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The Meaning of Mass Atrocities Beyond *Our Moral Fate*

Abstract: Philosophical accounts of moral progress commonly acknowledge the problem of mass atrocities. But the implications of such events for our ability to perceive, and achieve, progress are rarely considered in detail. This paper aims to address this gap. The paper takes as its starting point Allen Buchanan's evolutionary theory of moral progress in his 2020 book *Our Moral Fate*. Through critical analysis of Buchanan's theory, the paper shows that moral philosophers seeking to draw evidence from atrocities must pay closer attention to social scientific research into such crimes, and particularly to findings concerning the diverse motives, intentions, and ideological influences on perpetrators. At the same time, the paper suggests that mass atrocities exhibit the action-guiding influence not only of moral norms, but also of social and legal norms. The paper concludes by briefly considering the significance of mass atrocities for theories of moral progress beyond *Our Moral Fate*.

Keywords: mass atrocities, moral progress, ideology, perpetrators, norms

In the 21st century, it is impossible to avoid seeing atrocities. Images of grievous death occupy the pages of newspapers and aggregators almost daily. Billboards and banner ads for humanitarian organizations routinely show victims of state depredations. TV outlets offer live coverage of ongoing atrocities, while documentaries recycle past scenes of suffering. Via social media, our closest friends and relatives have become sources of reports about intolerable harms.

Allen Buchanan has engaged closely with the problem of atrocities in his writings on the philosophy of international law (Buchanan 2004). He continues to reflect on the causes of such crimes in his recent work on moral progress. Both Buchanan's co-authored 2018 book *The Evolution of Moral Progress* (Buchanan/Powell 2018) and his 2020 book *Our Moral Fate* cite historical cases of genocide, mass killing, ethnic cleansing, and forced sterilization in order to emphasize humans' evolved capacities to grievously harm other humans. *Our*

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Moral Fate goes further, drawing specific connections between human cognitive and cultural attainments and the perpetration of atrocities.

This essay critically examines Buchanan's treatment of historical and contemporary mass atrocities in *Our Moral Fate*. I distinguish several different purposes for which Buchanan introduces such examples in his text, and clarify what these examples are supposed to tell us about the risk of moral regress in complex modern societies. My first aim is to submit this particular argumentative track to Buchanan's own test: the test of compliance with the most firmly established scientific findings in relevant fields. A second aim is to consider some meta-ethical questions raised by mass atrocities which reach beyond *Our Moral Fate*.

My discussion proceeds as follows. In *Section 1*, I identify four reasons why theories of moral progress should be concerned with mass atrocities. In *Section 2*, I identify three non-trivial claims about the etiology and perpetration of mass atrocities in *Our Moral Fate*: first, that atrocities represent behavioral extremes; second, that atrocities cannot be accounted for as mere reversions to humanity's evolutionary environment; and third, that the contents of moralities matter for explaining mass atrocities. *Section 3* assesses each of these claims based on recent empirical studies of atrocities. *Section 4*, finally, argues that Buchanan's account of ideological features of tribalistic moralities falls short of the best theoretical work on how ideologies contribute to such crimes.

One definitional point should be made at the outset. Though atrocities occur at many scales, I am concerned, like Buchanan, with mass atrocities. Elsewhere I have defined these as temporally extended assaults by large numbers of individuals on large numbers of individuals, where the latter are people particularly vulnerable to harm (Morrow 2020, 3-5). Readers with a legal background may prefer the term 'atrocity crimes', covering the three established categories of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. For our purposes, the distinction should not matter, as both concepts apply to the various acts and policies discussed in *Our Moral Fate*.

1 The Significance of Mass Atrocities for Theories of Moral Progress

Philosophers writing on moral progress commonly acknowledge the problem of atrocities. But their purposes in doing so differ. Some authors cite atrocities to illustrate meta-ethical questions about how we might know when progress has occurred (Kitcher 2011, 169; Spinner-Halev 2012). Others introduce them as evidence (not necessarily conclusive) that little progress can be observed in recorded

history (Jamieson 2002, 335). A third approach consists in asking whether the moral capacities that permit such horrific acts and policies could instead be harnessed for morally progressive ends (Sauer 2019, 162).

In this section, I offer a more thoroughgoing account of the significance of mass atrocities for theories of moral progress. I identify and describe four independent reasons why theories of moral progress must contend with humanity's enduring history of atrocities. In each case, I comment briefly on the extent to which these considerations receive attention from Buchanan in *Our Moral Fate*.

The first reason why theories of moral progress must contend with mass atrocities is the one raised at the very start of this essay: atrocities offer spectacular, and widely seen, evidence of extreme wrongdoing. Advances in film and photographic technologies over the 20th century have made it possible for people around the globe to 'picture atrocities' (Batchen et al 2012). The rise of digital and social media during the last two decades has only expanded the 'spectatorship of suffering' (Chouliaraki 2007). Beyond visual media, the progress of international criminal law and the circulation of testimony from victims of atrocities supply support for Eric Hobsbawm's claim that the 20th was also 'the most murderous' century (Hobsbawm 2002).

The spectacular character of modern mass atrocities casts a shadow of paradox onto Steven Pinker's finding that human beings have become substantially less violent in recent centuries (Pinker 2012). Buchanan applauds Pinker for uncovering this counterintuitive evidence for progress, crediting him with making "what had been invisible visible" (2020, 39). But a further question, for a theory of moral progress, is exactly how visible—or how widely credited—Pinker's finding has become. As Buchanan observes, widespread beliefs in the existence of grave threats from internal or external others can foment tribalistic moral responses, even when those beliefs lack factual support (2020, 179). On this basis, we may conclude that theories of moral progress should be concerned with mass atrocities, and their publicity, on both epistemic and substantive grounds. Widespread coverage of atrocities makes it harder to see the progress that humanity has achieved; by stifling such recognition, spectacular reporting on atrocities can also contribute to moral regress, here understood in Buchanan's terms as withdrawal of moral regard from members of mistrusted outgroups.[1]

A second reason why theories of moral progress must be concerned with mass atrocities is that such crimes provide clear proof that human beings have not

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[1] This should not be taken as a reason for stifling or suppressing evidence of past or present atrocities, as some proponents of so-called 'patriotic education' in the US and UK have argued. But it does suggest that the way such evidence is presented may become a subject for the 'science of moral institutional design' that Buchanan calls for in the closing chapter of *Our Moral Fate*.

lost their capacities for extreme interpersonal violence under modern social and political conditions. This is the point Buchanan emphasizes most forcefully in *Our Moral Fate* (2020, 172-177, 98-102, 227-229). Indeed, this point underlies his general concern with resurgent tribalism and deeply divisive ideologies. What is more distinctive and, as I will argue, misleading about Buchanan's response to this consideration is the particular way in which he links human moralities to the ideologies that influence perpetrators of atrocities. But as far as the point about capacities for violence is concerned, I agree with Buchanan that contemporary mass atrocities reveal not a radical departure from our evolved human nature, but rather a baseline potential for interpersonal violence that remains present in all human beings today.

The third way that mass atrocities challenge theories of moral progress is by supplying models for future wrongdoing. Describing this as a challenge to the theorization of moral progress is perhaps misleading; the real challenge is to the secure achievement of progress in the world. Among 20th century theorists, Hannah Arendt most directly advanced the claim that the advent of certain kinds of large-scale crimes, such as industrialized killing, represented the creation of something new in the world which, now accomplished, could inspire and inform future episodes of mass atrocity (Arendt 1976, 460-480). In the terms Buchanan prefers, such modern institutions and practices as settler colonialism, saturation bombing, and concentration camps represent a form of "cumulative culture" that remains available for planners of current and future mass atrocities (2020, 18-19). Buchanan's own extended case study of the early-20th century eugenics movement resonates with news from America today, such as reports of forced hysterectomies in migrant detention camps. Whether or not those reports are ultimately substantiated, the occurrence of comparable atrocities in the past means we cannot be assured such spectacular moral failures will not recur.

A fourth, and final, reason why theories of moral progress should be concerned with mass atrocities is that such theories, or their popular analogues, have at times been among the causes of extreme wrongdoing. Here Buchanan's discussion of eugenics is again relevant, though to my mind *Our Moral Fate* does not sufficiently emphasize the fact that the eugenic idea was not just part of an ideology, but an ideology that placed moral progress at its core. As historian of science Rob Boddice points out, late-nineteenth century British eugenic thinkers such as Francis Galton and Karl Pearson believed the elimination of the weakest members of society was not just morally permissible, but morally required, in order to enhance the welfare of the whole (Boddice 2016, 109-115). By broadening our understanding of eugenics as one of several strategies for population engineering adopted by governments of various states in the 20th century (though not, ultimately, in Britain), we can locate it among the broader 'utopias of race and nation' that held ideas of moral progress

at their heart, even as they undertook campaigns of genocide, forced removal, and mass killing.

Buchanan and his co-author Russell Powell directly address this worry about theories of moral progress in *The Evolution of Moral Progress*. Here, the authors describe "the perceived perils of *using* the concept of moral progress," which has in the past been invoked "by agents of colonialism and imperialism" (2018, 8). Although they ultimately reject this concern as too limiting, Buchanan and Powell do accept the need to "reflect critically on our confidence in making judgments about moral progress" (9). The main source of confidence that emerges, both here and in *Our Moral Fate*, seems to be the view that increasing the inclusivity of human moralities cannot have the pernicious consequences of past supremacist movements which claimed the banner of progress. But concern over abuse of the idea of moral progress is not idle, and Buchanan and Powell later endorse Jonathan Glover's suggestion that the "first order of business" for a theory of moral progress must be to prevent moral regress (2018, 339).

In this section, I have identified four different reasons why theories of moral progress should be concerned with historical episodes of atrocity. I have also explained, in a general way, the extent to which Buchanan engages with each of these reasons. In the next section I will focus in more closely on Buchanan's treatment of atrocities in *Our Moral Fate*, and analyze the specific claims he makes about the etiology and perpetration of such crimes.

2 Tribalism, Moralities, and Mass Atrocities in *Our Moral Fate*

Our Moral Fate stands out among recent philosophical studies of moral progress for the way it builds examples of mass atrocity into its evolutionary story about the emergence of inclusive moralities. In this section, I analyze three non-trivial claims about the etiology and perpetration of atrocities advanced by Buchanan, before turning in the next section to consider how far these claims accord with current social scientific research. The three claims are (1) that mass atrocities represent behavioral extremes; (2) that mass atrocities cannot be characterized as mere reversions to patterns of conduct common in our ancestral environment; and (3) that moralities matter for explaining mass atrocities.

First, *Our Moral Fate* explicitly describes mass atrocities as behavioral extremes, and that in two senses. On the one hand, individual perpetration of atrocities is regarded as an extreme because it seems, on Buchanan's account, to draw wholly on the part of the evolved moral mind that responds to out-group members

as potential threats, and not at all on the portion that responds to them as potential cooperators. On the other hand, individual and group perpetration of mass atrocities is extreme because it surpasses other, less violent modes of manifesting a basic lack of moral regard for others.

The first of these two points emerges from Buchanan's critique of excessively Hobbesian views of the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptation (EEA). "The assumption that there was one EEA," Buchanan remarks, "amounts to believing that *throughout* the EEA, cooperation with members of outgroups would have been so detrimental that natural selection would have produced humans whose moral nature was thoroughly tribalistic" (2020, 107). That assumption, he argues, is wrong: in the EEA, there would also have been occasions for intergroup cooperation, creating conditions for the emergence of "moralities that were not purely tribalistic" (108). Nevertheless, it is important to be clear which tokens of behavior count as exhibiting the cooperative capacities of the evolved moral mind, and which do not. Intergroup marriages sometimes reflect the more cooperative capacities of the evolved moral mind, Buchanan argues, but in the case of forced marriages inflicted by ISIS fighters no such cooperative tendencies are to be found (111). Here, then, perpetrator behavior during a quite recent episode of atrocity is used to illustrate one extreme capacity of the evolved moral mind (115).

Turning to the second sense of extremity, *Our Moral Fate* indicates that atrocities are distinguished by exceptionally violent treatment of outgroups. Throughout the text, Buchanan notes various postures that members of an in-group can take towards members of an outgroup, ranging from full and open cooperation to selective cooperation to stubborn non-cooperation (107-110). Non-cooperation does not, by itself, entail efforts to destroy or disperse members of an out-group. Modern campaigns of mass killing, forced removal, and forced sterilization, then, are not only characterized by extreme ways of *thinking* about others, on Buchanan's view, but also by extreme forms of *acting* towards them.

Buchanan's claim about the extreme nature of mass atrocities stands out more clearly when we add to it a second claim presented somewhat more implicitly in *Our Moral Fate*. This is the claim that modern mass atrocities cannot be characterized as mere reversions to the behaviors common in our ancestral environment. Ascribing this claim to Buchanan might seem inconsistent with the plain meaning of his text, since he regularly describes modern tribalistic moralities as regressions towards the EEA, and since he suggests that political leaders seeking to stoke divisions often deploy language or other cues like those of the distant past (172-177). But a careful analysis of Buchanan's argument shows that this is not so.

Modern mass atrocities, as the discussion of such events in *Our Moral Fate* makes clear, draw heavily on the cumulative culture that is such an important part of the success of modern societies. This includes not only obvious features of mod-

ern life, such as technological means for organizing and carrying out persecution, but also ideological factors such as nationalism which, though rooted in capacities of the moral mind that developed in the EEA, nevertheless have no exact corollary there. Indeed, insofar as ideology plays a role in explanations of mass atrocity, this by itself demonstrates that such events cannot constitute mere reversion to behaviors common in our ancestral environment. For Buchanan explicitly claims that ideologies are modern (i.e. 'post-Neolithic') adaptations to intra-societal competition (197). As he writes, "ideologies are products of cultural selection for what enables cooperation within a group under modern conditions" (198). Observed patterns of expression and conduct during mass atrocities may resemble patterns of conduct in the EEA, as Buchanan's early discussion of dehumanization aims to show, but it is wrong to characterize atrocities as actual reversions to our ancestral environment (36-37).

There is one passage in *Our Moral Fate* that introduces the idea of a total reversion to the social conditions of the EEA—but in this case, the contrast with the actual circumstances of modern mass atrocities is clear. Buchanan analogizes conditions in our ancestral environment to those of the TV show *The Walking Dead*, and suggests that the automatic lack of trust and violent reactions between remaining human groups are akin to the behavior between our ancestors in evolutionary time (74-75). But however much the zombie apocalypse resembles philosophical accounts of the sort of 'ultimate harm' that might result from climate change or nuclear winter, it does not resemble conditions during the various historical and contemporary instances of mass atrocity that Buchanan invokes (Persson/Savulescu 2014).

The third non-trivial claim about mass atrocities advanced in *Our Moral Fate* is the claim that moralities matter for explaining such events. Buchanan defines 'moralities' as "particular bundles of rules, values, and emotional responses" (2020, 7). In addition to the content of moralities, certain parts of Buchanan's discussion of moral progress depend on claims about what we do with these bundles, such as employ them in reasoning about novel situations or use them to achieve consistency in our behavior towards other humans and non-human animals. In light of these progressive uses of moralities, it may be surprising to read that moralities also play a significant role in explaining mass atrocities, but this is indeed one of Buchanan's core claims.

For Buchanan, tribalism, and even the extreme forms of tribalism discussed above, manifests itself in and through moralities—sets of rules, values, and emo-

tional responses capable of guiding and justifying actions.[2] Mass atrocities, encompassing both the planning of such crimes and individual acts of perpetration during such crimes, stand among the acts and policies that tribalistic moralities are used to justify. This claim about justification is somewhat ambiguously treated in *Our Moral Fate*. At times, Buchanan seems to suggest that tribalistic moralities justify atrocities by presenting them as morally permissible—as when members of outgroups are regarded as falling outside the bounds of moral regard (2020, 99-100). At other times, Buchanan suggests moralities justify atrocities by holding them to be morally prescribed—objects of moral duties, or "the right thing to do" (194-195). In both cases, however, moral beliefs, attitudes, and commitments are placed at the center of the individual and group decisions that lead to atrocities.

In this section, I have identified three non-trivial claims about the etiology and perpetration of mass atrocities presented by *Our Moral Fate*. Though not equally relevant to every part of Buchanan's discussion of moral progress, these claims present a clear through line in his text, as should be expected in a book which takes the resurgence of tribalism as one of its main themes. So far, I have not tried to assess Buchanan's claims, though I have identified a few inconsistencies in his handling of them. In the next section, I will consider how each of these claims fares in the face of contemporary social scientific studies of mass atrocity.

3 The Contemporary Social Science of Mass Atrocities

At the beginning of *Our Moral Fate*, Buchanan tells us he has tried to make his philosophical account of moral progress "consistent with the best existing theories that are relevant to its subject matter" (57). The theories he has in mind include neuroscientific theories of human cognition, as well as social scientific theories bearing on the anthropology of groups and the dynamics of cultural transmission. But there is another branch of social science that is relevant to Buchanan's project, namely, the social scientific literature on perpetrators of mass atrocities. In this section, I first briefly outline this literature, then consider how far current work supports, or fails to support, Buchanan's claims about the etiology and perpetration of atrocities.

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2 'Moralities' are here treated in something like anthropological terms, as empirical features of human groups produced through cultural evolution from a basis in cognitive and biological evolution.

Social scientific investigations into the perpetration of mass atrocities have their origins in studies of perpetrator personalities sponsored by Western military authorities during and immediately after the Second World War (Waller 2002; Mastroianni 2018). Investigations by social psychologists in the 1960's and 1970's—most famously the 'obedience to authority' experiments carried out at Yale by Stanley Milgram and the Stanford Prison Experiment designed by Philip Zimbardo—aimed to show that group dynamics, rather than individual pathologies, played an important role in driving perpetrator behavior (Milgram 2009; Zimbardo; Haney/Banks 1973; Mastroianni 2018). The emergence of previously classified or inaccessible archival materials at the end of the Cold War made possible the landmark historiographical debate between Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen in the mid-1990's, which centered on the question of whether certain Holocaust perpetrators should be considered 'ordinary men' or hate-filled ideologues (Browning 1993; Goldhagen 1997). Political scientist James Waller published a key synthesis of existing social scientific research in 2002, providing a clear discussion of how evolutionary science, particularly evolutionary psychology, intersected with empirical studies of perpetration (Waller 2002).[3]

Major episodes of atrocity occurring in this same period, including the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica, impressed international observers with the need to take a more comparative and institutional approach to the study of such crimes. These events led directly to the founding of one of the major professional groups in this field, the International Association of Genocide Scholars; it also created support for atrocity forecasting and early warning systems still in use today (Verdeja 2016; Harff 2018; Leaning 2016). Within the academy, the growth of Holocaust and Genocide Studies programs at research universities in Europe and the US, and the development of international networks and institutions devoted to predicting and preventing mass atrocities, have focused further attention on perpetrator behavior. The creation of the Perpetrator Studies Network and launch of the *Journal of Perpetrator Research* reflect these influences, as do several other recent edited volumes on this topic.

In a recent review of this burgeoning literature, political scientist Scott Straus has highlighted the methodological diversity of scholarship and expressed doubts about whether "a comparative study of perpetrators [is] possible" (Strauss 2018, 204). Straus stresses particularly the challenge of distinguishing extraordinary from ordinary violence in war; the importance of local contexts in explaining perpetration; and the difficulty of gathering a representative and reliable sample

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3 The discussion of the evolutionary background to perpetration is extended significantly in the 2007 second edition of Waller's book.

of perpetrator perspectives (204-209). While I acknowledge Straus's concerns, I believe there is broad agreement amongst social scientists on three claims about perpetrators and perpetration that are relevant to Buchanan's work on tribalism and moral progress. The first is the claim that mass atrocities have a typical etiology, i.e. that admittedly diverse societies tend to pass through certain stages, and develop certain features, before large-scale violence begins. The second is the claim that perpetrators of mass atrocities are not motivationally uniform, but instead tend to comprise 'coalitions for violence' bearing significantly different factual beliefs, ideological commitments, and practical goals. The third is the claim that morality is just one of several orders of normativity relevant to the explanation of mass atrocities.

Scholars of the etiology of genocide such as Barbara Harff, Stephen McLoughlin, and Deborah Meyerson seek to identify structural conditions that inhibit or escalate the risk of genocide within particular social contexts (Harff 1987; McLoughlin 2014; Mayersen 2014). Beyond this, as the term etiology implies, they attempt to give an account of how those inhibitory and escalatory factors amplify, or alternatively work against, each other. Far from mere academic theories, the work done by these scholars has informed the risk assessment and early warning models employed by governments and international institutions concerned with predicting, and preventing, mass atrocities today.

This branch of the scientific literature lends a certain degree of support to Buchanan's claim that atrocities are behavioral extremes, and particularly the aspect of that claim which holds that atrocities are extreme forms of action towards outgroup members that have analogues in milder forms of persecution or exclusion. Mayersen, for example, offers an eight-stage temporal model of escalatory conditions for genocide, with each stage intended to mark development towards actual genocidal acts (2014, 16). On her model, "presence of an out-group within a society" is only the first of those eight stages, and "perception of an out-group as an existential threat" is only the third stage out of eight (16). Buchanan would likely agree with such accounts, and regard them as evidence of moral regress that falls short of the extreme violence of atrocity.

Seen from a different angle, though, social scientific models of the 'path to genocide' put pressure on Buchanan's claim that atrocities reflect extreme forms of moral thinking about outgroup members. As emphasized in Scott Straus's work, the presence of social outgroups, and even their perception as existential threats, is by no means a sufficient condition for mass atrocities. Other structural and case-specific conditions, such as the outbreak of external war or the assassination of political leaders, provide more proximate and more predictive conditions for mass atrocities (Straus 2015, x). But once those other conditions are in place, it becomes harder to show that the actions of individual perpetrators reflect the workings

of tribalistic moralities. They may just as plausibly be interpreted as escalations prompted by the new social conditions themselves, such as wartime brutalization or hardening (Morrow 2020, 48-50; Glover 2000, 53).

A second, and related, challenge to Buchanan's first claim comes from scholarship that emphasizes the cross-cutting and sometimes antithetical motivations of planners and perpetrators of mass atrocities. Historian Christian Gerlach has coined the phrase 'coalitions for violence' to describe the ways in which perpetrators come together for widely different reasons in order to engage in murder, expulsion, or expropriation (Gerlach 2010). Uğur Üngör draws attention to the ways in which paramilitary groups and organized crime syndicates act together with official police or militaries to perpetrate large-scale crimes (Üngör 2020). Rather than understanding such coalitions as united by tribalistic moralities, it seems more appropriate to speak of a kind of *modus vivendi* that, under complex social conditions, facilitates cooperation on violent political projects.

While challenging Buchanan's first claim about the extremist thinking manifested in atrocities, however, this social scientific finding provides some support for what I have described as his second non-trivial claim, i.e. that mass atrocities cannot be characterized as mere reversions to the EEA. The social strata and sub-divisions implicated in Gerlach's 'coalitions for violence' are too complex to have close analogues in our evolutionary past. They are as much products of the 'cumulative culture' Buchanan describes as the coalitions for peace that helped form the modern human rights movement (Buchanan/Powell 2018, 273-305).

Indeed, an observation Buchanan has made about the role institutions play in securing human rights could with equal justice be applied to institutions implicated in mass atrocities. "We now understand," Buchanan wrote in a 2013 book chapter, "that institutions are human creations and that it is sometimes possible to modify them and even to create new ones" (2013, 407). Planners and perpetrators of atrocities have learned this lesson. They have proved capable of turning institutions—from police forces and military cadres to courts of justice and state bureaucracies—to their vicious ends.

What of Buchanan's third claim: that moralities matter for explaining mass atrocities? Here there has historically been little agreement among social scientists studying the etiology and perpetration of large-scale crimes. One early investigator of Holocaust perpetrators, for example, framed them as 'murderous robots;' there is little space on such a view for moral beliefs, commitments, and attitudes to come into play (Gilbert 1963). More commonly historians and legal scholars have described mass atrocities as transpiring within an "inverted moral universe" (Waller 2002, 231), i.e. a social world in which previously accepted moral rules have been turned "topsy-turvy" (Osiel 2009, xi). But such characterizations risk circularity,

and are left further exposed by a failure to specify how moral norms differ from other orders of normativity, such as legal and social norms.

In my own work, I have tried to vindicate the claim that moral norms are relevant to the explanation of mass atrocities, in part by providing a clearer account of how such norms should be understood, and in part by showing different ways in which such norms can enter (or recede from) agents' practical deliberations (Morrow 2020). I define norms generally as "practical prescriptions, permissions, or prohibitions, accepted by individuals belonging to particular groups, organizations, or societies, and capable of guiding the actions of those individuals" (2020, 19). Moral norms, I suggest are distinguished from social norms by the fact that they are not grounded in real or perceived social practices. Moral norms are distinguished from legal norms by the fact that there are no standing procedural rules governing changes in the scope, force, or content of moral norms (2020, 41).

This definition of moral norms is compatible with Buchanan's naturalistic approach to human moralities, including his account of the evolved moral mind. The second item on Buchanan's list of core features of that mind, which focuses on the ability to 'internalize moral rules', is especially important for unpacking what I call the practice-independent character of moral norms. Other instances in which Buchanan's discusses historical mass atrocities also resonate with my account, such as his analysis of Heinrich Himmler's infamous speech to SS officers in Posen (Posnau), Poland in October 1943. In this speech, Himmler encouraged the perpetrators under his command to show toughness and to do what was necessary to secure the future of Hitler's Reich (Hochstadt 2004, 163-165). Here, Buchanan argues, we do not find a complete reversal of ordinary moral beliefs and attitudes, but instead a suggestion that "this case of killing was an exception to the moral rules that apply in ordinary situations, because this was in effect a supreme emergency" (2020, 195). I believe the kind of moral manipulation Buchanan identifies is best described in terms of the evasion of moral norms—a dynamic that helps explain some, but not all, patterns of perpetration during mass atrocities (Morrow 2020, 45-54).[4]

As this discussion indicates, I agree with Buchanan's basic claim that moralities matter for explaining mass atrocities, and I believe his evolutionary account of the moral mind provides some resources for building out such explanations. But moral norms are not the only kinds of norms that play a role in precipitating such crimes, or in motivating particular perpetrators. Legal and social norms are

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4 Himmler's speech is sufficiently long and digressive, however, to contain evidence for many different explanatory theses, including those which emphasize dehumanization, rather than supreme emergency, and those which posit an actual inversion in moral norms (Smith 2020, 48; Morrow 2020, 193n23).

equally crucial. To explain how these several orders of normativity relate to each other, I will now consider one feature of Buchanan's book that I have not discussed so far: his account of ideology as a distinctively modern component of tribalistic moralities.

4 The Normative Structure of Ideologies

The philosophical literature on norms is not well integrated with the literature on ideology. Widely-cited studies of norms by Cristina Bicchieri, Geoffrey Brennan, and others make no mention of ideology or ideological influences on norm cognition (Bicchieri 2006; 2017; Brennan et al. 2013). A recent edited volume, largely devoted to exhibiting the evolutionary background of human normative beliefs and attitudes, refers just once to ideology (Roughley/Bayertz 2019, 68). Possibly the reason for this shyness about ideology among theorists of norms is the very one Buchanan provides: a lingering skepticism towards Marxist interpretations of this concept, and doubts about the possibility of aligning those interpretations with findings from evolutionary theory (2020, 199).

Buchanan's own definition of ideology differs significantly from Marx's account. Here I quote Buchanan's definition in full:

> An ideology is a system of beliefs and corresponding attitudes that (1) orients individuals by providing a more or less comprehensive map of the social world, offering a greatly simplified characterization of its main features; (2) includes a diagnosis of what is right or wrong or good or bad in the existing social order, while appealing to and reinforcing individuals' group-based moral identities, sometimes—but not always—in such a way as to facilitate assigning praise for what is right or good to Us and blame for what is wrong or bad to Them; and (3) supplies resources for morally justifying various cooperative actions on the part of the group to whom the ideology links the individuals' identity, by referring to the diagnosis of what is right and wrong or good or bad about the social order and sometimes —but not always—by referring to who is responsible for it. (2020, 199)

This definition is much more elaborate than those proposed by other philosophers concerned with roughly the same political phenomena as Buchanan, including Jason Stanley, who defines ideologies in his book *How Propaganda Works* as "beliefs that unreflectively guide our path through the social world" (2015, 183). The details in Buchanan's definition are, furthermore, tightly fitted to his argumentative program, and especially his claim that ideologies are adaptations to the demands of intra-group competition in modern societies (2020, 198). Nevertheless, Buchanan's definition overlaps significantly with that provided by political scientist Jonathan Leader Maynard, who has revolutionized social scientific thinking about the influ-

ence of ideology on perpetrators of atrocities (Maynard 2014; 2015; 2019). Where I will suggest Buchanan falls short is not in his basic definition of ideology, but in his specific claims about the ways in which ideologies are linked to mass atrocities. Here my discussion closely follows Maynard's.

Maynard defines an ideology as "a distinctive overarching system of normative, semantic, and/or purportedly factual ideas which provides a general understanding of the political world and guides political behavior" (2015, 191). I take Maynard's idea that ideologies "provid[e] a general understanding of the political world" to match closely Buchanan's claim that ideologies "map the social world." I take Maynard's idea that ideologies "guid[e] political behavior" to be related to Buchanan's claim that ideologies "morally justif[y] various cooperative actions," with certain differences that will be addressed below. The central difference between Buchanan's definition and Maynard's lies in Buchanan's emphasis on the intersection between ideologies and the moral identities of those who hold them. This, I shall suggest, works to Buchanan's disadvantage, at least as far as the effort to link tribalistic ideologies to mass atrocities goes.

We should first consider what the concept of ideology adds to the general relationship Buchanan has drawn between humans' evolved, culturally varied moralities and the perpetration of atrocities. Recall Buchanan's general definition of human moralities as "particular bundles of rules, values, and emotional responses" (2020, 7). Tribalism, or the withdrawal of moral regard from all but a few individuals outside one's perceived identity group, is itself a morality (or rather a description of range of possible moralities), one that has helped drive perpetration of "the worst large-scale atrocities" (194). What ideologies add to tribalistic moralities, according to Buchanan, is a way of signaling precisely who belongs to one's identity group; a way of defusing the sort of "moral consistency reasoning" that might otherwise prompt the extension of moral regard; and a way of satisfying demands for moral justification where such demands cannot be ignored (204-26, 209-2010, 216).

It is fairly clear how the signaling function of ideologies can contribute to the etiology of mass atrocities. Signaling helps reinforce the divisions between social in-groups and out-groups mentioned above. The second, and especially the third, functions of ideology relate the third stage on Deborah Mayersen's 'path to genocide,' i.e. regarding out-group members as an existential threat. Here further support for Buchanan's characterization of the relationship between ideology and atrocities can be found in Alex Bellamy's empirical study of reputational considerations among planners of atrocities (2012), where Bellamy argues that planners of atrocities are driven by a need to maintain their perceived legitimacy, and do so in part by claiming that mass killings or removals were morally justified in light of the great threat posed by their victims.

Nevertheless, Buchanan's account of the "social and psychological functions of ideologies" does not go very far toward explaining what he himself suggests needs explaining: the willingness of "morally normal people" to move from viewing members of an outgroup as a dangerous threat to actually picking up weapons and doing violence to them (2020, 201, 194). Further, his description of ideology's role in this continues the confusion between two senses of moral justification noted in Section II above. In some places, as in his allusions to Serbs torturing Croats, Buchanan suggests modern ideologies justify perpetration by excluding the targets of atrocities from the bounds of moral consistency reasoning (2020, 99). Here, ideologies *permit* atrocities. In other places, as with his extended discussion of eugenics, he suggests such moral views cast such acts as morally required. Here, ideologies *prescribe* atrocities (196, 218-222).

Maynard's 'neo-ideological' approach (2019) provides a more fine-grained and varied picture of the different ways ideologies can influence perpetrators of such crimes. Key features of this approach include the idea that perpetrators are ideologically heterogeneous, rather than all accepting a specific belief system; the idea that ideologies are often mundane, rather than fanatical, in their contents; and the idea that the motivational force of ideologies should be distinguished from their justificatory force (2019, 185).

Combining these features of Maynard's analysis with the social scientific finding concerning 'coalitions for violence' discussed in Section III, we see that the explanatory connection between extremely divisive ideologies and mass atrocities is hardly straightforward. While there may be fanatics among planners and perpetrators of atrocities, many participants will be motivated by much more mundane beliefs—such as a belief that it is better to be on the winning side of a political struggle than the losing side, or the belief that one should not miss out on benefits others are getting, whatever their source.[5] As Maynard explains, perpetrators who are actually motivated by beliefs of this rather mundane kind may nevertheless seek to justify their actions via other beliefs available within local ideological frameworks, such as the claim that members of an outgroup pose an existential threat (2019, 181). This gap between ideological motivations and ideological justifications for perpetration undermines Buchanan's claim that ideologies "derive motivational power from the commitment to moral identity" (2020, 217).[6]

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[5] Buchanan hints at this kind of motivation as standing behind some Nazi ideology, but seems to see it as of secondary importance (Buchanan 2020, 221).

[6] Whereas Maynard does not directly confront the question of the reliability of perpetrators' claims about their motivations, philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen emphasizes "the profound and enduring unreliability of motivations in general and of those expressed by perpetrators in particular" (Vetlesen 2018, 119).

Moving beyond Maynard's analysis, I want to suggest further that "normative ideas" that form part of ideologies are not limited to moral norms, but also include legal and social norms. Among social norms, ideologies frequently include the idea that one ought to take advantage of gains there for the taking (an idea relevant for explaining looting and expropriation during mass atrocities). Among legal norms, ideologies frequently include the idea that the judiciary ought to defer to the executive on matters of national security (an idea relevant for explaining why atrocities often occur under conditions of claimed 'national emergencies'). Future research into ideological influences on perpetrators should take into consideration the diversity of norms that compose particular ideologies. Likewise, investigations into the role of ideology in fueling milder forms of intra-societal tribalism should take into account these different orders of normativity.

5 Conclusion

In the final chapter of *Our Moral Fate*, Buchanan calls for scientific research on "moral institutional design" as a response to the threat posed by resurgent tribalism and deeply divisive ideologies (234). I believe the neo-ideological research program that Maynard has laid out, and particularly his calls for "persuasive ideological interventions," or positive attempts to replace factual and normative ideas embraced by adherents to deeply divisive ideologies, belongs to that project (2015, 220). So too does the empirical work by Richard Ashby Wilson, Jordan Kiper, and others on the contents and effects of atrocity speech (Wilson 2017; Wilson/Kiper 2020; Maynard/Benesch 2016), a topic Buchanan briefly discusses (2020, 247-248). Institutional efforts, such as Facebook's 'hateful meme challenge,' which seeks to use artificial intelligence to identify cases of incitement that work through a combination of words and images, also belong to this research program.[7]

For the science of moral institutional design to work, it must take into account the role that legal and social norms, as well as moral norms, play in escalating the risk of mass atrocities, and in fueling less extreme forms of inter- and intra-group hostility. Large-scale crimes, as I suggested at the start of this essay, illustrate the most spectacular kind of threat to moral progress, but their causes are not to be found exclusively in the content of our moralities, and neither are the causes of other kinds of moral regress. This is the chief lesson that closer study of mass atrocities holds for *Our Moral Fate.*

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7 See the description of this initiative, which launched in May 2020, at https://ai.facebook.com/blog/hateful-memes-challenge-and-data-set/.

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