

THE GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FEASIBILITY OF INTERNATIONALISM

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Abstract: *This essay revisits the metanormative version of the motivational critique of contemporary conceptions of cosmopolitan justice. I distinguish two ways of understanding this critique as leveling the charge of infeasibility against cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan motivation can be understood to be infeasible because it is impossible or because it is not reasonably likely to be achieved if tried. The possibilistic understanding is not persuasive, given that examples show that cosmopolitan motivation is possible. The conditional probabilistic understanding is more compelling, by contrast, because under certain social conditions it may not be reasonably likely that cosmopolitan motivation is achieved if tried. I argue, however, that whether cosmopolitan motivation is infeasible in the conditional probabilistic sense depends on malleable social conditions, given that, according to a plastic account of the human moral mind developed by Allen Buchanan, social conditions can undermine or favor the formation of cosmopolitan motivation. I illustrate this plastic account by showing how it can explain recent antic cosmopolitan orientations as “tribalistic” reflexes to global crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved competition for survival resources and (existential) threats. I conclude that cosmopolitan motivation is not infeasible under all social conditions and that cosmopolitanism therefore requires bringing about and maintaining those social conditions under which cosmopolitan motivation is feasible.*

KEY WORDS: motivation, cosmopolitanism, feasibility, moral psychology, meta-ethical particularism, evolution, morality

I. INTRODUCTION

This essay considers the long-term moral psychological feasibility of so-called Internationalism, the most dominant conception of global distributive justice in mainstream liberal political philosophy.¹ Internationalism has emerged from the global justice debate between the positions of Statism and Globalism.² Unlike Globalism, Internationalism is not committed to

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¹ In her recent assessment of the global justice debate, Katrin Flikschuh, *What Is Orientation in Global Thinking?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2, for example, identifies Internationalism as the “now increasingly dominant view.”

² My focus here is mainly on global *distributive* justice, and I also mean this subject matter when using “global justice,” unless specified otherwise. For this narrative of the emergence of Internationalism, see also Laura Valentini, *Justice in a Globalized World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For the use of the Statist, Globalist, and Internationalist terminology to characterize the global justice debate, see also Mathias Risse, *On Global Justice* (Princeton, NJ:

interpersonal socioeconomic equality, but to a limited set of minimum socioeconomic human rights as requirements of global distributive justice.³ Thus, unlike Statism, Internationalism does not deny the applicability of the concept of distributive justice outside the state.⁴ While demanding that all states protect minimum socioeconomic rights globally, it allows states to pursue more ambitious egalitarian standards of distributive justice domestically.

Yet despite its popularity, Internationalism's psychological feasibility has not yet been put under critical scrutiny.⁵ This neglect is curious, given that the critique of Globalism for its lack of psychological feasibility plays a major role in the Globalism versus Statism debate.⁶ This motivational critique of Globalism portrays Globalism as pointless "wishful thinking" or "naïve utopianism," and steers theorists toward Internationalism.⁷ Perhaps the best reason for the neglect of Internationalism's psychological feasibility is that its demands on individuals are *far less* demanding than those of Globalism. Relative to the Globalist ethos, the Internationalist ethos is easier to realize; it "merely" involves a commitment to realizing a minimum human rights standard globally. Thereby it contains a clear cutoff point at which no further redistributive efforts are needed. However, despite the

Princeton University Press, 2012); Julian Culp, *Global Justice and Development* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³ Internationalists defend different sets of these human rights. On one end, theorists such as John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 65, limit this set to a right against slavery, a right to liberty of conscience, a right to personal property, a right to emigrate, and a right to the means necessary to subsist *without including a right to democratic participation*. On the other end, theorists such as Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128–30, endorse a more expansive set of these human rights, including a right to democratic participation.

⁴ I reserve "Statism" for the view that there are *no* valid claims of justice outside the state. Others, such as Simon Caney, "Global Distributive Justice and the State," *Political Studies* 56, no. 3 (2008), 487–518, refer to this position as Strong Statism and label as Weak Statism the view that there are only sufficiency claims of justice outside the state and egalitarian claims of justice only domestically. I subsume Weak Statism under Internationalism.

⁵ The basic idea of the infeasibility charge is that feasibility functions as a constraint on the validity of a normative claim. It is contested, however, which kinds of normative claims are subject to such a feasibility constraint. Some, for example, hold that it is a constraint on prescriptive but not on evaluative normative claims. For surveys of the current debate, see Nicholas Southwood, "The Feasibility Issue," *Philosophy Compass* 13, no. 8 (2018). For the specific claim that the *psychological* feasibility of a moral motivation is a condition for its validity, see Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 277, who speaks of a "motivational condition."

⁶ For a discussion and overview of this motivational critique of Globalism, see Lior Erez, "Cosmopolitanism, Motivation, and Normative Feasibility," *Ethics & Global Politics* 8, no. 1 (2015): 43–55; Lior Erez, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and the Motivational Critique of Cosmopolitanism," in *Handbook of Patriotism*, ed. Mitja Sardoč (Cham: Springer, 2020), 545–59.

⁷ I adopt these expressions of what is problematic about a normative theory that is infeasible from, respectively, Southwood, "The Feasibility Issue," 5, and Pablo Gilabert, "Justice and Feasibility: A Dynamic Approach," in *Political Utopias: Contemporary Debates*, ed. Michael Weber and Kevin Vallier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 99.

relative ease of realizing an Internationalist ethos, Internationalism may nevertheless lack psychological feasibility.

Today, the psychological infeasibility of Internationalism seems especially plausible, as there are serious and apparently growing threats to hard-won successes in the implementation of Internationalism.⁸ These threats include the increasing relevance of extremely nationalist, anticosmopolitan, and illiberal social movements and political parties. For those who believe that gains in the realization of Internationalist principles have been progressive, these threats constitute a global crisis and the possibility of severe regression. At this juncture, it is important to vindicate the psychological feasibility of Internationalism, because otherwise Internationalists might doubt the feasibility and give up on their distinct project of realizing global justice.

To defend Internationalism's psychological feasibility, I present in [Section II](#) Internationalism in greater detail and explain how the motivational critique of Globalism has contributed to Internationalism's dominant role in today's global justice debate. In [Section III](#), I explain why Internationalism's psychological feasibility is questionable today and justifies speaking of a global crisis of Internationalism. I point toward the rise of extremely nationalist, anticosmopolitan, and illiberal political parties and social movements over the past decade as well as to an Evoconservative position that interprets these parties and movements as a backlash against an evolutionarily inadequate cosmopolitan ethos. In [Section IV](#), then, I turn to recent findings on the evolutionary foundations of moral psychology to assess the psychological feasibility of Internationalism and this Evoconservative position, in particular. Some of these findings suggest, as Evoconservatives argue, that human moral psychology is tribalistic, and thus that Internationalism goes against the grain of human nature. I argue against this view, however, by pointing to recent work of Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell that holds that human beings' moral psychology is plastic so that, under more favorable conditions, humans can adopt a nontribalistic morality and cosmopolitan ethos of the type that Internationalism represents. Finally, [Section V](#) concludes that Internationalism's global crisis calls for paying greater attention to the specific conditions under which Internationalism would be psychologically feasible.

II. GLOBALISM, STATISM, AND INTERNATIONALISM

Contemporary conceptions of global justice initially developed out of extensions of John Rawls's 1971 theory of social justice, called "justice as

⁸ For a recent analysis of the crisis of a global order akin to Internationalism, see Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, "The Real Crisis of Global Order: Illiberalism on the Rise," *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 1 (2022): 103–18.

fairness," to the world at large.⁹ Like Rawls, Charles Beitz suggests that principles of justice should be hypothetically decided behind a so-called "veil of ignorance" in which decision-makers would not know of their personal characteristics such as their class or natural talents.¹⁰ Different from Rawls, however, Beitz maintains that one's nationality as well should remain unknown within this hypothetical choice situation, which should thus represent a "global original position" among all persons globally.¹¹ In that situation, Beitz argues, participants would still accept as valid Rawls's liberal and egalitarian principles of justice, even though the subject matter to which these principles would apply would be the global rather than the domestic social basic structure.¹²

However, scholars such as Thomas Nagel hold that Rawls's liberal egalitarian principles of domestic justice would apply only within contexts of state coercion.¹³ Nagel points out that the state's coercion is a particular form of coercion, as it is carried out in the name of its citizens.¹⁴ It is because of this special feature of state coercion, Nagel argues, that this coercion can only be deemed just if the state's basic structure fulfills Rawls's principles of justice as fairness. Outside the state, however, where there is no state coercion, Nagel denies that *any* principles of distributive justice would apply, even though other moral demands, such as those of humanitarian aid, would indeed obtain globally. Following Statism's opposition to Globalism, eventually the Internationalist position gained more support, according to which minimal socioeconomic human rights should be recognized as standards of global distributive justice within all countries.

Widespread support of this position by several contemporary philosophers is understandable because the Statist view that there are no demands of global distributive justice seems counterintuitive in a highly globalized world and Globalism seems to involve wishful thinking or naïve idealism. The psychological version of this latter critique of Globalism's feasibility says, more specifically, that the motivation to comply with egalitarian principles among all individuals globally is either impossible to form or impossible to sustain over time.¹⁵ David Miller, for example, objects that

⁹ Rawls articulates this conception in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). He provides the definite formulation of the three principles of this conception—the basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity, and difference principle—in John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 42–43.

¹⁰ Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), Part III.

¹¹ Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, 151.

¹² Cf. also the "neo-Rawlsian" positions of Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002); Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice without Borders* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹³ Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2005): 113–47.

¹⁴ Nagel, "The Problem," 114, 128.

¹⁵ Erez labels the critique of globalism, according to which the relevant agents are unable to maintain the requisite moral motivation over time, as the *political* version of the motivational critique of Globalism and distinguishes it from the *metanormative* version of this critique that

Globalism is psychologically not viable, given the ethical importance that modern subjects ascribe to their national identity and national sense of solidarity. This feeling of national attachment, Miller maintains, would prevent modern subjects from giving equal concern in matters of distributive justice to all human beings in the way that Globalism calls for. Therefore, they *could not* be morally motivated to act in the ways that Globalism requires.¹⁶ The core psychological idea of this critique is thus that human beings' moral motivation is particularistic and insufficiently sensitive to the abstract demands of Globalism grounded in the contractualist type of justification that the global original position represents.¹⁷ What is more, cultural mechanisms such as a shared national culture for ensuring compliance with demands of distributive justice seem especially important in situations when partial compliance is possible and one can free-ride on others' compliance.¹⁸ Yet at the global level, even though there is no world state or government that could coercively ensure compliance and prevent free-riding, there are no such cultural mechanisms that would ensure compliance with the demands of Globalism.¹⁹

III. INTERNATIONALISM'S GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE CRITIQUE OF ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL FEASIBILITY

Given that Internationalism is psychologically far less demanding than Globalism, many of those who are critical of the psychological feasibility of

deals with questions of moral psychology. This differentiation is confusing, however, because both critiques concern moral psychology and the long-term psychological feasibility is not simply a political question. The label *metanormative* is also not ideal, because it is not as specific as *psychological*. For the distinction between *forming* a motivation and *maintaining* this motivation, see Gilibert, "Justice and Feasibility," 97.

¹⁶ David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 65. See also Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 33; and Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), chap. 1.

¹⁷ This psychological idea expresses David Hume's moral sentimentalism, according to which moral judgments reflect *feelings* of moral approval or disapproval and our actions are never motivated by reason alone but always have feelings (or "passions") at their source; cf. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev., P. H. Nidditch (1739; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (1748; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" *The Lindley Lecture at the University of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1984), 10, argues that "typically moral agency and continuing moral capacity are engendered and sustained in essential ways by particular institutionalised social ties in particular social groups." Cf. also Joseph Heath, "Rawls on Global Distributive Justice: A Defence," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy: Supplementary Volume* 31 35 (2005): 193–226.

¹⁹ David Miller, "Reasonable Partiality Towards Compatriots," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8, nos. 1–2 (2005): 79, makes a similar point: "It has yet to be demonstrated that a purely cosmopolitan ethics is viable—that people will be sufficiently motivated to act on duties that are likely to be very demanding in the absence of the ties of identity and solidarity that nationality provides."

Globalism may not think that this feasibility critique also applies to Internationalism. After all, the contribution to international institutions for the sake of realizing minimum socioeconomic human rights abroad is not only less demanding than realizing global interpersonal equality, but it is also compatible with pursuing an egalitarian distributive agenda domestically. Thus, Internationalism seems compatible with many of the feelings of national attachment that Miller ascribes to modern subjects and that supposedly find their expression in egalitarian concerns for distributive justice among compatriots. What is more, in the second half of the twentieth as well as the early twenty-first centuries we have witnessed an active international human rights movement that pursued the concerns of Internationalism.²⁰ According to David Held, these efforts have transformed international society and created a cosmopolitan political reality.²¹ Based on the example of this movement, Internationalists can plausibly maintain that it is *possible* for human agents to act in ways that Internationalism requires.

The psychological feasibility of maintaining an Internationalist motivation *over time*, however, has not yet been positively confirmed by empirical fact. To the contrary, over the course of the past decade, empirical realities have provided reasons to question that Internationalism is psychologically feasible over time. Different from the political climate toward the end of the twentieth century, in which political support for Internationalism was broader at least in liberal Western societies, the present climate is characterized by extremely nationalist, explicitly antic cosmopolitan, and illiberal normative orientations. Within countries that used to be considered democratically consolidated, political parties such as the *Rassemblement National* in France, the *Österreichische Volkspartei* (ÖVP) in Austria, and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany advocate extremely nationalist positions. Moreover, there are presently social cleavages within most liberal democratic societies between groups with “cosmopolitan” orientations, like those of Internationalism, and those with “communitarian” ones that would denounce Internationalism as insufficiently patriotic.²² What is more, the rise of illiberal countries such as China and Russia has given rise to a multipolar order in which there is no shared commitment toward international cooperation for protecting minimum human rights.²³ While Russia and China still participate in liberal international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, they tend to use their participation to promote nationalist aims.²⁴ In addition, they also aim at undermining cosmopolitan

²⁰ See Beth Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Kathryn Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

²¹ David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010).

²² Pieter De Wilde et al., eds., *The Struggle over Borders: Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*, trans. Valentine Pakis (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020).

²³ Chantal Mouffe, “Democracy in a Multipolar World,” *Millennium* 37, no. 3 (2009): 549–61.

²⁴ Cooley and Nexon, “The Real Crisis of Global Order.”

forces by spying and threatening critical journalists based abroad as well as by financing news media that support their illiberal agenda.²⁵ These extremely nationalist, explicitly antic cosmopolitan, and illiberal parties and movements oppose the normative commitments of not only Globalism but also of Internationalism. The ways in which such opposition to Internationalism represents a challenge to the long-term psychological feasibility of Internationalism become especially clear once we adopt a *probabilistic* or *scalar* understanding of psychological feasibility.²⁶ According to this understanding of feasibility, a moral motivation is feasible to maintain over time if it is *reasonably likely* that agents will maintain a particular moral motivation over time if they try to do so. Employing this probabilistic or scalar understanding of long-term feasibility, Internationalism is psychologically *less feasible* in the present climate than it was in the late twentieth century. The following four points explain why this is so and thereby further substantiate the view that Internationalism is in crisis.

First, today it is no longer sufficient to convince members of liberal societies that due to the globalized nature of social, political, and economic relations, the liberal commitments that they already entertain domestically now give rise to a commitment to the principles of distributive justice of Internationalism globally. As a significant portion of formally liberal societies nowadays reject liberal commitments, this way of arguing for Internationalism no longer works.

Second, agents who used to have an Internationalist motivation may have given it up or are no longer trying to disseminate this motivation and bring about the necessary political changes. They may have become exhausted or overwhelmed by the difficulties and sheer amount of activist political work that they are facing, given the existence of so many actors and groups with antic cosmopolitan, extremely nationalist, and illiberal orientations.

Third, the less support there is for Internationalism, the more certain communitarian-type reasons for questioning the psychological feasibility of Globalism also apply to Internationalism. In the case of the communitarian critique of Globalism, there are two reasons why the absence of commitments to Globalism is viewed as problematic. The first reason is that without such commitments, there are no effective agent-relative motives to comply with these principles. The second reason is that because of the lack of such commitments, there is no adequate conceptual understanding of the

²⁵ These media include China's CGTB and Russia's RT television stations. The spyware that is used is Pegasus of the NSO technology group.

²⁶ For the conditional probabilistic account, see Geoffrey Brennan and Nicholas Southwood, "Feasibility in Action and Attitude," in *Hommage à Wlodek: Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz*, ed. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen et al. (Lund: Lund University Press, 2007), 1–25. Subsequently, I will drop the qualifier "conditional" when referring to the conditional probabilistic account. The distinction between the possibilistic and the probabilistic understanding of feasibility is analogous to the distinctions between binary and scalar understandings of feasibility as well as between hard and soft feasibility constraints.

meaning of these principles.²⁷ Today, theorists of global justice can no longer circumvent this communitarian-type critique by adopting Internationalism and claiming that this morality, different from Globalism, reflects already shared commitments. Not long ago, this argumentation was, in effect, what political philosophers and theorists such as Rawls and Beitz offered.²⁸ They maintain that the practices of international law reflect the international community's commitment to human rights, which their so-called practice-based approach was simply meant to reconstruct. Thereby their Internationalist position seemed immune to the communitarian-type of critique concerning the lack of agent-relative motives and conceptual understanding. Yet under current conditions in which the commitments to an international order are seemingly no longer as much human rights-respecting as they used to be, the communitarian-type critique that there are no agent-relative motives, has gained in validity.

Fourth and finally, doubts concerning the long-term psychological feasibility of Internationalism also arise from the interpretation of the current climate characterized by extreme nationalism, explicit antic cosmopolitanism, and illiberalism as a reactionary backlash to the increasing success that Internationalism had toward the end of the twentieth century. According to this interpretation, this backlash is explainable on evolutionary grounds because the kind of moral motivation that Internationalism requires goes against the grain of the evolutionarily developed, tribal nature of human beings' moral psychology. In other words, moralities of the type that Internationalism represents may indeed be motivationally possible to realize in occasional instances or within short time periods. However, due to their lack of congruity with the evolutionarily hard-wired characteristics of humans' moral motivation, which is supposedly tribal, the attempt to institutionalize such moralities provokes opposition. And so, the motivation to pursue moralities such as Internationalism, although psychologically possible in the short term, is fragile and unstable.²⁹

These four ways in which the Internationalist project of global order is deemed infeasible explain why some view it as a global crisis. To assess the critique of Internationalism's long-term psychological feasibility, on which judgments concerning the crisis of Internationalism are based, the next section will explore the recent literature on the evolutionarily conditioned development of human beings' moral psychology and its importance for such feasibility assessments.

²⁷ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (1984): 90; MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" 9–10.

²⁸ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*; Charles Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Cf. Mouffe, "Democracy in a Multipolar World," for a similar claim from an *agonist* perspective, according to which "the political" is constituted by group identities distinguishing between us and them, the denial of which leads over time to *antagonistic* forms of intergroup violence.

IV. THE EVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Research on the evolutionary foundations of humans' moral psychology has emerged from the apparent difficulty of explaining human beings' altruistic or pro-social behavior. After all, from the perspective of evolutionary theory it seems as if non-altruists who do not behave pro-socially should be able to outcompete pro-social altruists who help non-kin. Thus, apparently, non-altruists should have greater reproductive fitness than the altruists, which should lead to the eventual extinction of pro-social altruists. The question of why this is not the case and how so many members of the human species are altruistic vis-à-vis others to whom they are not genetically related, is what drives this research on moral psychology informed by cultural anthropology and biology.³⁰

The explanation of altruistic or pro-social behavior that most evolutionary biologists accept refers to the development of social cooperation among homo sapiens living within hunter-gatherer bands of foragers in the mid-to-late Pleistocene 120,000 to 50,000 years ago.³¹ This explanation suggests that the moral capacity for indirect, reciprocal cooperation represented an evolutionary adaptation of homo sapiens. This capacity allowed the members of homo sapiens to engage in more specialization and division of labor based on a wider range of resources than was previously the case among *hominini erecti* and *heidelbergensis*. The homo sapiens' moral capacity involves the recognition and observance of implicit and explicit norms of indirect, reciprocal cooperation; it is supported by moral gossip; and it goes along with a willingness to punish those who violate these norms. According to several scholars, the development of this moral capacity emerged after an earlier stage of the Pleistocene in which *hominini erecti* and *heidelbergensis* practiced a form of mutualism in the immediate division of prey, a practice which already represented a cultural innovation over even earlier, largely independent foraging practices. There is disagreement, however, on whether this mutualism, which may have emerged prior to the existence of a rich (moral) language, already involved the recognition of implicit

³⁰ Chris Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012); Richard Joyce, *Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Philip Kitcher, *The Ethical Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013); Joseph Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Robert Boyd, *A Different Kind of Animal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). See also the references to Kim Sterelny's work in the next footnote.

³¹ This paragraph follows the characterization of the current scholarly debate in Kim Sterelny, "Life in Interesting Times: Cooperation and Collective Action in the Holocene," in *Cooperation and Its Evolution*, ed. Kim Sterelny et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 89–108; Kim Sterelny, "Cooperation in a Complex World: The Role of Proximate Factors in Ultimate Explanations," *Biological Theory* 7 (2013): 358–67; Kim Sterelny, "A Paleolithic Reciprocation Crisis: Symbols, Signals, and Norms," *Biological Theory* 9 (2014): 65–77; Kim Sterelny, "Norms and Their Evolution," in *Handbook of Cognitive Archaeology: Psychology in Prehistory*, ed. Tracy Henley, Matt Rossano, and Edward Kardas (London: Routledge, 2019), 375–97.

norms. Whereas some scholars such as Michael Tomasello, Robert Boyd, and Joseph Henrich argue that mutualism expresses a recognition of implicit (but not explicit) norms, others such as Kim Sterelny hold that this mutualism was regulated merely by reactive attitudes such as anger or resentment. By contrast, there seems to exist a scholarly consensus that the capacity to follow, morally gossip about, and sanction both implicit and explicit norms of cooperation is a central cultural feature of not only the hunter-gatherer bands of the mid-to-late Pleistocene, but also of the more elaborated clan-like kinship structures within larger, segmented social groups of the very late Pleistocene. This capacity starts becoming especially important in the social environments of the mid-to-late Pleistocene, which are not only larger and more anonymous, but also characterized by novel technologies of the “projectile revolution” and a wider range of economic resources.³²

To illustrate this view, consider Chris Boehm’s cultural-anthropological work, according to which the interaction between gene and culture in the mid-to-late Pleistocene has generated human beings’ capacity for altruistic behavior.³³ He observes that hunter-gatherer bands cooperated in various activities with no expectation of immediate or exact reciprocation, whereby they displayed a capacity for compliance with norms of social cooperation even if such compliance did not benefit individuals directly.³⁴ Boehm therefore argues that *group selection* is the cause of such pro-social behavior, as those groups with more altruistic cooperative tendencies achieved greater reproductive fitness.³⁵ Boehm identifies three cultural mechanisms that facilitated altruistic, cooperative behavior:

- (1) the punishment of group members that violate norms of cooperation, for example, by way of excluding them from future cooperation³⁶;
- (2) the internalization of cooperative norms through the formation of a moral conscience, which gives rise to moral emotions such as a sense of shame, which makes individuals feel uneasy when they break moral norms³⁷; and
- (3) the “preaching” of cooperative behavior in moral gossip through which peers mutually monitor one another morally, establish moral consensus on how people should behave, and keep track of who is a reliable cooperator and who should be punished.³⁸

³² See Paul Seabright, *The Company of Strangers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), for the claims concerning scale and anonymity, and Sterelny, “Norms and Their Evolution,” for the claims concerning technological and economic changes.

³³ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 10.

³⁴ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 10, 180.

³⁵ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 11–12, 73–74.

³⁶ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 15, 17, 19, 31–32, 71–72, 87, 149–50.

³⁷ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 19–23, 28, 32–33, 43, 106–7, 185, 200.

³⁸ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 33–35, 73.

The groups that cultivated these mechanisms were able to create more egalitarian societies of superior reproductive fitness, whereby the capacity for altruistic or pro-social behavior eventually became biologically engrained.³⁹ Biologically, this is reflected in the size of human beings' prefrontal cortex, which helps with assessing social consequences and controlling anti-social impulses. Damage to this part of the brain causes deviant behavior.⁴⁰ According to Boehm, the ability to distinguish and communicate "good" and "evil" behavior, to punish immoral behavior, and to internalize corresponding rules of behavior, is thus unique to our species.⁴¹

One relevant characteristic of these evolutionary accounts of moral psychology like that of Boehm is that the capacity for moral behavior emerged from social cooperation *within groups*, as those groups whose members were capable of moral behavior had a reproductive surplus vis-à-vis those groups that were lacking this capacity. Based on this observation, Evoconservatives maintain that humans' moral psychology continues being tribalistic even today. Their argument is that since the capacity for moral behavior evolved within "tribally" circumscribed groups in the environment of evolutionary adaptation in the mid-to-late Pleistocene, that capacity is currently still limited to cooperation among members of a circumscribed group. Evoconservatism thus holds that human beings' moral psychology is not well adapted for complying with the principles of Internationalism that claim validity for all human beings regardless of their belonging to more narrowly defined groups. And so, from the Evoconservative point of view, the international human rights movement and practices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries seem to represent an anomaly.

Nevertheless, this human rights movement does not necessarily falsify Evoconservatism. Evoconservatism can concede that it does not deny the *possibility* of forming the moral motivations that Internationalism demands, while still questioning the feasibility of these motivations over time, given that our evolved human nature opposes them. In line with such an argument, the more recent proliferation of extremely nationalist, antic cosmopolitan, and illiberal movements and parties confirms that human beings are not capable of sustaining an Internationalist ethos over time, even if the formation of Internationalist moral motivations is not altogether impossible. In this way, hence, Evoconservatism can articulate a distinct version of the motivational critique of the long-term feasibility of Internationalism that also provides relevant cues for explaining the contemporary crisis of Internationalism.⁴²

³⁹ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 12–13, 15, 31.

⁴⁰ Boehm, *Moral Origins*, 23–25.

⁴¹ Another case in point is Kitcher, *The Ethical Project*, who, like Boehm, argues that the capacity to follow rules of social cooperation emerged within small groups that attempted solving so-called altruism failures. Altruism failures are cases in which individuals do not give sufficient weight to the interests of other individuals in their decision-making, e.g., when going on a large-scale hunt, and therefore fail to solve collective action problems.

⁴² See Simmons, *Mobilizing*; Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade*.

It is important to recognize, however, that beyond the consensus regarding the emergence of the capacity for moral behavior, there is no scholarly consensus that human beings' moral psychology is still exclusively tribalistic today. Alternative accounts of the evolved nature of human beings' moral psychology reject Evoconservatism's claim that human beings' present moral psychology is limited to cooperation within narrowly circumscribed groups. Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell, for example, maintain that human beings' moral psychology is plastic and can adapt itself flexibly to the social conditions at hand.⁴³ They recognize, like Boehm and others, that in the environment of evolutionary adaptation in which human beings first developed the capacity for moral behavior, human beings initially adopted tribalistic or exclusivist moralities.⁴⁴ According to Buchanan and Powell, tribalistic or exclusivist moralities are characterized by relatively high levels of cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity among those who are part of the same tribe or in-group. In addition, however, these exclusivist moralities regard foreigners, who are members of other tribes or out-groups, as unreliable partners for cooperation. Thus, if human beings' moral psychology were still tribalistic today, it seems unlikely that Internationalism's ethos could be maintained over time. And so, it would be questionable that human beings were capable of institutionalizing international cooperation of the kind that fulfill the human-rights-based socioeconomic global demands of Internationalism. Accordingly, Buchanan concedes that "our tribal moral nature dooms the project of creating genuinely cosmopolitan international institutions."⁴⁵

Yet Buchanan and Powell argue that under sociocultural conditions more favorable than those that are found under the relatively harsh conditions of the environment of evolutionary adaptation, human beings can and are reasonably likely to develop and maintain inclusivist moralities that permit international cooperation with foreigners. Buchanan and Powell's central idea is that when material and cultural conditions have created a

⁴³ Cf. Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) as well as Allen Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

⁴⁴ Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate*, 67–68, characterizes the environment of evolutionary adaptation as follows: "(1) There weren't many humans, and they lived in small, widely scattered groups. (2) When they encountered individuals from other groups, they were in a desperate competition for survival resources. (3) Because these groups were widely scattered, they had different immune histories, which meant that if you encountered people from another group, you might become infected with lethal pathogens.... (4) Individuals from other groups not only presented a risk of biological parasites but also could be social parasites, free riders on your group's cooperative practices, because they hadn't internalized your group's rules and weren't bound to you by the ties of loyalty that your group's traditions and practices fostered.... (5) There was little or nothing in the way of social practices or institutions to enable peaceful, mutually beneficial cooperation among different groups.... (6) Because human groups were widely scattered and had their own histories, they had different languages, different styles of bodily adornment, clothing, hairstyles, and so on, and different ways of doing the basic things that all human societies must do to survive."

⁴⁵ Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate*, 76.

reproductive surplus, human beings need not constantly worry about improving their reproductive fitness. Buchanan and Powell call this process the “Great Uncoupling.”⁴⁶ It is due to this uncoupling of our moral psychology from adaptive pressures to survive under harsh conditions that human beings can eventually cooperate, reciprocate, and act in solidarity with human beings who are not part of their tribe or in-group. To clarify, on Buchanan and Powell’s view, this potential development of an inclusivist morality—such as that of Internationalism—is not merely a cultural achievement of overcoming the limitations of a hard-wired tribalistic moral psychology, as other evolutionary accounts of moral psychology may claim.⁴⁷ Instead, the development of such an inclusivist morality, although it is triggered by changes in human beings’ cultural, political, and economic environments, is nevertheless also facilitated by and conditional on the *biologically and evolutionarily* conditioned moral plasticity of the human mind. In support of this understanding of a plastic human moral psychology, Buchanan and Powell offer a revisionist account of prehistory. This account holds that not all human beings were subject to the same kind of environment of evolutionary adaptation, and so some human beings found themselves in conditions that allowed them to develop practices of intergroup cooperation—such as long-distance trade, outmating, and military alliances—that gave rise to “shallowly inclusive” moralities.⁴⁸

The upshot of this analysis of Buchanan and Powell’s plastic account of the human moral mind is hence that the formation of Internationalist motivation depends on the prevalent sociocultural conditions, given that, according to this plastic account, the preponderance of either inclusivist or exclusivist moralities depends on these conditions. Accordingly, while it may be reasonably unlikely that agents form and maintain Internationalist motivations under social conditions that favor exclusivist moralities, it may be reasonably likely that they succeed at forming and maintaining such motivations under social conditions that favor inclusivist moralities. Thus, while forming and maintaining Internationalist motivation may indeed be infeasible under conditions that resemble the environment of evolutionary adaptation, Internationalist motivation can feasibly be formed and maintained when these conditions are no longer present.

On this view, hence, we should not regard Internationalism as invalid due to the insufficient likelihood or alleged impossibility of its long-term psychological feasibility. Instead, it seems more plausible to hold that Internationalism is valid and that those who are successful at forming Internationalist motivations under sociocultural conditions unfavorable to forming and sustaining inclusivist moralities have “dynamic duties” to create the social conditions under which it is reasonably likely that other

⁴⁶ Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate*, 125.

⁴⁷ Greene, *Moral Tribes*.

⁴⁸ Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate*, 109, 105–18.

actors as well will form and sustain Internationalist motivations.⁴⁹ In addition, it also follows from this analysis that whenever sociocultural conditions are in place that are favorable to inclusivist moralities, then agents have duties to maintain these conditions and prevent them from eroding. Indeed, this view concedes that *under certain sociocultural conditions*, the formation and maintenance of Internationalist motivations will not be feasible in the probabilistic sense of being reasonably likely. Nevertheless, under favorable sociocultural conditions, it is reasonably likely to form and maintain an Internationalist ethos as well as to take measures, based on such motivations, that prevent the erosion of these favorable social conditions. Hence, from the point of view of Internationalism, it is necessary, at least for those who can, to work toward the realization of social conditions favorable to the long-term psychological feasibility of Internationalism, even under social conditions that are unfavorable to the emergence and durability of the Internationalist ethos.⁵⁰ Future research on the long-term psychological feasibility of Internationalism should focus on exploring further the sociocultural conditions under which the Internationalist ethos is reasonably likely to emerge as well as on mechanisms that would prevent these conditions from eroding.

V. CONCLUSION

This essay began by clarifying the importance of research on the psychological feasibility of Internationalism. It highlighted that despite the relative ease of its realization—when compared to the difficulty of realizing Globalism—there are nevertheless good reasons, especially today, for questioning its psychological feasibility. These reasons are related to the recent rise of extremely nationalist, anticosmopolitan, and illiberal movements and parties that can be interpreted as regressive forces that have led to a global crisis of Internationalism. This is because based on such an interpretation, a communitarian-type of critique of Internationalism is plausible according to which international society lacks the relevant moral motivations to follow the demands of Internationalism. In addition, this interpretation of a regression and global crisis also lends itself to support the Evoconservative position that holds that Internationalism's ethos goes against the grain of the evolved nature of humans' moral psychology.

The psychological feasibility of Internationalism hence must not be taken for granted, but instead subjected to critical scrutiny. To advance this type of

⁴⁹ Gilabert, "Justice and Feasibility," 118–23.

⁵⁰ This is a different way of saying that the Internationalist ethos may appear infeasible (in the probabilistic sense) from a *static* perspective (e.g., due to the preponderance of anticosmopolitan orientations), even though it is feasible (in the probabilistic sense) from a *dynamic* perspective. For this distinction, see Alan Hamlin, "Feasibility Four Ways," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 34, no. 1 (2017): 209–31. For my defense of how to change educational practices to create a more Internationalist (and democratic) consciousness, see Julian Culp, *Democratic Education in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2019).

inquiry and to vindicate Internationalism's psychological feasibility, I presented a contemporary debate on human beings' evolved moral psychology and showed that following the plastic account of humans' moral psychology, an inclusivist morality of the type that Internationalism represents is feasible under favorable sociocultural conditions. Future research should thus further explore the nature of these conditions and the ways in which they can be brought about and maintained.

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