be multidimensional, responsive to diversities, and grounded in the hopes and aspirations of communities themselves. What's more, in Aotearoa New Zealand and wider Moana Oceania, our philosophical traditions examine whether other entities too are subjects of well-being: groups such as iwi and whānau, plant and animal species, terrestrial features such as maunga and moana, practices such as philosophies and sciences. Some of these are multi-generational entities, existing for many human generations. Unlike human individuals, they typically still exist centuries after they are harmed by now-historical injustice, and centuries into a future in which the harms that we present generations inflict on them might increasingly accrue. These implications of their multi-generational existence suggest that their ethical importance requires a different, much wider conception of well-being (Moore 2017). Our philosophies should examine this further. They should also examine whether it is well-being alone that matters in ethics; or whether, for example, having due regard for what is precious, and respecting all entities that are agents in their own right, matter too, in ways that well-being alone cannot capture.

When we limit ourselves to a single philosophical tradition or disciplinary field, we limit the range of issues and questions that are visible to us. Wider perspectives raise considerations outside of our limited purview, and in doing so provide opportunities for novel insights and possibilities. In the discipline of Western philosophy, for instance, discussion of our responsibilities to future generations has emerged only over the last fifty years. For the most part, mainstream Western philosophical literature ignored the future – assuming that the well-being of future generations would be guaranteed by securing the well-being of present generations. Māori and other indigenous philosophy includes responsibilities to future generations from the start. Appropriately navigating responsibilities to past, present, and future people is part of what it means for both individuals and communities to thrive. We can see the value of these convergences between knowledges in the ever-growing and important work bringing together the sciences and Māori philosophy (for example: Hikuroa 2017; King et al. 2017; Groot et al. 2020; King and Hodgetts 2017; Wehi et al. 2018, Wehi, Whaanga, et al. 2020; Wehi, Brownstein, et al. 2020; Wehi et al. 2021), and in the longstanding and influential work bringing Māori philosophy to the fields of Law, Health, and Education. In light of our changing worlds, different perspectives have proved vital for moving our discussions forward.

A key lesson is that we do not know which worldviews we will need in our post-pandemic future. What we must do, then, is nurture a wide variety of moral experiments in living (Cf. Mulgan 2011, 2017; Grix 2019). In philosophy, this requires that we create space for diverse philosophical methods and practices. It also requires that we recognise the rich and diverse genealogies that underpin the philosophies we explore. To confront the problems that we will face, we need a range of different knowledges, as well as the ability to push at the boundaries of what might be possible. Such engagement requires listening, relationship building, and recognition of different types of expertise in all the places they exist. Such a practice will enable collaborative philosophical undertakings with others at the intersections of different conversations within the field, with other disciplines, and with issues as they feature within communities. Philosophy for and beyond Covid-19 will be built on a different culture within the field – enabling present generations to face the challenges that arise and empowering future people to do the same.

Disclosure statement

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