

Longevity and Age-Group Justice¹

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ABSTRACT

Justice Across Ages offers an attractive account of justice between the young and the old that brings together three notable principles of age-group justice: complete-lives equality, relational equality, and prudence. Yet, the book says little about the fact that many of us live longer than others, and the little it does say casts doubt on whether lifespan inequality threatens justice as construed by the three principles. This essay argues, instead, that theories of justice between the young and the old should not dispense with a conception of justice between different longevity groups. It concludes that we must be sensitive to lifespan variations when designing policies to promote justice across age groups.

Keywords: Bidadanure, longevity, age-group justice, complete-lives equality, relational equality, prudence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Juliana Bidadanure's book *Justice Across Ages* offers a hybrid account of age-group justice that brings together three notable principles: complete-lives equality, relational equality, and prudence (Bidadanure 2021: 123). In combination, these principles have considerable plausibility. Yet the book says little about the fact that many of us live longer than others. Moreover, the little it does say casts doubt on whether lifespan variation matters for the principles proposed in this book. Bidadanure thinks, for example, that "it is a misunderstanding of the point of age-group justice to turn it into a matter of longevity justice" (71). Surely, longevity and age are not equivalent problems. But assuming that justice across ages involves satisfying the three principles Bidadanure affirms, this article attempts to

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show that theories of age-group justice cannot dispense with a conception of justice between longevity groups.

After clarifying the connection between longevity and age, I defend three claims about the role of longevity in age-group justice, each drawing on one of the three principles. First, I show that unequal longevity supplies complete-lives egalitarians with arguments against age-group inequality. I then argue that lifespan inequality can be a source of social or relational inequality. Finally, I claim that Bidadanure's formulation of prudential fairness must involve some conception of "longevity justice". There is, then, much in her theory that supports the conviction that justice between people with unequally long lives is necessary for age-group justice, and nothing that undermines it.

2. LONGEVITY AND AGE

Political philosophers devote little attention to variation in lifespan. Unlike social class, gender, ethnicity, and even age, longevity is an often-overlooked source of inequality despite the relatively high number of short-lived people. Of all the deaths in Europe from 2015 to 2020, the percentage of deaths between 15 and 65 was one in five lives (United Nations 2019: 17). Lifespan inequality is also high (and increasing) among those who live beyond 65 years old (Permanyer and Scholl 2019).² And, in all this, the poor and other disadvantaged groups are persistently and predictably more likely to die earlier (e.g. Chetty *et al.* 2016).

We might think of justice between longevity groups (or "longevity justice" in short) as detached from normative debates on age. However, I suspect this attempt would be futile, given how strongly intertwined longevity and age are. They are so in at least two ways. First, length of life determines how many (and which) chronological ages we live through. Without longevity, we would not belong to any age group. The longer our lives, the more age groups we belong to (eventually reaching old age if we live long enough). Because those who die young will not live to old age, it is only early in life that we can most effectively benefit them while they are alive. While it may be possible to benefit people after they have died (Boonin 2019, Stemplowska 2020), it likely remains preferable to fulfil our obligations of justice to people when they are still alive. That is possible in

² Even though some specific longevity gaps may be closing down, such as the gender one.

the case of the short-lived since we can benefit them while they are young.

Secondly, age also tells us about longevity. Age is a better indicator of longevity at older ages. We can safely assume that the elderly are long-lived, even if we do not know precisely to what extent. Yet we do not know the actual length of life for the young. We are ignorant about how long a young person will live. Though we know that some groups have a lower life expectancy, such as lower socioeconomic classes, any such group includes presently unidentifiable shorter-lived people who will have less in life, other things being equal. The short-lived who we cannot identify *ex ante* are only able to benefit (while they are alive) from policies that shift goods to *all* young people (Fleurbaey *et al.* 2014). If so, it is possible to devise policies that assist only the long-lived by making them available *only* at old age (as often happens with retirement schemes). Yet, it is *impossible* to devise policies that assist only the short-lived. Enhancing resources or welfare early in life distributes equal benefits to both the short- and the long-lived, as both live through young ages. The distribution of costs may still be unequal, as the long-lived will likely pay more for the scheme. But assisting the short-lived is already in one respect *prima facie* more egalitarian than helping the long-lived. Because while the long-lived necessarily benefit from assistance to the short-lived, the reverse is not true.

Longevity determines how much we age, and age is a better indicator of longevity at older ages. This strong connection between longevity and age should already make us somewhat suspicious of attempts to exclude the former from debates on the latter. In response, one could propose first to discuss the issue of age and introduce longevity considerations later. After all, Bidadanure has somewhat bracketed questions of gender, climate, and global justice from her discussion. But I would insist that this is not something that one can do with longevity. For this section shows that the connection between longevity and age is unlike others. Contrary to gender or nations, we cannot speak of “age” without assuming longevity considerations in the background.

3. COMPLETE-LIVES EQUALITY

The first principle proposed by Bidadanure—complete-lives equality—states that we can object to inequalities between individuals at specific moments whenever and because these accumulate into inequalities between the entire lives of those individuals (Gosseries 2014: 66-7). Bidadanure uses this principle to distinguish age from other discriminatory grounds. For instance, people generally feel more at ease with age

discrimination than with sex/gender or racial/ethnic inequality (or discrimination). The familiar “complete-lives” justification for this is that, because *we all age*, age is not expected to accumulate into complete-lives inequality between people (unlike other discriminatory grounds):³

"We live our lives expecting to pass through the various stages, and old age is a club we know we will most probably join one day. As we pass through the different age categories, burdens and benefits that once applied to those older than us become ours. Nothing like this typically happens for gender and race." (29)

Treating people unequally across ages will likely be consistent with treating them equally in life. But Bidadanure goes beyond the assertion that complete-lives equality justifies more leniency towards age discrimination. Further, there is the suggestion that the principle is, in fact, entirely at ease with age-based inequalities that do not turn into inequalities between birth cohorts. For Bidadanure, complete-lives equality requires only opposing age-based inequality that can be expected to translate into lifelong inequalities between cohorts (47). Yet, Bidadanure underestimates the degree to which age can lead to lifelong inequalities within the same cohort. Bidadanure writes that once such “birth cohort equity is granted, the complete lives view [on equality] gives us no reasons to object to inequalities between age groups” (48). Let us see why by considering two directions of age-based inequality.

*Early Paradise.*⁴ A society’s older members have it rough, and its younger members are much better off, as the older members used to be when they were younger. If the younger members become older, they will have it rough as well.

*Late Paradise.*⁵ A society’s younger members have it rough, and its older members are much better off, although they used to have it rough when they were younger. If the younger members become older, they will be much better off.

These examples *seem* to comply with complete-lives equality when we all live lives of the same length and each of us passes through the same situations. Presumably, the young in *late paradise* lack a comparative

³ Bidadanure (2017), Gosseries (2014). As an anonymous reviewer noted, one might disagree with this “complete-lives” view of the specialness of age. For instance, one might insist that people would still be less opposed to age-involving inequality even if sex/gender and race/ethnicity would have the same “swapping features” that age tends to have.

⁴ This is a simplified version of Mckerlie’s (2012: 8) famous “nursing home” case. Mckerlie (1989) reminds us of other examples, such as when couples dominate each other in turns, or in feudal societies where peasants and nobles exchange roles every ten years.

⁵ I take this example from Meijers (2018: 4).

complaint about having it rough now if they will later benefit from heaven. Similarly, the elderly cannot also complain about *early paradise*, if they had enjoyed these benefits when they were younger (while their parents had it rough). What makes complete-lives equality possibly indifferent to such inequalities is that when we all age to an equal extent, we all take equal turns at being better and worse off (Gosseries 2007).⁶

We all age, but not to an equal extent. Some of us belong to more age groups by dint of living longer. If age-based inequalities are *prima facie* more acceptable than others because we all age, then the fact that some age more than others must matter for the acceptability of age-based differential treatment. That is why complete-lives egalitarians should consider unequal longevity when formulating complaints against age-group inequalities. It is not that a short-lived person is worse off because (their lack of) longevity is itself a source of (dis)advantage. Instead, that person would be worse off because she has access to fewer goods in life than her longer-lived peers. To illustrate, we must distinguish between two types of complete-lives egalitarianism, because the strength with which we ought to oppose the above paradises will depend on when we take equality to apply: *ex ante* or *ex post*.

Ex ante equality calls for individuals to be equally situated *before* knowing the relevant risks (for instance, how long they will live). The chances that each person will have of living to some ages but not others will determine whether their expectations are equal and, thus, whether *ex ante* equality is achieved. While this strand of egalitarianism focuses on the distribution of expectations, the *ex post* approach cares about realized outcomes. It seeks equality *after* uncertainty has disappeared, and we know the actual situation that people have lived through.⁷ Quite straightforwardly, the latter perspective worries about the consequences of age-based inequality across longevity groups.

From an *ex post* complete-lives egalitarian perspective, we can say two things about the cases above. First, we can say that the late paradise is *prima facie* less egalitarian and, therefore, more unjust than the early paradise. While the latter will exclude no one from the best that life offers, the former will prevent some (short-lived) people from living in heaven. Under cohort equality, understood as unconstrained lifetime equality, *ex post* complete-lives equality already justifies complaints about some

⁶ Complete-life egalitarians who do not rely on a purely comparative understanding of equality might be able to explain why these cases are objectionable. But in line with Bidanure, I will only consider complete-lives equality in this sense. But later on, we shall discuss noncomparative issues, which Bidanure brings into her theory through prudential fairness.

⁷ See Ponthière (2020, 2021), and Parr and Williams (2021: 88-98).

inequalities favoring the elderly.

Ex post complete-lives equality can also potentially explain why early paradise is unjust (even if it is not as unjust as late paradise). While late paradises benefit the long-lived more for no good reason, early heavens place more burdens on those who live longer, who will have to endure life outside paradise. Even if it would be better to live outside paradise than to be dead, complete-live egalitarians could oppose this arrangement. For instance, they might argue that people should benefit from more time in heaven the more (labor) burdens they incur across life. The underlying intuition would be (a) that those who face more burdens are worse off, all else equal, and (b) that people should be equal in benefits and burdens, or a ratio of these two factors. Egalitarians for whom benefits should attach to labor burdens can oppose early paradises for failing to give the longer-lived more time in heaven. Burden-sensitive compensation of those who die early tells in favor of sabbatical paradises, where each gets to live one year in paradise every X years (instead of early heavens).⁸ Thus differential longevity *can* justify a complete-lives egalitarian opposition to both paradises, even if cohort equality is granted and cohorts are equal over their whole lives.

It is not so obvious that the *ex ante* stance ignites similar concerns. Maybe saying that the late paradise is less egalitarian than the early paradise was too quick. For if all have an equal life expectancy at birth, thus possessing the same odds of living through either heaven, then one might insist that there is no inequality before people know how long they will live. Unaware of how (long) our life plays out, but knowing that we all have equal initial chances of dying early, we might be unable to say that one paradise treats us worse than the other, *ex ante*. If so, it may seem that the argument I am putting forward applies only to the *ex post* view. And, for many egalitarians, equality applies *ex ante*.⁹

However, this line of reasoning is a little too quick. Although it is not the only one, we can respond by appealing to an influential instance of *ex ante* egalitarianism: the “fair insurance” approach (e.g. Dworkin 1981). Longevity is a circumstance that affects individuals’ capacity to pursue

⁸ Under identical longevity, one could defend the view that burden-incurring people should spend more time in paradise. However, this does not, in principle, give rise to an egalitarian complaint against early or late heavens, provided that some can enter earlier in the late paradise or stay later in the early one (to compensate for the respective differences in burdens). Note that unequal longevity can give rise to such complaints. For two recent discussions of sabbaticals, see Valente (2022b) on complete-lives equality and Jauch (2023) on the prudential lifespan account discussed in section 5.

⁹ See, for instance, Dworkin’s defense of the *ex ante* approach (2002: 120-5) and, more recently, Parr and Williams (2021).

many of the reasonable ambitions that they will come to have in life, even if they do not know how long they will live. If so, *ex ante* egalitarians can sensibly offer, if it is feasible, fair insurance against the risk of premature death as an instance of bad (brute) luck. When it is impossible to do this, “fair insurance” contends that we have reasons to mimic the outcome that would have arisen had fair insurance been available. Behind a veil of ignorance, in which we are made unaware of the length of our lives, insurance against the chance of falling below (or above) the average life expectancy can be as suitable as purchasing insurance against the risk of falling below average earning abilities. Knowing the impact that longevity can have on our life, we would all be worse off (*ex ante*) if we began living unprotected against the risks of living longer and dying early.

Knowing this, proponents of *ex ante* equality should want individuals to enjoy equal opportunities to purchase insurance against longevity risks. But it will likely be more difficult to insure against a short life than against a long one, because individuals have more time and resources to protect themselves against the latter. At least, that is so as long as capital markets are imperfect, and we cannot borrow as much as we would like at an early age from our older selves. Meanwhile, one will likely prefer early to late paradise because the first does not preclude the option of purchasing old-age insurance. The reverse is impossible with late heaven, since we only receive goods when it is too late (and unnecessary) to buy insurance against the risk of premature death. In short, early paradises give fairly situated individuals (*ex ante*) more freedom to insure against the chances of a short and long life according to their values and attitudes to risks, and thus, more control over the risks they are exposed to. Such considerations support the intuition that individuals will likely prefer insurance policies akin to early paradise, which mitigate the risk of premature death. And, on a plausible version of *ex ante* equality, we should respect, within limits, the insurance decisions that symmetrically situated individuals would make about the various risks they face (Parr and Williams 2021: 71-5, 88-98).

Early paradises might bring economic costs. For instance, concentrating goods early in life might have undesirable Carnegie effects by harming the recipient’s later work efforts.¹⁰ Fairly situated insurers would be sensitive to efficiency considerations when deciding which policies to favor. I shall discuss this further in section 5, on “prudential fairness”, since it is in this principle that Bidadanure includes considerations of efficiency. Nevertheless, I am open to there being additional considerations that outweigh our *pro tanto* reasons to prefer early paradises in fairness to the

¹⁰ On the Carnegie effect, and the fact that the young may be more susceptible to it, see Bø *et al.* (2019).

short-lived. In this present section, I only want to conclude that complete-lives egalitarians should consider inequalities between longevity groups as raising issues of social justice for institutional designers. This, of course, is not to say that protecting short-lived individuals from unfairness overrides the many other reasons that govern their decision-making.

4. SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL EQUALITY

Even if the other principles proposed by Bidadanure were silent on the question of longevity, the first one would already have had much to say about it. But can we go as far as saying that longevity is also a matter of social and relational equality? Bidadanure does not give a firm answer (71), but she hints at the idea that longevity justice “may not be a matter of social justice at all”. Instead, it is just an instance of cosmic justice. And as John Rawls once put it, “the natural distribution is neither just nor unjust ... What is just and unjust is the way that institutions deal with these facts” (Rawls 1971: 87).

Social and relational conceptions of equality typically focus on actual relations (*ex post*) rather than expected ones (*ex ante*). In the book, Bidadanure proposes an account of *synchronic* relational equality, which requires people to relate to each other as equals at any time they coexist. This synchronicity element could explain why longevity is nothing to relational egalitarians. At least, one could insist upon this along Epicurean lines. Recall Epicurus’s famous quote that death is nothing to us, “since while we exist, our death is not, and when our death occurs, we do not exist” (see Konstan 2018). One could say the same about longevity: it is nothing to synchronic relational egalitarians because as long as the short-lived exist, relations are equal, and once they die, they no longer stand in relations.

To object to this Epicurean claim, one could say that there is no experience requirement on relational harms: that those alive can still relate as unequals with people who no longer, or do not yet, exist.¹¹ But this is an objection against the synchronic view of relational equality. For the sake of argument, and because I am inclined to agree with Bidadanure, I will suppose that the proper temporal scope of relational equality is synchronic, applying only to those who coexist.

I nevertheless think that longevity can be a source of social and relational inequality while longevity groups coexist; and not only because social factors, like education and socioeconomic status, separate people

¹¹ I want to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

into different life expectancies. It is also worth emphasizing that what short-lived people miss out on in life is essentially a result of social organization. In particular, what is unjust about it is not the bare cosmic fact that some people die earlier than others, but rather how societies treat the shorter- and longer-lived differently.¹²

Relational egalitarians care about inequalities in social status and status hierarchies because they lead to various social evils, such as social and political domination, exploitative exchange, social exclusion, and stigma (99). Not all cases of relational inequality between age groups mentioned in the book involve longevity concerns, such as infantilization (105-7). But at least four paradigmatic instances of relational inequality do, or so I will now argue. These are stigmatization, marginalization, exploitation (or exploitative exchange), and domination.

Stigmatization is when one marks someone or something worthy of disgrace because of a personal attribute that they possess.¹³ We tend to think of stigmatization as generally wrong but perhaps morally permissible if people are responsible for falling into disgraceful situations, such as when poor people are seen as accountable for their financial problems.¹⁴ When people die early, questions often arise about whether they are responsible for their early death. We are often quick to point the finger at those responsible for their own early death, assuming in the background that a person foregoes her right to be compensated for premature death if it is her fault she died young. Yet, no such questions are raised about long lives. Few of us would consider making old-age retirement available on the condition that the elderly are not responsible for growing old. It might even be that the availability of suicide makes growing old voluntary, at least to some extent. We do not have to conclude that the elderly must be responsible for living longer simply because suicide is always available. The point is rather that welfare-state institutions pay great attention to the unique claims of longer lives regardless of whether the length is voluntary, which is not what happens with short lives. Living under such stereotypes seems disrespectful to the short-lived because it appears to imply that those who live longer are superior in rights and opportunities to those who die early. The problem of unfairly attaching responsibility does not pertain to longevity groups only, but the length of life is undoubtedly a source from

¹² This is compatible with thinking that early death is also bad in itself, even if it is not unfair because institutions did their best to alleviate it.

¹³ See “stigmatize” in the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (accessed July 18, 2022), where it is defined as “to accuse or condemn or openly or formally or brand as disgraceful”. Originally, it figuratively meant “set the mark of disgrace upon”.

¹⁴ For a recent qualitative study of *perceived* stigmatisation among Dutch people with low socioeconomic positions, see Simons *et al.* (2018).

which it arises.

Marginalization refers to the act of treating someone or something as if they are not important. It is a significant concern for today's society that people live longer on average than they did in the past, and much ink has been spilt on how to meet the needs of the longer-lived. I do not doubt that this is an essential matter. The most adopted and "consensual" solution has been to increase the retirement age, even though it excludes more longevity groups from retirement. The impacts that social and economic policies have on shorter-lived longevity groups are rarely considered. Often, these groups are ignored as if they were unimportant. Unfortunately, it is tempting to marginalize the short-lived because many of them are invisible to us: we know who they are only once they are already gone. In other words, they become visible to us only after they disappear.

Exploitation (or Exploitative Exchange). Longevity groups can also exploit one another. Consider the two Nic(h)olases case. First, take *Nicholas Vrousalis's* definition of exploitation: "A exploits B if and only if A and B are embedded in a systematic relationship in which (a) A instrumentalizes (b) B's vulnerability (c) to extract a net benefit from B" (Vrousalis 2013: 132). And compare it now with a founding formulation of contribution-based social insurance by the famous French thinker *Nicolas de Condorcet*: "We shall point out how ... guaranteeing people in old age a means of livelihood produced partly by their own savings and partly by the savings of others who make the same outlay, but who die before they need to reap the reward..." (Condorcet 1995).

Welfare states can instrumentalize the short-lived to extract a net benefit from them. I suspect exploitation may occur even if we do not know who exactly it is that we are exploiting. Otherwise, the short-lived could still exploit the long-lived, since they know who they are (i.e. the elderly). While the long-lived can be victims of exploitation, I am interested here in the more complex case of the exploitation of the short-lived. Here is how this exploitation may happen. As mentioned earlier, the young suffer from a specific vulnerability to premature death that the elderly do not face. It may be possible for the elderly to instrumentalize this particular vulnerability of the young by setting up a system that extracts a net benefit from the short-lived. The long-lived can exploit the short-lived by instrumentalizing the young's exposure to the risk of premature death. Because we are all (only) vulnerable to premature death early in life, those who know they will live long (the elderly) do not share the young's exposure to an early death. I take this to match paradigmatic cases of *synchronic* exploitation, where the exploiter and the exploitee do not share the same vulnerability at the time of exploitation.

The aim here is not to say that Nicolas de Condorcet was defending exploitation, since living long is a vulnerability worth protecting people against. Exploitation only arises if there is no exchange in risk pooling, and only some parties and not others get a fair share of protection against the risks to which they are vulnerable. So it is not necessarily exploitation if the short-lived cover for the long-lived (for instance, by ensuring that the latter have enough throughout their lives). But it can be if transfers are unilateral, and the long-lived do not also safeguard against the particular vulnerabilities of the short-lived. Insurance against premature death is a gamble that is typically not available to us. Exploitation does not arise when the short- and long-lived protect each other as equals, but it may do if only one of them is covered at the expense of the other's transfers. It is possible, if not typical, for some longevity groups to exploit others in this sense.¹⁵ That is, unless there is not only insurance against living longer but also against dying early.

Domination. Individuals might dominate each other because of how long they live. Because longer-lived groups live to older ages, they might come to possess characteristics that can be sources of interpersonal domination (such as when their “greater life experience” justifies dominating younger people). Yet, I am interested here in the social and political domination that arises between groups, namely longevity groups. Collective domination might have two sources that relate to longevity. One is that, in virtue of having lived more years, the elderly have had more time to set up the system that serves their interests above those of others. The problem here has to do with a specific property attached to age, which is that the elderly have had more time. This can remain just a case of domination between age groups if it so happens that we all live equally long. But it can become domination between longevity groups if that is not the case. Now, there can also be domination between longevity groups because of the population's demographic structure. The more people belong to one longevity group, the more likely it is that a coalition will use its majoritarian power solely to advance its interests, leading to some form of *collective* domination.¹⁶ As people live longer on average, we can find ourselves embedded in a systematic relationship where a coalition of long-lived people uses its majoritarian power in this way. This is increasingly likely as power-hungry parties seek to satisfy the median elector: an elector

¹⁵ See Mulkeen (2021) for a (much) more detailed defense of the possibility of intergenerational exploitation. While her main concern is birth cohorts rather than age groups, some of the arguments could apply here.

¹⁶ For Vrousalis (2013: 139), “A dominates B if A and B are embedded in a systematic relationship in which (f) A takes advantage of his power over B, or the power of a coalition of agents A belongs to, in a way that is (g) disrespectful to B”.

whose age has been rising steadily over the years (e.g. Van Parijs 1998: 296).

The worry of domination between longevity groups only adds to Bidadanure's insightful concerns about the relative disenfranchisement of young people, with many injustices against the young being forgotten in ageing societies. Unfortunately, this translates into double invisibility for the short-lived. As we have seen, we know who they are only once they are already gone (after which they become invisible). But the only chance of making them visible in our democracies is by strengthening the political power of the young. However, because the young are also often invisible in politics, the short-lived might never have the opportunity of visibility in politics. Domination between longevity groups is possible, if not likely.

Longevity may trigger social and relational justice concerns. Even if our longevity were decided by the "cosmos", which it is not, it could still become a matter of social justice depending on how society is organized.¹⁷ For instance, many would agree that the physically impaired can simultaneously be victims of cosmic and social injustice if the communities they live in are built to suit the claims of only nonimpaired persons. Similarly, it is a matter of social justice for the short-lived if there is a tendency to organize institutions to serve better, if not to serve only, the interests of long-lived persons (and vice versa). Longevity groups can be victims of social and relational inequality, be that inequality directed against those who live long or short. If so, it is increasingly surprising that Bidadanure downplays the role of longevity in her theory of age-group justice.

5. PRUDENTIAL FAIRNESS

I turn now to the third principle of prudential fairness. Drawing on the seminal contribution by Norman Daniels (1988), the so-called prudential lifespan account is a device to help us decide how to distribute resources across ages by asking agents what prudent distribution of resources across life they would choose under a reasonably thick veil of ignorance. Bidadanure (123) suggests that, under these circumstances, prudent agents would decide on two rules. One, *lifespan sufficiency*, guarantees that all enjoy a normal opportunity range across life. The other, *lifespan efficiency*, holds that institutions should allocate resources earlier than later when such unequal treatment benefits us all and, therefore, worsens the position of no one. Let us consider these in turn.

¹⁷ On why society is responsible for converting a "cosmic" injustice into a social one, see e.g. Anderson (1999: 334) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2019: 3-4).

The first principle of lifespan sufficiency includes two thresholds, the second of which I set aside here. The first absolute threshold purports to give humans what they need to be free from noncomparative sources of deprivation, like hunger and disease (Bidanure 2021: 60; Casal 2007: 305). Premature death could certainly join hunger and disease in the list of noncomparative sources of deprivation, as one that only younger persons are vulnerable to. When considering people's plans in life, a lack of longevity can always be a potent cause of their frustration. Bidanure's first principle does not seem to capture longevity because it commits to continuous sufficiency (sufficiency across our lives) instead of complete-lives sufficiency (sufficiency over entire lives). Making sure our lives go well enough entails a concern with the short-lived that we lack once we make sufficiency at specific times our sole aim. Given that premature death can be a noncomparative source of harm, we may question whether a sufficiency view that is designed to capture such harms can give up entirely on the lifetime view and remain silent on longevity.¹⁸

Let us now turn to *lifespan efficiency*, whose motivation is the idea that unequal treatment by age makes our lives go better than they would otherwise (52-3). Such unequal treatment is efficient insofar as it "benefits us all" and does not worsen anyone's position. It is theoretically possible to integrate egalitarian concerns for lifespan efficiency with either *ex ante* or *ex post* approaches. While it is more common to do so in *ex ante* terms (with prudential fairness being a case in point), both sides of the *ex ante/ex post* distinction can agree with the two potential sources of "benefits to us all" that Bidanure points out. One is (i) increasing the chance of living a life of normal length. The other is (ii) increasing the diachronic returns made possible by early investments (63).

(i) The commitment to increasing our chances of living a life of normal length expresses an explicit concern with longevity (63). It shows that the prudential fairness account has a longevity norm at work, allowing us to say something about at least sufficient longevity (which the book refers to as "a life of normal length"). In general, this puts further pressure on Bidanure's dismissal of longevity's role in age-group justice (71).

However, an important question remains. Prudent planners would want to boost their chance of living reasonably long, but how should they deal with the possibility of *inevitable* early death? On top of *increasing the opportunities* of living long enough, it can also be prudent to *decrease the damage* from premature death. It is unclear how planners could justifiably care about the first but disregard the second. Indeed, as I suggested in

¹⁸ See Casal (2007: 314-15) for a discussion and a case of why sufficiency may be sensitive to the lifetime view.

section 3 on complete-lives equality, fairly situated individuals would have reasons to accept the existence of policies that protect them against the damage of early death.

(ii) The idea of increasing diachronic utility tells us to concentrate resources early in life when so doing increases diachronic returns. Bidadanure seems to understand “diachronic returns” as future returns from an investment. For instance, having access to education early rather than later enhances diachronic returns by having us benefit from such educational investments for a longer time. Other things being equal, diachronic returns will increase with *return length*: the longer the return, the more we will be able to “cash in” on early investments. If so, the concern with return length favors the long-lived, who have a longer future. In general, the longer-lived can be regarded as “utility monsters” as they are more efficient than the short-lived at converting resources into lifetime welfare (Leroux and Ponthiere 2013). Interestingly, the commitment to increasing diachronic returns takes a stance on longevity justice, this time by showing greater concern with longer-lived persons (who are vulnerable to a higher return length).

For instance, consider Bidadanure’s insightful worries about the scarring effects of youth unemployment. Imagine that two unemployed young people are equal in all respects, except that we know that one (Shorty) will die thirty years earlier than the other (Longie). Since Longie lives longer than Shorty, the scarring effects will be lower for Shorty. Increasing diachronic returns pushes us to prioritize Longie instead, for whom return length and scarring effects can be higher; for instance, by providing us with reasons to allocate scarce resources to Longie ahead of Shorty. If so, prudence has an implicit norm of longevity justice at work that prioritizes longer-lived groups (who are more vulnerable to early investments’ future impact).

One can justify shifting goods earlier in life to increase diachronic returns for longer-lived agents. But a question remains about what to do when growing diachronic returns would require us to concentrate goods later rather than early. Suppose, for instance, that the implementation of old-age retirement brings forth greater productive effort, thereby increasing the diachronic returns of workers, and more so the longer they work (and live).¹⁹ Returning once again to the *ex ante/ex post* distinction here will be useful. Such incentives-inducing retirement will likely increase the economic prospects of us all *ex ante*, i.e. before we know how long we will

¹⁹ See Halliday and Parr (2022) for a recent discussion of “the argument from capped rewards” which supports mandatory (old-age) retirement as a way of structuring a worker’s wages optimally throughout life.

live. *Ex post*, this policy may well leave short-lived workers worse off than they would be if society shifted part of this old-age retirement to earlier in life.²⁰ Note that transfers were efficient only because they did not worsen the position of anyone. So the acceptability of our incentives-inducing retirement will (again) depend on how we count people's situation as being worse: *ex ante* or *ex post*. As expected, the *ex post* view will be more demanding than the *ex ante* view in constraining how we may treat the short-lived. But this is not to say that *ex ante* constraints will deliver a *carte blanche* to how we may deal with the prematurely dead.

Lifespan efficiency justifies policies that benefit longer-lived workers, provided that these do not leave short-lived workers worse off than they would or could otherwise be. In economists' words, it pushes us to enhance returns for the longer-lived, subject to the constraint that doing so does not disadvantage the short-lived. How binding this constraint is will ultimately depend on whether we adopt an *ex ante* or *ex post* approach, with the latter being more assertive than the former. So it is not simply a coincidence that increasing diachronic returns make us concentrate on resources earlier in life. Instead, it may be something that justice requires: not to worsen the position of those who (expect to) die prematurely. Bidadanure's account of prudential fairness guarantees efficiency (understood as "benefits to all") only if it adds a constraint protecting the short-lived on top of its concern with the diachronic returns of longer-lived workers.

In conclusion, a concern with longevity should appear when protecting people against noncomparative harms. And it is a concern that is already there when we seek to strengthen the opportunity to live long enough or to increase lifetime returns (with implicit benefits to the long-lived) without leaving anyone worse off (implicitly requiring that we protect the short-lived). I take this to vindicate further the role of longevity in age-group justice.

Much of this discussion of prudence assumes that we were correct in our earlier assertion that fairly situated agents would purchase some insurance against premature death. Bidadanure (70-1) doubts this, suggesting that they might dismiss this risk because it is too unlikely. But I suspect this comes from Bidadanure thinking of the short-lived as those dying between 10 and 24 years old. If we broaden the group to include all who do not reach 65 years old, as I think we should, then the probability of

²⁰ While it leaves the short-lived worse off than they *could* otherwise be, one could doubt that it renders them worse off than they *would* otherwise be. We can imagine the latter possibility if pension contributions are higher than the marginal wage increase brought by retirement-induced incentives. I would also doubt that efficiency should stop with what *would* otherwise benefit us if there is something that *could* benefit us all even further.

early death is no longer as small. Even if it were, prudent agents would still have reasons to purchase insurance against premature death if the damage is sufficiently significant to raise the expected value of the accident to a level that one should take seriously.

6. CONCLUSION

The book *Justice Across Ages* offers an attractive theory of age-group justice that gives little room to claims of justice between longevity groups. This essay suggests that this need not, and should not, be the case. I have not explicitly shown that *any* account of age-group justice must incorporate longevity considerations. But by discussing the most prominent theories of age-group justice, I take the significance of our conclusions to extend well beyond Bidadanure's work. So long as justice across ages must satisfy the principles of complete-lives equality, relational equality, and prudential fairness, no account of age-group justice can dispense with some conception of longevity justice. To be sure, I do not necessarily mean that Bidadanure must reinterpret all of the principles to accommodate longevity considerations. We need not be isolationists about principles: each principle may pay special attention to some specific groups, provided that others compensate for these biases. For instance, there may be no problem for prudential fairness in benefiting long-lived persons more if complete-lives equality takes the "job" of protecting the short-lived. Indeed, prudence will likely matter more the longer we live (e.g. Valente 2022a). Therefore, my argument does not necessarily call for all of Bidadanure's principles to step in to accommodate longevity concerns (though it also does not exclude that possibility). It says only that at least one of them should step in, and that this can be any of the three.

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