

It is a great pleasure to comment on Professors Buchanan and Powell's timely and important book. The book takes up one of the most crucial questions of our time, and the argument unfolds with both genuine inter-disciplinarity and epistemic humility -- two qualities of crucial importance that are often lacking in Anglophone philosophy. The book's treatment of moral progress as a pressing practical problem, and not just an abstract question, shows a striking and admirable engagement with the practical matters of life and modern society.

[As we've heard in the overview...?], the authors embrace pluralism about the nature of moral progress, they focus on the kind of moral progress associated with inclusivity and moving away from in-group/out-group moral reasoning, and they argue that moves toward inclusivity are associated with a certain kind of prosperity, sense of security and absence of threats. Moral progress is a kind of "luxury good"; among other things, markets and "security arrangements" facilitate peaceful, mutually beneficial cooperation. Central to the argument is the idea that we can look at examples of moral progress and use them to understand what moral progress is and how it comes about. Examples include as the abolition of slavery, the expansion of human rights, the decline of discrimination as in sexism and racism, and valuing people as people rather than valuing them for their economic contributions. From an abstract point of view, the authors say that the starting point from which these can be seen as clearly examples of moral progress is a kind of liberalism, writing: "In what follows we focus on examples of inclusiveness that are morally uncontroversial within a broadly liberal perspective and which therefore will be regarded as progressive by cosmopolitans and liberal nationalists alike" (Chapter 1). The authors emphasize the systematic nature of their analysis as an improvement over previous existing accounts which are more like *ad hoc* proposals.

One implication is that an important route to moral progress -- and to avoiding moral regression -- lies in improving and maintaining social and political structures and ideas (as opposed to, say, biomedical enhancement of individuals to make them more moral). Another is that moral regression can occur not only because threats to security and well-being have increased, but also because people are wrongly led to believe that threats to security and well-being have increased. For example, the authors say that when Donald Trump creates an atmosphere of fear and threat, people are wrongly led to believe their security is being undermined, and this makes them favor less inclusive policies and social structures.

I strongly agree with the authors that changing social and political structures is central to moral progress, and the way they link this point to their broader argument is beautifully done. In my own work related to these topics -- primarily in my 2015 book *Moral Reasoning in a Pluralistic World* -- I also emphasize the importance of social structures and institutions and the roles they can play in helping us better exemplify our ideals. The authors aptly explain how inequality can undermine our ability to appropriately see and understand other people and how this creates a barrier to moral progress. The book's intellectual honesty, in grappling with topics like moral regression and the way it often goes alongside moral progress, is refreshing -- and in my opinion at least, gives this book a seriousness that other recent optimistic "we're doing great!" books lack.

At the same time, I want to explore here some problems that come with these positions. First, there are complexities in the proposed relationship between prosperity and morally progressive thinking. Second, and closely related, the question arises of how we view see poor people in wealthy societies: are they excluded from the "luxury" situation? If not, why not?

Third, how are we to interpret the concepts of "inclusive," "liberal," and "equality"? And finally, how should we to acknowledge the darker sides of markets?

On the first topic: there is something, I think, to the idea that security and prosperity encourage moral progress, and in some sense it is certainly easier to share when you have enough and easier to care when you are not frightened. But as a generalization, there are certain facts or domains that didn't seem to fit the overall picture. As is often discussed, there is some evidence that in the US, poor people give away a larger proportion of their income than richer people. A recent psychology study found that "lower status" people were more likely to share wealth than those with higher status (<https://www.sciencealert.com/lower-status-people-more-likely-to-share-wealth-than-higher-status-people>). Black Americans are frequently the target of the worst in-group/out-group racism there is, and many of them live in what poverty arising from the legacy of slavery and centuries of racial injustice, yet I doubt that poor communities of people of color in the US are more prone to moral regression in the form of dehumanizing outsiders. It's easy to envision reasons for disparities like these. If wealth and security allow the luxury of generosity, they also heighten fears of loss and disruption; they make people more anxious about preserving what they have and saving for future uncertainties. This alternative narrative raises interesting questions about the degree to which inclusion requires not only moral respect but also other forms of equality like distributional equality. More on this below.

Related to this first point, I found myself wondering who is in the situation that the authors think gives rise to inclusivity and what we should say about poor people in wealthy countries with respect to this question. The authors are admirably clear in their explication that they are discussing how communities, rather than individuals, come to experience moral progress, and they aptly explain how inequality can hinder that progress. They emphasize the

importance of protections like health care and of ensuring that some positive rights are met as part of moral progress. But I was still a bit unclear about what it means to say that "we" are in a luxury situation.

To explore this, let's look first at how the authors understand **not** being in the luxury situation. The authors posit our situation in opposition to the "harsh conditions" of the "environment of evolutionary adaptation" or EEA. In the EEA, there are "small scattered groups of weakly genetically related human beings competing with other groups for crucial resources." But the authors also emphasize that we can be fooled into thinking that we are in the harsh conditions that lead to moral regression, and in this context they emphasize the perceived (and not real) danger that strangers or outsiders are thought to pose to safety and security. If I understand correctly, the link here is that in the luxury situation, we have enough prosperity to guard against the various threats and dangers that might affect us, so we are able -- and inclined -- to go beyond in-group/out-group thinking and extend moral consideration to everyone.

Are the poorest and most threatened people in rich societies in harsh conditions like that of the EEA? The authors say that poorly educated white Americans are vulnerable to exclusivist belief manipulation -- that is, they are fooled by authoritarians like Donald Trump into thinking that they are in EEA-like harsh conditions. This suggests that the answer is no, they are not actually in such conditions. But -- why not? If a town depends on mining, or steel production, and those jobs disappear due to globalization, are these not harsh conditions? If you're a low-skilled British worker, and workers from poorer EU countries are happy to do your job for a fraction of what you used to get paid, and you become poor, aren't you in harsh conditions? If a desperate and vulnerable undocumented person will do your job for pennies and you lose your minimum wage job, aren't you in harsh conditions? One of the distinctive characteristics of

modern capitalism is the way that everyone except the richest is so fully dependent on what they get from a job; as market relations now structure so much of life, perhaps we are vulnerable now in a different way than we were in the EEA.

Perhaps the authors would want to say these poor people in wealthy countries are not in the harsh conditions of the EEA because in those conditions outsiders were genuinely dangerous, whereas in my examples outsiders are not genuinely dangerous. But whether this is so would depend on what we mean by "dangerous." To my mind, even when free trade policies make communities much more wealthy, they can still make individual people much worse off, and this is reasonably counted as a danger. Instead of saying these people are fooled, why not simply say that they are prevented from joining us in the luxury situation because of runaway material inequality, and that this is a cause of the problem? For that matter, as long as we've got a normative framing that includes equality from the get-go, why not say more radically that the extension of equal moral consideration means looking after everyone's material prosperity equally? To say this, we need not say also that the solution is moral exclusion or economic protectionism; instead we could say that the security offered by prosperity has not been appropriately distributed.

This last question -- of what equal moral consideration comes to in practice -- leads me to discussion of my third topic, the interrelated ideas of inclusion, liberalism, and equality and how they are interpreted here. The authors write that "Throughout this volume, "inclusivist morality" will be used first and foremost to refer to attitudes and behaviors that extend moral regard or equal basic moral status beyond the narrowest confines of the group, without prejudice to the question that divides cosmopolitans and liberal nationalists" (ch 1); as I mentioned in the

overview, the authors also say that their examples will be obvious as moral progress to anyone coming from a broadly liberal perspective.

Here, I want to start by noting that the framing in terms of "inclusion" and "extending" consideration may seem to center the people who are in positions of power and control who are then seen as either accepting or not accepting others. "Inclusion" seems to describe a process of adding new people into an existing social and political structure, one which may or may not be suited to their way of seeing the world. Women of color have long commented on the problems of "white feminism" and the ways in which framing feminism as "inclusion" can mean centering white women's concerns and life experience and wrongly adopting goals that measure "progress" in terms of other women being more slotted into liberal European framings of what is good to want.

In this context, complexities of interpretation of what we mean by equality, non-discrimination, and liberalism become significant. With respect to gender equality, if we are talking abstractly about women having moral status, then yes, this is a norm that is compatible with many forms of cultural life. But in some places the authors seem to suggest that gender equality and anti-discrimination mean something more specific -- that people should not be excluded from valued social activities and roles on basis of their gender. If this means that people of all genders should be included in society's practices and institutions in the same way, then this is more contested and controversial.

Gendered perspectives on appropriate life roles in which women are not seen as capitalist workers but instead have an essentially different role to play are embraced by many people, including those from religious, culturally traditional, or socially conservative points of view and also those from certain radical points of view such as radical feminism. This need not be a lack

of inclusion, it can be a considered perspective -- and one you or I may not agree with -- of how gender affects life and life roles. In addition to familiar examples from cultures associated with Evangelical Christianity or Islam, there is also the example of radical feminism, including its contrast to liberal feminism and its challenge to liberal social structures. While all forms of feminism are complex and multifaceted, liberal feminists are more likely to seek equality in the sense of equal rights, protections, and status while radical feminists may think that people who do not identify as men might require different rights, protections, and status from those of men -- and even a radically different organization of society -- to lead flourishing lives. At one point, the authors suggest that the burden of proof is on those who are against "moral-status egalitarianism," and that attempted proofs depend on false generalizations -- e. g., that women are less rational than men. But my point is that moral-status egalitarianism is itself complex: one can coherently reject the norm of same life roles for all genders while still taking people of all genders to be equally morally valuable.

I say all this not to suggest that the authors have some unsavory or intolerant set of ideas lurking in their views, but rather to illustrate the well-known fact that concepts like "inclusion," "liberalism," and "equality" can be multiply interpreted and are often contested. Insofar as the arguments of the book assume specific interpretations of these concepts, the account of moral progress will be one that rests on substantive and contested moral ideals and will thus be compatible with a narrower range of fundamental moral frameworks or perspectives. A different way to put the point would be that there's a difference between the general idea that all people are equal -- an idea that can be instantiated in any number of ways -- and the more specific ideas associated with some of the examples in this book and perhaps taken up by the people that are presented in this book as possibly hoodwinked by powerful charlatans.

Perhaps, it may be said, this doesn't much matter: many readers will share the basic starting point of liberal ideals of equality and anti-discrimination, and for those who do not -- well, they should. The topic is complex and beyond the scope of a short book commentary, but let me suggest that one of the most crucial questions facing Western progressives right now is how to engage with those who do not share our outlook on life. In saying this, I think I agree with the authors, who felt compelled to bring their abstract theory to bear on current events. But I found myself wondering how this book's arguments would seem to someone who did not already adopt the broadly liberal perspective on offer. I worry that to such an audience, the book's starting point leads quickly to the conclusion that they are either immoral, stupid, or easily misled. That this could be so would not itself be an argument for rejecting liberal egalitarianism, but it might suggest that what when it comes to the fraught topic of "moral progress" and how we should all live together, what we need is not so much a systematic account, but rather more local, piecemeal, variable proposals for making things better. Anyone who has read my own work knows the skepticism with which I view the norm of systematicity.

Let me close by saying something about markets and capitalism. In one way, this book is a celebration of markets, of the "incentives" that they create for cooperation, and of the prosperity and security that capitalism and "stable property rights" have brought us. While I personally think there are reasons for skepticism about the causal relations involved in this rosy picture, I will not challenge the specifics here, on grounds this would take us too far afield. But I would like to end this comment by mentioning that capitalism, markets, and property rights are having a weird moment: we are destroying the planet, we are treating as "resources" what an Indigenous worldview might have us regard as friends, relatives, and connected beings, and here in North America anyway, we are doing all of this on stolen land. Capitalism has created extreme

winner and loser, deaths of despair are rising, and the anxiety and unhappiness of young people is at a record high. This darker side of things is among the matters we might talk about when we talk about markets in the 21st century as we are doing here today.