CRITICAL DEBATE ARTICLE

Cosmopolitanism, motivation, and normative feasibility

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Abstract
David Axelsen has recently introduced a novel critique of the motivational argument against cosmopolitanism: even if it were the case that lack of motivation could serve as a normative constraint, people’s anti-cosmopolitan motivations cannot be seen as constraints on cosmopolitan duties as they are generated and reinforced by the state. This article argues that Axelsen’s argument misrepresents the nationalist motivational argument against cosmopolitanism: the nationalist motivational argument is best interpreted as an argument about normative feasibility rather than as an argument about the technical feasibility. Nationalists’ objection to cosmopolitanism arises not from the impossibility of cosmopolitan motivation but from the moral costs of achieving and sustaining it. Given this interpretation, this article argues that Axelsen fails to demonstrate that nationalists would have to accept cosmopolitan conclusions from their own premises.

Keywords: global justice; cosmopolitanism; motivation; feasibility; moral costs

In a recent article, David Axelsen introduces a novel critique of the motivational argument against cosmopolitanism: because people’s anti-cosmopolitan motivations are generated by the state, they cannot be seen as constraints on cosmopolitan duties.1 Although this line of argument is an important contribution to the burgeoning debate on the place of motivation in the broad global justice literature, I argue that it misrepresents the nationalist motivational argument against cosmopolitanism, and thus fails to demonstrate that nationalists would have to accept cosmopolitan conclusions from their own premises.

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Citation: Ethics & Global Politics, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2015, pp. 43–55. http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/egp.v8.26347
Axelsen reconstructs the motivational argument against cosmopolitanism as following from four premises:

1. *Ceteris paribus*, people can be brought to meet strong redistributive obligations towards others with whom they have a fundamental relationship but cannot be brought to meet such obligations towards those with whom they have only a peripheral relationship.
2. For most people, sharing a national identity constitutes a fundamental relationship whereas sharing a cosmopolitan identity constitutes a peripheral relationship.
3. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, most people (a) can be brought to meet strong redistributive obligations towards people with whom they share a national identity but (b) cannot be brought to meet such obligations towards people with whom they share only a cosmopolitan identity [(1) and (2)].
4. For all persons, if a person cannot be brought to do something, then justice does not require that she does it.
5. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, most people are not required by justice to meet strong redistributive obligations towards people with whom they share only a cosmopolitan identity [(3b) and (4)].

The novelty of Axelsen’s thesis is that he asks the reader, for the sake of argument, to grant these four premises of the argument. Axelsen argues that even granting these premises, the anti-cosmopolitan conclusion—that is, that most people are not required by justice to meet strong redistributive obligations towards people with whom they share only a peripheral cosmopolitan identity—does not follow. This is because the central place of national relationships in people’s lives—and, no less important, the peripheral place of cosmopolitan identity—are themselves created and maintained by national and societal institutions. Because strategies for fostering a cosmopolitan identity are possible, he maintains that this current state of affairs fails to show that cosmopolitan theory is false. Therefore, nationalists are forced to either accept the cosmopolitan conclusion, or suggest a different line of argument against it.

In what follows, I argue that Axelsen misrepresents the debate between cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans on the question of motivation. Although he interprets the debate as revolving around the question of the technical possibility of cosmopolitan motivation—essentially an empirical question—I show that framing the debate around the normative feasibility of cosmopolitanism, in particular with regards to the moral costs of constructing and maintaining a cosmopolitan motivation, is preferable both in consistency of argument and in fidelity to the arguments nationalist theorists actually make. If my reading is correct, Axelsen’s argument would therefore not succeed in persuading nationalists to accept cosmopolitan conclusions from their own premises, as it intends to do.

**THE AMBIGUITY OF PREMISE 4**

My focus in this response is Axelsen’s premise 4: ‘if a person cannot be brought to do something, then justice does not require that she does it’. By granting this premise,
Axelsen wishes to differentiate his thesis from other cosmopolitan theorists who engage with this premise (or one like it) only to reject it—for example, because they wish to separate the questions of the justification of a moral obligation from that of the motivation to fulfil this obligation. Axelsen’s novel move is rather to grant the premise that motivation has normative significance, in order to show that cosmopolitan conclusions still reasonably follow. I argue, however, that this move ultimately fails because Axelsen’s formulation of premise 4 is ambiguous between two unhelpful versions: the first referring to the possibility of motivation, which renders the nationalist argument trivially invalid, and a second referring to the actuality of motivation, which makes the argument obviously implausible.

The first interpretation of premise 4 is as a private case of ‘ought implies can’, referring to the possibility of being motivated. According to this interpretation, the only way in which cosmopolitanism would be constrained by premise 4 was if cosmopolitan motivation was impossible, if ‘people cannot be brought to meet strong redistributive obligations towards non-compatriots given the very nature of cosmopolitan identity—that is, regardless of the level of globalisation and interdependence, the policies we pursue, and the institutional setup’. As nationalist motivation is a political construct and not a natural fact, cosmopolitan motivation would be possible under different policies and institutions, and therefore not precluded by the motivational constraint.

This, however, is a peculiar way of interpreting the motivational constraint, as it seems that there will be no normative principle that will fail to pass it. This is very different from ‘ought implies can’, which, even on the narrowest formulation, excludes some normative principles (e.g. those that involve logical contradictions or actions beyond human possibility). ‘Cannot be brought to do’ is not obviously equivalent to ‘cannot do’. Can we say that any motivation is impossible, strictly speaking? Human psychology and behaviour are, after all, highly malleable. Let us exclude cases of psychological pathologies, which would make the individual in question incapable of a certain motivation (say, a psychopath’s incapacity for empathy). These exceptions in mind, history and experience teach us that people can be persuaded, inspired, manipulated, indoctrinated, brainwashed, or coerced, to do any number of things. We know of people who were willing to greatly endanger themselves and their families in order to protect complete strangers and people who turned their family in to the secret police out of ideological conviction. So if we understand, as Axelsen arguably does, the condition ‘can be brought to do’ as depending on technical possibility, it is not clear that any normative theory—be it cosmopolitanism, nationalism, communism, racism, social Darwinism, or any alternative—would be incompatible with it.

It is hard to deny, of course, that this interpretation is quite useful for a pro-cosmopolitan argument. Indeed, pointing to the malleability of human motivation is a common strategy for theorists rejecting the motivational constraint posed by premise 4 (or one similar to it): if motivational facts are malleable, they cannot be normative constraints. But it is not clear that this move is available to Axelsen, who supposedly accepts the premise that motivation is normatively significant for
determining the content of moral requirements. By interpreting premise 4 as referring to the possibility of motivation, the implied anti-cosmopolitan motivational argument becomes trivially false. Interestingly, the rest of Axelsen’s argument becomes redundant. There is no longer a need to show how nationalist attachments are being socially constructed, or to explain how a cosmopolitan motivation could plausibly be constructed. Under this interpretation, the claim that people cannot be brought to act as cosmopolitanism demands is false, regardless of how they came to acquire their current beliefs and motivations.

It may be suggested that I am misrepresenting Axelsen’s argument, as his point may be that nationalist, anti-cosmopolitan identity is a political construct, and not a natural fact about human psychology. Although this is certainly a major part of his article, it is important to notice that given the interpretation of the motivational constraint as referring to possibility, the fact that national identity is politically constructed adds nothing. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are things that humans are naturally motivated to do—for example, care for their young, prefer the genetically superior partner, and so on. This in no way implies that a normative principle that will require radically different motivations will be ruled out by premise 4 under this interpretation. It might be easier to get people to act as they are naturally conditioned, but it is not technically impossible to make them act otherwise, and this therefore cannot be a reason to exclude principles of justice that requires them to do so.

Premise 4 interpreted as pertaining to the possibility of motivation is therefore quite useless for Axelsen’s thesis. Yet given the alternative interpretations, it would seem that it is the only plausible one. On one alternative interpretation, premise 4 could be rendered meaningful if we take ‘can be brought to do’ to mean ‘is currently motivated to’—that is, referring to the actuality of motivation—and would exclude any principle which is at odds with what people are currently motivated to do. This would be a theoretically interesting constraint as it would arguably preclude cosmopolitanism, as well as numerous other normative theories, and would not leave premise 4 as empty as the possibility interpretation has.

However, an anti-cosmopolitan would be ill-advised to adopt this interpretation, as it will commit her to implausible status quo bias and extreme relativism. It seems plausible to us that there must be a distinction between motivating reasons and normative reasons—that is, between the reasons people currently act upon and the reasons they ought to act upon. Interpreting premise 4 as pertaining to actual motivations fails to account for this distinction, and therefore fails as a plausible interpretation.

Axelsen argues that anti-cosmopolitans are ambiguous regarding the proper interpretation of people’s lack of motivation towards cosmopolitanism in premise 3(b): they either make the implausibly strong claim that anti-cosmopolitanism is an unalterable fact about human nature (a claim which, I argue, will be at the very least very difficult to sustain empirically) or the weaker claim that people currently are not motivated by cosmopolitanism, which could be supported but is not clearly relevant to the normative justification of anti-cosmopolitanism. This is ironic, because as my argument above suggests, it is in fact premise 4 that is ambiguous: it is either referring
to people’s actual motivation, which is an implausibly strong constraint that is dangerously status quo biased, or, as I claim Axelsen does, can be read as referring to the possibility of motivation, forcing anti-cosmopolitans to argue for the impossibility of cosmopolitan motivation.  

The claim that these interpretations are unattractive is not sufficient to show that Axelsen’s reconstruction of the nationalist argument is incorrect. Perhaps there are anti-cosmopolitans who interpret the motivational constraint as referring to possibility and make the implausible claim that cosmopolitan motivation is empirically impossible. Yet, the theorists he discusses in the article offer a more sophisticated and plausible reading of the motivational constraint in the anti-cosmopolitan literature, in a way that does not focus on technical possibility or on actuality of motivation. In the next section, I present an interpretation of this constraint as one of normative feasibility, and show that not only is it a more plausible way to reconstruct the anti-cosmopolitan argument, but that it fits better with what anti-cosmopolitans actually argue.

**NORMATIVE FEASIBILITY**

David Miller is Axelsen’s main anti-cosmopolitan target in the article, so it is telling that trying to place Miller’s theory within the reconstructed argument is more difficult than it first appears. As evidence for Miller’s support of premise 4, Axelsen quotes him as writing that justice should ‘not abstract too far from prevailing circumstances’, and argues that ‘Miller seems to be in tune with the fourth premise of the argument . . . although his explanation for going from (3) to (5) is . . . mostly implicit’. This is misleading for two reasons. First, notice that the quote Axelsen is using comes from Miller’s description of the dilemma between utopian abstraction and status quo bias. Although he is certainly opposed to unrealistic moral theories, Miller writes, later in the very same paragraph: ‘If the theory assumes too much by way of empirical constraints, on the other hand, it may become excessively conservative, in the sense of being too closely tied to contingent aspects of a particular society or group of societies, and therefore no longer able to function as a critical tool for social change’. This already suggests that Miller’s interpretation of the constraint is referring neither to technical possibility nor to actuality, but to some middle-ground position.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Miller has in fact provided his own version of the motivational constraint in his more recent writings, which clearly defends this middle-ground position. In his ‘Political Philosophy for Earthlings’, he argues that the feasibility condition in political theory must distinguish between three different notions of feasibility. First, political feasibility concerns the level of support a political proposal will command. Second, technical feasibility concerns whether a proposal contravenes physical laws or ‘rock bottom social and psychological laws’. These two versions of feasibility correspond to the possibility and actuality interpretations of the motivational constraint discussed above. Importantly, Miller introduces a third conception of feasibility—namely, normative feasibility—which takes the middle
ground between political feasibility and technical feasibility. The following paragraph is particularly suggestive:

A political philosophy that presents itself to any given society as realistically utopian must contain principles that members of that society could be brought to accept by reasoned discussion, which means that the principles cannot have implications that those citizens would find abhorrent. This doesn’t mean that the principles must be accepted immediately they are laid out. They may be unfamiliar, or they may be resisted simply because they impose sacrifices that many citizens are initially unwilling to make. Political philosophy should be in the business of changing political attitudes, of showing people what their convictions mean when applied consistently to political questions. It should not be constrained merely by political feasibility in the above sense. But at the same time it implies more than technical feasibility, because many technically feasible proposals would fail the requirement that they be reasonably acceptable to present-day citizens.12

Notice the crucial difference between the emphasised sentence and Axelsen’s formulation of the motivational constraint. As I argued above, Axelsen’s formulation ‘cannot be brought to do’ implicitly refers to technical possibility or is at the very least ambiguous between technical and normative feasibility. Miller’s, on the other hand, includes a clear normative condition—if a person cannot be brought to do something by reasoned discussion, justice does not require that he/she does it. This is not merely an empirical point on the possibility of motivation—it includes a normative constraint on the way in which this motivational basis is to be obtained.

It still remains unclear at this point why cosmopolitanism will be precluded by this normative motivational constraint—why, in other words, it could not be accepted as a result of a reasoned discussion. Given that the limits of human motivation are malleable, or at least unknown, the answer cannot be empirical.13 A possible, and I think quite plausible, interpretation of the argument would suggest that Miller’s conception of a reasoned discussion is one that includes within it considerations of all of the implications of the proposed theory, and not simply its intuitive acceptability. This ‘democratic’ view of political philosophy, Miller argues, is superior to the ‘neo-Leninist’ alternative, which leads people to take a leap of faith without considering the consequences. Therefore, ‘the limits of political possibility are set not just by physical and sociological laws, but by implicit assumptions about what, for us, would count as a tolerable or intolerable outcome’.14 The tolerability or intolerability of any proposed theory, in turn, involves a consideration of its moral costs, and cosmopolitanism, Miller and other nationalists suggest, is morally too costly for people to reasonably accept it.

**THE MORAL COSTS OF COSMOPOLITAN MOTIVATION**

If my reading is correct, then, the anti-cosmopolitan argument refers not to the impossibility of cosmopolitan motivation, but to the normative infeasibility of getting people to accept the moral costs involved in cosmopolitan motivation. What kind of moral costs do nationalists believe cosmopolitanism implies? For the sake of
analytical clarity, I suggest that there are at least three categories of moral costs which are relevant here:

1. Moral costs of the cosmopolitan end-state.
2. Moral costs of transitioning to a cosmopolitan identity.
3. Moral opportunity costs of trying to create a cosmopolitan identity.

The first category of moral costs nationalists worry is also the most straightforward one—the cost that will be incurred if the world cosmopolitans prescribe manifests itself. This line of argument could take one of two forms: the first assuming that cosmopolitan institutions exist without a fundamental cosmopolitan identity and its accompanying motivation, and the second assuming that this cosmopolitan identity was generated at the expense of more local identities.

First, because nationalists believe that redistribution presupposes collective solidarity and/or collective identity, they argue that without such solidaristic motivation redistribution could only be effectively imposed by coercive institutions, and that these will be alienating and unstable. Although it is granted that some level of coercion may always be necessary in order to resolve various collective action problems, the stability of these redistributive institutions must not rely on coercion alone. Without a shared collective identity to generate a sense of solidarity, therefore, global institutions would only rule by force and the moral price to pay for a more egalitarian global distribution would be too high. Now, one may challenge this line of argument by arguing that a shared identity is not a precondition for egalitarian redistribution, either globally or domestically. Axelsen, however, cannot make this move; he is committed, given his premise 1, to the claim that a fundamental cosmopolitan identity is possible, necessary and, ceteris paribus, desirable for redistributive obligations.

An alternative interpretation for the moral cost of the cosmopolitan end-state refers to the consequences of a world in which local identities are subsumed into a cosmopolitan one. The moral cost of a cosmopolitan collective identity—which, again, both nationalists and Axelsen suppose is necessary for motivating distributive justice on a global level—would involve the dissolving of particularistic identities. However, even if this cosmopolitan identity could serve the functional role of motivating redistribution, at least some liberal nationalists argue that the loss of local identities represents a cost in itself. For this to be seen as a cost, this line of argument assumes that special duties to compatriots are not merely apparent, but are a moral fact arising from cooperation, gratitude, shared history, mutual subjection to coercion, or any of the other arguments found in the literature to support compatriot favouritism. In addition, nationalists often argue that there is a value in the plurality of particularist identities, and therefore a reason to resist cosmopolitan homogeneity. Although this is not an argument about motivation in itself, it gives us reason to think that a world with a shared cosmopolitan identity, if it exists, might not be all-things-considered just, and would for that reason not be a tolerable outcome that individuals could be brought to accept under current conditions.
Axelsen seems to take for granted that the cosmopolitan end-state he describes—a world in which those in rich states give more to the poor—will be a more just one, all-things-considered. There are certainly strong reasons as to why this might be the case, and it is not my intention here to refute these arguments. Note, however, that given the structure of his argument, Axelsen is not at liberty to simply stipulate this position. Because premise 4 is plausibly read as a motivational constraint on the requirements of justice, the answer to the question ‘what is global justice’ must depend on some motivational facts. Given the normative feasibility constraint implied in a plausible interpretation of premise 4—supported by a reading of the kind of arguments nationalist anti-cosmopolitans actually make—Axelsen cannot argue a priori that global justice requires the redistribution of wealth from the global rich to the global poor. This must be the conclusion of an argument, not one of its premises. Unlike other cosmopolitan accounts, Axelsen is not at liberty to treat the motivational problem as merely a practical puzzle of reaching a predetermined desired goal, as he is committed, at least for the sake of argument, to the idea that motivational facts are normatively significant.

The second category of moral costs interprets normative feasibility as arguing that the desirability of normative theories depends not only on the moral costs of their end-state, but also on the moral costs of transition. Although the argument from the moral costs of the end-state is the most straightforward one, it is rather vulnerable—as I showed above, it depends to a considerable degree on a contestable account of whether or not special duties to compatriots exist. However, even if this argument is refuted, it is not the only possible way to take moral costs into account. Borrowing from earlier accounts of the distinction between technical and normative interpretations in the feasibility condition in political philosophy, I follow theorists such as Juha Räikkä and Alan Buchanan in arguing that ‘moral accessibility’ is a necessary condition for the desirability of a normative theory: the ideal state of affairs, desirable as it may be in itself, must not be achieved through actions that would be morally too costly. Plausibly, then, the normative feasibility constraint can be read as one pertaining to the moral costs of transition towards a cosmopolitan identity.

To illustrate how this point might serve the nationalist argument, let us assume that a world in which we all share a fundamental cosmopolitan relationship is not in itself morally objectionable, as any loss of particular identity will be fully compensated by the more universal identity, or at least be commensurable with the benefits generated by a more cosmopolitan world. Nationalists argue that the processes required for generating a cosmopolitan identity would in themselves be morally too costly. Ironically, some of the best examples of the moral perils of constructing a broad collective identity in place of local ones come from the history of nationalism itself. One would struggle to find a history of nation building which does not involve coercion, manipulation, or even physical violence. In this case, liberal nationalists will have to concede to Bernard Williams that liberalism cannot justify its own history. Be that as it may, if the construction of cosmopolitan identity is thought of as analogous, at least in some ways, to the construction of national identity,
anti-cosmopolitans can argue that this process will carry a price that we are no longer willing to pay, regardless of how attractive the cosmopolitan end-state is.\textsuperscript{21}

I am not suggesting, of course, that Axelsen endorses any of these morally objectionable transformations of collective identity. His two favoured strategies for creating cosmopolitans—inspired by Martha Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan education and James Bohman’s cosmopolitan democratic community—can reasonably seem to fit with the requirements of normative feasibility, as they are ways of changing minds in deliberative, non-coercive ways. One might suggest that by appealing to these strategies, Axelsen tacitly accepts the normative feasibility interpretation of premise 4; otherwise, if the point is to demonstrate the mere possibility of cosmopolitan motivation, why limit oneself to these strategies? Although this admittedly mitigates my critique of Axelsen’s argument, it does not dissolve it.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, it remains unclear whether these practices will generate a cosmopolitan identity that will be fundamental enough to support strong distributive duties under the nationalist argument.

Take for example Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan education.\textsuperscript{23} In her original argument, cosmopolitan education is seen as a way to make people realise their shared humanity with distant strangers and appreciate the significance of this fact. It does not, however, necessarily lead to the idea that cosmopolitan identity replaces national identity as fundamental—it rather highlights the significance of wider humanity as a peripheral identity in the concentric circles of moral concern. In her argument, Nussbaum sees at least four reasons to endorse this form of civic education: somewhat paraphrased, these include the recognition of the contingency of our own practices; the facilitation of dialogue required for the global cooperation; the support for basic moral obligations towards distant others; and the requirement to justify partiality in universalist terms.\textsuperscript{24} Note that none of these rather minimal goals will be rejected by liberal nationalists, and that they all fall short of the ‘strong redistributive duties’.

Axelsen’s interpretation of this strategy is not identical to Nussbaum’s, because he sees the role of cosmopolitan education as highlighting the interconnectedness of different national communities and deconstructing the myth of national self-dependence.\textsuperscript{25} This arguably gets him closer to his goal but only to a limited degree. First, although historical interconnectedness may extend beyond national borders, the result of this process will fall short of cosmopolitanism unless one makes the claim that all human communities’ histories are interconnected to a similar degree. We can very plausibly describe the interconnectedness of, say, French and British histories through a narrative of colonialism, the Napoleonic Wars, the Enlightenment, or the Roman Empire; some may even argue that these shared histories form the background for a nascent European identity. It would be less plausible, however, to claim that such historical interconnectedness exists between Japan and Sweden, or between Nigeria and Canada. Second, the interconnectedness of different national communities, in itself, may be seen to contribute to a sense of resentment and antagonism, rather than a willingness to cooperate. As Axelsen himself points out in reference to Renan, collective identities demand forgetting, and not merely remembering, our shared history.
There is, therefore, at least some uncertainty as to whether these practices would actually promote the construction of a fundamental cosmopolitan identity. Yet, here Axelsen may reasonably ask, as he does: should we not at least try? If we suppose that a world in which a fundamental cosmopolitan identity exists is all-things-considered good, or at least non-objectionable, and it is possible that we can reach this world in a morally permissible manner, isn’t the nationalist anti-cosmopolitan at least committed to the dynamic duty of trying to change our attitudes?26

In response, we can turn to the third category of moral costs, which could be best described as one of moral opportunity costs.27 The worry is that attempting to make cosmopolitan identity more fundamental, in the sense that people will understand it as playing a central role in a good human life, will undermine the basis for national solidarity and the motivational basis for social justice. In Axelsen’s argument, national and cosmopolitan fundamental identities are, by their nature, mutually exclusive—if constructing and maintaining a national identity requires the weakening of cosmopolitan identity, then constructing and maintaining cosmopolitan identity will weaken national identity. The nationalist objection here is that not only cosmopolitan identity construction will fall short of providing the motivational basis for the sacrifices required by social justice, for the reasons discussed above, but in addition its construction will divest scarce motivational resources from national identities.

Consider here Richard W. Miller’s ‘Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern’, which Axelsen identifies as a target, as an example of this line of argument.28 Miller’s argument, in brief, is that special concern for compatriots is not incompatible with a cosmopolitan respect for persons, as there are general reasons to support compatriot bias. This bias towards the least well off in a political society is justified given two pressing needs: first, the need to maintain social trust, and second, the need to provide compatriots with adequate incentives to obey the law.29 Miller argues that a fully impartial cosmopolitan concern would display disrespect for the least well off in a society, eroding their trust in political institutions, whereas a budgetary bias towards their needs will not display disrespect towards the global poor.

Axelsen misreads Miller’s argument as relying on a strong version of premise 3: that people cannot ever be brought to meet their distributive duties towards non-compatriots. Contrary to this interpretation, we can see that Miller is not arguing that there are fixed psychological limits regarding care for distant others—that is, he is not arguing that a cosmopolitan fundamental identity is impossible regardless of circumstances, or even that cosmopolitan concern in individual charity would be objectionable. The argument is better understood as sceptical in regards to the prospect of maintaining a level of social trust in a society in which a special concern towards compatriots does not exist. To reiterate, it is not that people are unable to grant equal concern to foreigners; but without special concern to compatriots, exemplified in budgetary bias towards domestic needs, we risk the erosion of social trust which is a motivational perquisite for institutions of social justice. Miller’s argument is thus better interpreted as referring not to the possible limits of individual motivation, but to the limit of feasible options in maintaining stable political community.30
The three categories of moral costs discussed above influence the normative feasibility of the cosmopolitan ideal. Although they are clearly related, and in fact reinforce each other, there is merit in considering them independently. First, it can be argued that the cosmopolitan end-state in itself involves moral costs; second, the transition to the cosmopolitan end-state could be seen as involving objectionable costs; and third, engaging in cosmopolitan identity construction at the expense of maintaining local solidaristic attachments may end up failing both. Different anti-cosmopolitan theorists use different combinations of these lines of argument; what is important to note here is that they all appeal to normative conceptions of feasibility.

CONCLUSIONS

The argument in this paper was advanced in two stages. First, I argued that Axelsen’s formulation of premise 4 in its reconstruction of the anti-cosmopolitan argument is ambiguous. It oscillates between the overly weak constraint of the possibility of motivation and the implausible constraint of actuality of motivation. I then showed that there is a third, more plausible reading of premise 4 as a constraint of normative feasibility, and showed that this better captures the arguments anti-cosmopolitans make. Note that my intention is not to defend any of the above nationalist arguments. My point is rather that none of these arguments depends on the empirical impossibility of individual cosmopolitan motivation.

I therefore maintain that if cosmopolitans grant the premises of the nationalist anti-cosmopolitan argument, as Axelsen does, they cannot simply reject the anti-cosmopolitan conclusion because nationalist anti-cosmopolitanism is socially constructed or because there are strategies for creating cosmopolitans. They have to rather demonstrate that the moral costs which concern anti-cosmopolitans—of the end-state, transition, and opportunity variety—are either not true or worth bearing. Alternatively, cosmopolitans can of course reject one or more of the premises of the argument—argue that a fundamental relationship is not required for distributive justice, or that the motivational constraint is false. It is not my intention to attack or defend any of these positions. However, this makes clear that the debate between nationalists and cosmopolitans is more complex than the debate over the possibility of individual motivation. The battle lines would therefore have to be drawn on normative, not empirical grounds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Richard Bellamy and Cécile Laborde for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this article, as well as Sara Amighetti, Florian Ostmann, and John Wilesmith for their helpful comments. I also thank Eva Erman and editorial board of *Ethics and Global Politics* for their helpful revisions on the final version. Financial support for the period when this article was written was provided by UCL’s Overseas Research Scholarship and the Anglo-Israel Association’s Kenneth Lindsay Scholarship.
NOTES

1. David V. Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It: How Anti-Cosmopolitanism Is Created by the State’, Journal of Political Philosophy 21 (2013): 451–72.

2. Ibid., 453. Axelsen defines strong redistributive obligations as ‘duties to bring one’s co-participants in a relationship to more than just above a basic minimum’, and a fundamental relationship as ‘one that people understand as playing a central role in a good human life, and one that plays a large part in determining whether or not people’s lives are successful, and which should, thus, be treated as an end in itself’.

3. Ibid. A somewhat different formulation could be found on, 454: ‘[P]eople are not required to follow principles of justice if they cannot be brought to do so’. For my purposes, however, these two formulations could be seen as equivalent.

4. See, for example, Pablo Gilabert, From Global Poverty to Global Equality: A Philosophical Exploration (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 141–2.

5. Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It’, 454.

6. See David Estlund, ‘Human Nature and the Limits (If Any) of Political Philosophy’, Philosophy & Public Affairs 39 (2011): 207–37.

7. Charles R. Beitz, ‘Cosmopolitan Ideals and National Sentiment’, The Journal of Philosophy 80 (1983): 591–600; Daniel Weinstock, ‘Motivating the Global Demos’, Metaphilosophy 40 (2009): 92–108; Gilabert, From Global Poverty to Global Equality, 141–2; and Laura Valentini, Justice in a Globalized World: A Normative Framework (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32–4.

8. James Bohman and Henry S. Richardson have pointed out a similar ambiguity in the literature on ‘reasons all can accept’. See their ‘Liberalism, Deliberative Democracy, and “Reasons That All Can Accept”’, Journal of Political Philosophy 17 (2009): 253–74.

9. Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It’, 456.

10. David Miller, National Responsibility and Global Justice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

11. David Miller, ‘Political Philosophy for Earthlings’ in his Justice for Earthlings: Essays in Political Philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 36–7.

12. Ibid., 37 [emphasis added]. Interestingly, Miller argues that this is also true of Rawls’s methodology. See Ibid., 31–4.

13. Cf. Bohman and Richardson, ‘Liberalism, Deliberative Democracy’, 257–61.

14. Miller, ‘Political Philosophy for Earthlings’, 32.

15. See, for example, Margaret Canovan, Nationhood and Political Theory (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 1998), 28.

16. Weinstock, ‘Motivating the Global Demos’, 94–6.

17. See, for example, David Miller, ‘Cosmopolitanism: A Critique,’ Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy 5, no. 3 (2002): 84–5.

18. Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It’, 466.

19. Juha Rääkkä, ‘The Feasibility Condition in Political Theory’, Journal of Political Philosophy 6 (2002): 27–40; and Allen Buchanan, Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61.

20. Bernard Williams, In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 9.

21. Cf. Thomas Nagel, ‘The Problem of Global Justice’, Philosophy & Public Affairs 33 (2005): 145–6.

22. I thank the reviewers for Ethics and Global Politics for suggesting this possible objection.

23. Nussbaum argues for this position in ‘Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,’ in For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism, eds. Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen.
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(Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 3–21; and more recently in Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

24. Nussbaum, ‘Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism’, 11–15.
25. Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It’, 467–8.
26. Ibid., 470. For the concept of ‘dynamic duties’, see Gilabert, From Global Poverty to Global Equality, 17 and passim.
27. I borrow the notion of ‘moral opportunity costs’ from Carmen Pavel, ‘Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Moral Opportunity Costs’, Polity 41 (2009): 489–513.
28. Richard W. Miller, ‘Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern’, Philosophy & Public Affairs 27 (1998), 202–24; See the discussion in Axelsen, ‘The State Made Me Do It’, 457–9.
29. Miller, ‘Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern’, 210.
30. Cf. Cécile Laborde, ‘From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism,’ British Journal of Political Science 32, no. 4 (2002): 603–4.