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Realism in the ethics of immigration

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Abstract

The ethics of immigration is currently marked by a division between realists and idealists. The idealists generally focus on formulating morally ideal immigration policies. The realists, however, tend to dismiss these ideals as far-fetched and infeasible. In contrast to the idealists, the realists seek to resolve pressing practical issues relating to immigration, principally by advancing what they consider to be actionable policy recommendations. In this article, I take issue with this conception of realism. I begin by surveying the way in which it exemplifies what certain political theorists have recently called 'problem-solving' realism – a species of realism which they reject as incoherent. These theorists demonstrate that what counts as a 'feasible' solution is far harder to establish than most problem-solving realists would have us believe. Applying this general critique to the specific domain of immigration ethics turns out to radically undermine the notion of realism that prevails in this sphere of applied ethics. I conclude that we should therefore revise our conception of what constitutes a genuinely realist approach to the problem of immigration.

Keywords

immigration, culture, politics, democracy, realism

Throughout the history of moral and political philosophy, we find thinkers time and again seeking to discredit their opponents by branding them idealistic or impractically utopian. Those who employ this argumentative strategy correspondingly tend to elevate their own normative recommendations by framing them as 'realistic', by which they generally mean something like *attuned to the constraints of the real world*, and therefore *feasible*. This stratagem, however, is as dubious as it is familiar since on the face of things the nature of

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moral and political reality is to a large extent empirically obscure, protean and the subject of what would seem to be interminable theoretical debate. Accordingly, when thinkers dub themselves 'realist' it should quite rightly put us on our guard. In this essay, I will explain why recent theorists of immigration should be particularly wary in this respect.

The philosophy of immigration is currently marked by a deep rift. On one side of the line of scrimmage stand the so-called 'realists'; opposite them, we then find the so-called 'idealists'. Partisans of the idealist camp strive to establish what morally coherent immigration and border policies would look like *in an ideal world* – that is, given our commitment to liberal democratic values such as fairness, freedom of movement and association, the right to property, and the right not to be coerced without justification (see, e.g. Carens 1987, 2013; Abizadeh 2008; Kukathas 2004; Benhabib 2004). In a word, they are concerned with setting ambitious moral ideals towards which we can collectively strive. Joseph Carens (1996), one of the first theorists to differentiate between idealism and realism in the ethics of immigration, draws a strong connection between being an idealist and promoting open borders. This association makes sense given that the goal of open borders is, under current geopolitical conditions, extremely ambitious and unlikely to be achieved within our lifetimes.[1]

Yet even in their idealism, the majority of these theorists remain committed to long-term feasibility. They take their ideals to be *realizable*, and as such do not see themselves building castles in the sky As Carens (2013, 301) unequivocally asserts, ideal theory 'is still constrained by the principle that "ought" implies "can"'. In this way, the idealists follow Rawls in his attempt to formulate a 'realistic utopia': a theory of society that 'takes people as they are (by the laws of nature), and constitutional and civil laws as they might be', and which posits 'first principles and precepts [that are] workable and applicable to ongoing political and social arrangements' (Rawls 1999, 13).[2] Like Rawls, idealist philosophers of immigration also wish to establish what we *currently* ought to do – that is, under the non-ideal conditions that we face at present – in order to realize their utopian goals. This said, their normative aspirations remain remarkably ambitious and farsighted. Again like Rawls, they seek to extend 'what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practicable political possibility' (Rawls 1999, 11), and so when conceiving new political ideals they by no means confine themselves to what is ostensibly feasible in the short term.

By contrast, realists seek to formulate an ethics of immigration that is exclusively focused on guiding current political policy, and as such they spurn ideal theory as redundant, or even counterproductive blue-sky thinking (see, e.g. Miller 2016c, chap. 1). Their stated goal is to sketch an immigration policy that is as ethical as possible given the particular set of real-world constraints that governments are subject to in the here and now (where the 'here' broadly refers to the liberal democratic West). Immigration realists typically defend restrictive immigration policies for the obvious reason that any call for open borders is not going to be implementable in the short term.[3] While some *explicitly* endorse some brand of realism (e.g. Bauböck 2020, 359; Hendrickson 1992; Little and Macdonald 2015, 385; Miller 2016c, 16–17), others have been categorized as realists after the fact – for example, Michael Walzer and the utilitarian Henry Sidgwick, both of whom Carens (1996) labels as realists, though they do not themselves use this term to describe their philosophies of immigration.

In recent decades, the distinction between realists and idealists has become common currency, being invoked by self-styled realists and idealists alike, as well as by non-partisan theorists, to map out the literature in the philosophy of immigration (see, e.g. Miller 2016c, chap. 1; Carens 1996, 2013; Parvin 2017).[4] Over the course of this article, however, we are going to find that there are strong grounds for doubting the validity of this distinction as it is presently conceived. The basis on which the realists lay claim to reality, and thereby distinguish themselves from their idealist opponents, will be seen to melt away when subjected to scrutiny.

In almost complete isolation from the debate just outlined in the ethics of immigration, realism has been enjoying a renaissance in political theory (see, e.g. Galston 2010; Geuss 2008, 2017; Honig and Stears 2011; Newey 2001; Rossi and Sleat 2014; Williams 2005). What is remarkable is that a number of the driving figures behind this revival (let us call them the 'neorealists') operate with a conception of realism that is intriguingly at odds with that which prevails in the ethics of immigration.[5] It is chiefly by probing this conceptual discrepancy that I intend to cast doubt on the distinction between realist and idealist philosophers of immigration.

Despite the theoretical diversity inherent to neorealism, there are some notable common threads. This should come as no surprise given that most neorealist philosophers self-identify as realists, indicating that they at least loosely conceive themselves as members of a unified movement, and therefore as sharing certain objectives in common. For instance, many members of this group similarly wish to combat what they call 'political moralism'. Moralist political philosophers are those who, according to the neorealists, misconstrue politics as 'applied morality' (Williams 2005, 2; Geuss 2008, chap. 1; Newey 2001, chap. 5). The moralists, who are exemplified by Kant and the early Rawls, stand accused of misconceiving political theory as the science of establishing how civic institutions can be structured so as to realize general moral maxims. In the eyes of the neorealist, this betrays a flagrant disregard for the specificity of political practice. They tell us that the general moral maxims that may very well apply to individual agency are ill-suited to political praxis for two reasons. First, the specific functions that a given regime ought to fulfil at a given moment in time are determined by the highly particular historical conditions in which that regime happens to be situated. After all, the expectations and motivations of political agents are fluid and change with time, as do the power relations that bear upon any political decision. But second, political agents are subject to unique constraints, particularly in the context of international relations – constraints with which the vast majority of individual agents never have to grapple. Often it is therefore justifiable for political agents to get their hands dirty in a manner that would be otherwise unacceptable for regular individual agents (Williams 2005; Geuss 2008, 13–14).[6] With respect to our current inquiry, what is striking about this realism–moralism opposition is that it does not neatly map onto the realism–idealism split that we find running through much of the literature on the ethics of immigration. In fact, many neorealists emphatically state that their target is *not* idealism. Rather, in their view (which will be expanded upon below), utopian political ideals can have a real and positive effect, even if said ideals are not fully realized (for an overview, see, e.g. Rossi and Sleat 2014).

This asymmetry may not seem to present any real cause for concern. After all, semantic pluralism is not in itself a problem: different groups of political theorists can quite legitimately use the term 'realism' in different ways and, moreover, oppose it to a wide variety of counter-concepts. At first blush, this appears to be the correct attitude, especially given that the foremost immigration realists *explicitly* distinguish their brand of realism from that of the neorealists. David Miller (2016c, 208), for instance, writes that he does not use the term 'realism' 'with the technical meaning that is sometimes now given to it in political philosophy'. Instead, he takes it 'simply to signal an approach that starts by looking at the world as it is, with its manifold inequalities and injustices, and asks what range of immigration policies may legitimately be pursued by democratic states under these circumstances'.[7]

If the immigration realists openly distinguish their approach from that of the neorealists, then why would it matter if there is a gap between their respective notions of realism? And what would be the purpose of analysing any such gap? In short, the issue is that the neorealists voice a number of forceful objections to the conception of realism employed by the immigration realists. Following Raymond Geuss, I will refer to this conception as *problem-solving realism*. So the two notions of realism under consideration are not merely different. It turns out they are *incompatible*. Our first motive for juxtaposing the two theories is therefore to establish whether immigration realism can withstand these neorealist objections. My contention is that it *cannot*; indeed, we will see that the realist–idealist opposition, as it is currently construed in the philosophy of immigration, is ultimately unsustainable. The import of this conclusion is far from being purely academic. Undermining the realist–idealist distinction potentially has significant ramifications for political practice. In severely weakening the realist critique of idealism, it encourages theorists and political actors to pursue highly ambitious goals vis-à-vis immigration policy.

I begin by distinguishing between three key forms of political realism. My analysis focuses on problem-solving realism in particular, and the critique of such realism that we find in the neorealist literature. I then demonstrate how the immigration realists operate with a problem-solving conception of realism and are therefore susceptible to this neorealist critique. Finally, I examine how the neorealist objections have bite when applied to the ethics of immigration. Yet, far from concluding that theorists of immigration should altogether abandon the notion of realism, I gesture towards how we might fruitfully reconceive this valuable political concept.

1. Three conceptions of political realism

For the purposes of this article, we should distinguish between three different meanings that 'realism' can take when used in the context of political theory. This tripartite schema is not meant as a comprehensive taxonomy, but as a heuristic framework that we can use to point up a number of significant conceptual problems in the ethics of immigration.[8]

First, in political theory the term 'realism' is often used to refer to a predominantly descriptive account of politics qua *realpolitik* – in other words, a theoretical approach that reduces politics to a tense network of power relations and which conceives political agents

as being exclusively motivated by the goals of self-empowerment and the promotion of the national interest (the *raison d'état*). On this view, it is delusional to expect politicians to adhere to abstract moral standards (such as 'justice', for instance). For this cast of realist, political agents are merely dissimulating when they profess their commitment to certain moral principles – morality is little more than the sheep's clothing in which wolfish political leaders disguise themselves in order to disarm their opponents and endear themselves to their subjects. This approach, which is usually called *classical realism*, is epitomized by Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and Hobbes' view of international relations in *Leviathan*; however, its provenance can be traced back as far as Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. While at present this species of realism has fallen out of vogue among political theorists, it continues to flourish in the field of international relations theory (see, e.g. Walz 1979; Lobell et al. 2009).[9]

Second, political theorists use the term 'realism' to signify a generally anti-utopian attitude – one eschewing any ideals that are not plausibly feasible. Spinoza typifies this stance when he argues that utopians 'have never managed to devise polities which could be called into use; but which are mere phantasms, or could only be instituted in the poets' golden age, where they were least needed' (Spinoza 2016, 503; quoted in Newey 2001). Realists of this stripe seek to make recommendations that are directed towards, and capable of, resolving concrete problems in the political present.[10] In Geuss' words (2017, 484), this type of realist 'never undertakes anything that is not "possible" in a given situation, or […] who attempts always to restrict his own wishes to what can be achieved in the existing situation'. In an effort to stay within the bounds of the 'possible', such realists endeavour to ground their ethical prescriptions in a modest (some would say *cynical*) conception of human nature; for instance, they assume that moral reasoning has a relatively weak impact on agency (especially when compared to the motivational force of emotions), and that humans have a severely limited capacity for ethical improvement (for an overview, see Galston 2010). If a normative political theory does not directly contribute to the resolution of current socio-political problems, realists of this ilk dismiss the theory as worthless. This form of realism is what I have already designated above as *problem-solving realism*.

Third, we have the neorealist understanding of realism. To clarify this conception, we should first run through the neorealist objections to the classical and problem-solving schools of realism. First off, they accuse classical realists of understating the causal influence that people's moral convictions have on political processes (Geuss 2017; Rossi and Sleat 2014, 691). And against the problem-solving conception of realism-that is, as a concern with formulating solutions that are possible for us in the given situation – the neorealists contend that it is impossible 'to distinguish attitudes that are "realistic" in this sense from utopian ones, since concepts like "in the given situation" and "possible" are so indefinite' (Geuss 2017, 454; see also Rossi 2019; Gledhill 2012, 75). From this standpoint, the problem-solving realists artificially determine these intrinsically vague parameters. Take the notion of feasibility, for example – it is practically impossible to predict how far humans are willing and able to alter their behaviour for a particular end (within the bounds of what is logically and physically possible, of course). Sometimes humans stubbornly resist, or prove incapable of change, while at other times, they make

seismic behavioural transformations (e.g. people turn vegan on ethical grounds, and states governed by long-standing aristocracies undergo socialist revolutions). 'The given situation' regarding human nature, and the malleability of human behaviour, is therefore profoundly ambiguous.

The best we can do is approximately ascribe particular ideals probability weightings based on historical experience – that is, by asking three questions. First: Is the ideal under consideration logically, physically and psychologically *possible*? Second: Was a similar ideal ever attained in the past? And third: If so, how frequently? Ideals that are both possible and have been frequently realized, would score higher in terms of realism than those that are possible but have never, or only infrequently, been attained. However, the neorealists point out that many progressive turns in human history have been unprecedented, and have sometimes exceeded what people thought of as physically or psychologically possible (e.g. atom bombs, or the abolition of slavery in the United States). As such, for the neorealists, the fact that a given logically possible ideal fails to fulfil these three criteria is not sufficient grounds for denying its realism.

Geuss (2017, 428) further points to the way in which the pronoun 'us' in the phrase 'what is possible for us' is unacceptably loose – it could, for instance, variously signify a particular social group, a nation, or even the entire human race. We might add that it also has a temporal dimension. What might plausibly be feasible for humanity over the course of the next millennium is going to very different from that which strikes us as feasible in a single generation. In arbitrarily opting for one particular spatio-temporal frame of reference over others, we set artificial limits on what is likely to pass as feasible. On this view, exponents of problem-solving realism present their own subjective, and usually conservative, view of what is feasible as objective fact. In this way, they illegitimately discredit more ambitious accounts of what humans are able to ethically achieve.[11]

The neorealists adhere to a conception of realism that avoids the weaknesses they identify in the classical and problem-solving schools of realism. Crucially, they do not, in principle, disavow ambitious, farsighted political ideals – even those that in the long run turn out to be infeasible, or in other words, utopian (Geuss 2017; Rossi and Sleat 2014; Rossi 2019; Owen 2010; see also Walzer 2013). They observe that sometimes blind faith in a goal that might appear to nay-sayers to be over-ambitious can be a precondition of achieving that goal, or of achieving some worthwhile end that falls somewhere short of it. Neorealists therefore endorse the motivational potential of blue-sky thinking as not just *real* but also as *valuable*. Consequently, they affirm utopianism in a far more radical manner than the idealist philosophers of immigration, who, unlike the neorealists, only entertain ideals which they consider to be concretely achievable.

This said, the neorealists seek to distinguish valuable utopian ambitions from *ideological* modes of wishful thinking. The latter refers to situations in which one pursues ideals that one believes are beneficial to oneself (or one's social group) but which in reality serve someone else's interests at the expense of one's own. In other words, they are *counterproductive* ideals. To illustrate this point, Geuss (2017, 480) cites the example of proletarians who campaign for the ideal of free-market capitalism under the false impression that such an arrangement would leave them better off. Or again, proletarians who fought in the British colonial armies in the 19th century, believing themselves, as Britons,

to be fighting for their own empowerment, when in reality they were risking their lives for the sake of benefits that principally accrued to members of the British middle and upper classes. Among other things, then, neorealists wish to distinguish ideals that are *really* enhancing for those who hold them from ideals that are only *apparently* so. It is then chiefly the latter which they urge us to combat (Geuss 2008, 2010; see also Rossi and Sleat 2014; Rossi 2019). But how, we should now ask, does this bear upon the philosophy of immigration? And where do the immigration realists fit into the above schema?

2. Immigration realism as problem-solving realism

Surveying what the immigration realists have to say about their own particular brand of realism, we quickly see that they reject the *classical* realist view. For one, as they point out, nations do not exist in a state of nature with respect to one another. Morality and human rights both have, and ought to have, a role in present-day international relations – hence, power and the national interest should not be considered the sole incentives motivating foreign policy decisions (Bauböck 2018, 61; 2020, 359). And to be sure, immigration *is* now covered by international law (regardless of how poorly enforced that law may be in practice) (see Wellman 2020, §1.9; Wellman and Cole 2011, 309). As to the relevance of morality, Michael Walzer (1983, 50–1) implies that the principle of asylum, which underpins the moral imperative to accept refugees, is grounded in human intuition – that is, in the intuitive sense that we are obliged to help the needy when the cost of doing so is relatively low.

The immigration realists similarly distance themselves from the neorealist vein of political theory. In our introduction, for instance, we saw how David Miller (2016c, 208) expressly disavows 'the technical meaning' of realism employed by the neorealists. What Adrian Little and Terry Macdonald (2015, 385) have to say in this connection is particularly instructive. While they openly acknowledge the applicability of neorealism to the issue of immigration, they shun the neorealist label, and indeed, any substantive engagement with this branch of political theory. They do so because they believe that 'invoking this label may risk diverting analytic energies away from the complex particularities of real political problems' – the implication being that bringing neorealism to bear on the problem of immigration risks making the discussion too abstract and thereby divorcing it from 'real political problems'.

So, if recent immigration realists broadly reject both neorealism and classical realism, what brand of realism *do* they endorse? Let us first look at how they are characterized by their opponents, the idealists. Carens (1996, 156), arguably the idealist *par excellence*, defines the realist approach to immigration as one that is 'especially attentive to the constraints which must be accepted if morality is to serve as a guide to action in the world in which we live'. This emphasis on the need to observe constraints and to guide action strongly intimates that the immigration realists belong to the *problem-solving* set. This intimation is then confirmed by the immigration realists' own description of their methodology.[12] For instance, Little and Macdonald (2015, 386), having rejected the neorealist framework, opt for what they consider to be a broader, 'problem-centred' approach. They describe this as

> a theoretical strategy that formulates and justifies normative principles for political action and institutions through direct and systematic engagement with real political predicaments and dilemmas, as these are understood by the real political actors whom the theory aims to guide.

Rainer Bauböck (2020, 359) similarly opts for what he calls a 'real-world justice' approach, which, following Little and Macdonald (2015), he glosses as 'a problem-centred methodological strategy, [with] a focus on the political value of legitimacy, and a normative and critical commitment'. Likewise, Miller (2016c, 17) describes his own realist theoretical approach as being dedicated to formulating solutions that throw 'practical light … on our predicament', and throughout his philosophy of immigration, he appears to seek what he considers to be actionable policy proposals – in his own words, his approach 'starts by looking at the world as it is, with its manifold inequalities and injustices, and asks what range of immigration policies may legitimately be pursued by democratic states under these circumstances'. Miller's confinement of political theory to our current circumstances is plainly opposed to the idealist attitude. To borrow Geuss' phrasing, Miller ostensibly pursues solutions that are feasible (as well as being morally permissible) 'in the given situation'.[13] It is therefore quite clear that the immigration realists principally adhere to a *problem-solving* conception of realism.[14]

We get an even clearer view of how the immigration realists see themselves as *solving problems* if we turn to how they criticize their opponents – the immigration idealists – for *failing* to solve problems. To this end, we should briefly sketch the respective idealist theories of immigration advanced by Joseph Carens and Arash Abizadeh. Carens (1996, 156) describes the idealist attitude as being 'concerned with issues of fundamental justification and inclined to challenge what is in the name what is right'. Idealist analyses therefore tend to start out from a set of fundamental moral commitments which they believe any bona fide liberal is required to endorse. They then explore the forms of social and political arrangement that would maximally cohere with these commitments. Carens (1987; 2013), for example, starts from a Rawlsian commitment to justice and equality. He contends that excluding prospective immigrants who are seeking a better life is unjust because it involves unfairly disadvantaging individuals on the basis of where they happened to be born.[15] If we were genuinely committed to the liberal value of equality and distributive justice, we would give all the equal opportunity to join our community and share in its economic success.

Abizadeh (2008) argues that if we subscribe to the core values of democracy then consistency demands that we support open border policies. Abizadeh's reasoning is that within authentic democratic states, those subject to legal coercion must have participated in the legislation of the laws that legitimize that coercion. On Abizadeh's Rousseauian definition of democracy, a democratic community is one in which citizens communally establish the legislation under which they live. Since border controls subject potential immigrants to coercion (i.e. in the form of barbed-wire fences, armed personnel and forced deportations), Abizadeh argues that potential immigrants ought to be included in the deliberative procedures that determine border policy. But this means including them in the demos, and so we end up with the imperative to form what Abizadeh (2008, 54) calls a 'global demos'.

For the idealists, the goal of open borders represents an ambitious target which, even if unachievable in the short term, can and should guide present policy-making. This objective can, they claim, give direction to our current efforts to formulate immigration policies that are as moral as possible (see e.g. Carens 1987; 1996; 2013, chap. 1). According to this view, philosophers of immigration are required to observe the distinction that Rawls draws between ideal and non-ideal theory. Whereas ideal theory is concerned with delineating, as a long-term goal, the best possible mode of political organization, '[n]on-ideal theory asks how this long-term goal might be achieved, or worked toward, usually in gradual steps' (Rawls 1999, 89; see also Valentini 2007, §3). Carens thus maintains that idealism has real problem-solving potential insofar as it provides us with an objective that can structure and incentivize current policy-making.

The immigration realists, however, flatly deny the problem-solving potential of idealist political theory. According to Little and Macdonald (2015, 385), ideal theory is too far removed from the concrete problems faced by present-day policy-makers charged with the task of addressing the issue of immigration. Consequently, 'theoretical constructions of ideally just societies are not intelligible even as aspirational targets for political action, and as such are unable by themselves to guide real political judgment and decision-making'. In a similar vein, Matthew Gibney (2004, 16) argues that by ignoring real-world constraints on political agency, 'normative theorists have deflected attention from the question of what responsibilities we have good reason to demand that actually existing states accept here and now'. Miller (2016c, 158) then echoes these objections in complaining that the idealist approach 'does not help us to think about questions such as how to choose, here and now, between different categories of immigrants in circumstances in which borders have to be controlled and the overall numbers coming in have to be limited'.

Alongside this argument, Miller also adopts a slightly less radical line of criticism. He contends that if one is wholeheartedly committed to open borders, it is going to be difficult to see non-ideal, transitional policies – such as those that presuppose the existence of separate states and relatively closed borders – as anything but inadmissibly unjust: 'It will be hard to make suggestions that are not in some way colored by the thought that the whole enterprise is a mistake' (2016c, 16–17). Before we make a detailed critique of problem-solving realism in the ethics of immigration, it is first worth noting that this particular view is patently false. If I were drawing the blueprints of my ideal house, it would not be covered in scaffolding; and yet in trying to construct the building, I am bound to discover that I need to temporarily erect some unsightly scaffolding. But from the fact that I do not want to live in a house permanently marred by scaffolding it does not follow that I cannot enthusiastically design and assemble such scaffolding (as a means to an end).

3. Neorealist objections to immigration realism

We should now consider whether the kind of problem-solving realism that we encounter in the ethics of immigration is vulnerable to the core objections advanced by the neorealists. To recap, the problem-solving realist argues that political theory should be

devoted to finding solutions that are possible for us in our given situation. The neorealists, however, reject this view on the following grounds:

1. The precise nature of 'the given situation' is ultimately indeterminable.
2. It is practically impossible to establish what is possible in advance of actually trying.
3. Establishing what is 'possible *for us*' requires arbitrarily circumscribing the collective to which the pronoun in this phrase refers.

Regarding (1), in this section, we are going to see that a number of immigration realists make a strong descriptive claim about political reality – namely, that compatriot partiality and public culture condition liberal democracy – that does not bear scrutiny. What we are going to discover is that this claim represents the way in which certain immigration realists would *prefer* to see liberal democracy functioning, and not the way in which it *actually* functions. With respect to (2), we are going to see that the immigration realists are apt to figure ambitious visions of liberal democracy which are at odds with their own as 'infeasible'. For instance, we will see that Miller conceives compatriot partiality as an insurmountable obstacle to open border policies, when there are in fact robust grounds for believing that this psychological bias could be diminished or transformed in such a way as to enable such policies. Conversely, we will see many immigration realists *under*-emphasize the way that compatriot partiality currently militates against progressive refugee policies. Indeed, seen in this light, immigration realism will begin to look increasingly like pessimism with respect to economic migrants, and utopianism with respect to refugees. And finally, in the case of (3), we are going to find that the 'us' to which the realists often refer is an arbitrarily select group of liberal democratic citizens living in the historical present. In order to substantiate these claims, we are going to consider a range of immigration realists (e.g. Bauböck, Gibney and Walzer); however, since there is insufficient space for a comprehensive study of immigration realism, the following sections will predominantly concentrate on the work of David Miller, who arguably represents the foremost proponent of problem-solving realism in the ethics of immigration.

Miller charges the idealists with having overlooked various key facts pertaining to our given political situation. Two such facts feature prominently in his critique, and are correspondingly fundamental to his own alternative approach to the ethics of immigration. The first of these is the alleged fact of compatriot partiality – that is, the tendency of individuals to give their countryfolk moral precedent over foreigners. According to Miller, when deliberating about border policy, we should accept that individuals are, on average, inclined to ensure the flourishing of their compatriots over and against that of prospective immigrants. In his view, this inclination constitutes a psychological fact. And as unpalatable as we may find such bias, Miller (2016c, 26–7) does not think that it can simply be wished away; hence, the demand of many cosmopolitan idealists that individuals grant their compatriots and prospective immigrants equal moral standing is in his eyes infeasible.[16]

The second 'fact' that Miller emphasizes is that collective well-being requires a public culture. In his own words, polities 'require a common public culture that in part

constitutes the political identity of their members, and that serves valuable functions in supporting democracy and other social goals' (2005a, 199). The issue, as Miller sees it, is that unrestricted immigration erodes the cultural pillars that support liberal institutions and socio-political cohesion.

Unfortunately, though, Miller is rather vague when it comes to defining what he means by public culture. As he rather loosely puts it: 'a public culture may be seen as a set of understandings about how a group of people is to conduct its life together'. This includes common allegiance to certain political principles (e.g. democracy), but it also 'extends to social norms such as honesty in filling out your tax return or queueing as a way of deciding who gets on the bus first. What is more, it embraces certain cultural ideals such as, for instance, religious values or a commitment to preserve the purity of the national language' (Miller 1995, 26; see also 2016c, 67–8). For Miller, the value of a common public culture lies in its function as a matrix of social *trust*. A public culture transmits common ethical values – for example, through national myths – and as a result, any member of a given culture can be fairly confident that their fellow members will uphold approximately the same ethical standards as themselves (Miller 1995, 36). In this way, we are more likely to trust those whom we deem part of our own socio-cultural set (92–4). By dint of this confidence, public culture breeds a sense of national *ethical* identity, which in turn grounds a feeling of trust towards our compatriots. The flip side of these considerations, however, is that 'as societies become more diverse, ethnically or culturally, levels of trust tend to decline' (Miller 2016c, 10).

Miller warns that while polities may very well be able to *survive* without trust, they would likely not be able to maintain certain desirable political institutions such as the welfare state and effective deliberative democracy for example. If a large enough portion of the electorate suspect those who claim benefits of being free riders, then the welfare state would likely lose democratic support (Miller 1995, 93; 2016c, 10). Since immigrants are often not integrated into the public culture of their receiving nation, they are prone to undermine the trust needed to ensure a thriving welfare state. Miller therefore concludes that 'we may face a trade-off between higher levels of immigration and creating or maintaining a strong welfare state' (2016c, 10). He also posits national trust as a necessary condition of deliberative democracy (Miller 1995, 96–7). Fruitful deliberation, he argues, requires that those deliberating be willing to make concessions when presented with convincing reasons for doing so – that they compromise on their partial interests in the name of arriving at a consensus. If participants do not trust their opponents to make reciprocal concessions in the future, then they are likely to dig in their heels and cleave to their partisan interests. Miller conceives trust as the affective basis of democratic deliberation to the extent that it underwrites this economy of concession-exchange. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that he defends public culture on the more general grounds that it enables citizens to 'feel at home in a place in part because they can see that their surroundings bear the imprint of past generations whose values were recognizably their own' (Miller 2005a, 201).

And so for all of the above reasons, Miller insists that 'the public culture of their country is something people have an interest in controlling' (2005a, 200). Immigrants threaten this interest insofar as they adhere to divergent sets of values, identify with

different cultural traditions, and are frequently unable to speak the language of their receiving nation. Accordingly, unless the members of a given state are willing to forfeit the benefits of their public culture, they need to restrict the influx of newcomers such that arriving immigrants can be adequately acculturated.[17]

What is more, states have an inherent right to ensure this cultural continuity because, says Miller, they have a basic right to self-determination that outweighs the claims of would-be economic immigrants. In making this claim, Miller develops Walzer's thesis that the right of a community to control its own membership is constitutive of what it means to *be* a community in the fullest sense of the word:

> Admission and exclusion are at the core of communal independence. They suggest the deepest meaning of self-determination. Without them, there could not be *communities of character*, historically stable, ongoing associations of men and women with some special commitment to one another and some special sense of common life. (Walzer 1983, 62; see also Miller 2005a, 202)

Miller concurs with Walzer's claim that communities – and especially those considered sovereign states – have a fundamental right to shape their cultural character according to their own preferences. A collective that is unable to do this is not, properly speaking, a community but rather a mere aggregate of individuals. Hence, on this view, the right of a nation state to control its membership trumps any competing rights-based claims to which economic migrants might appeal in their endeavour to enter that community (such as, for instance, the liberal rights invoked by Carens).

Matthew Gibney (2004, 27–48, 77–82) builds on these considerations, tying them back into the issue of compatriot partiality. Gibney claims that unless citizens are able to control the direction in which their culture develops, they are likely to feel alienated from their political community. This sense of alienation, he argues, undermines social solidarity and the state's capacity for concerted action. As such, healthy democratic politics can be compromised by excessive inflows of migrants. Compatriot partiality, on the other hand, bolsters a feeling of self-determination, and thereby minimizes the aforementioned sense of alienation and political fragmentation. Gibney (2005, 32) therefore warns that to 'ignore the force of these [compatriot] attachments (and the way the entry of foreigners might jeopardize them) could lead one to advocate entrance policies that actually undermine just and egalitarian political regimes where they exist'. For Gibney, then, there is something deeply contradictory (and therefore infeasible) about the idealist attempt to promote liberal democratic values by combatting compatriot partiality. And on this basis, he maintains that nations are justified in restricting immigration in order to maintain socio-political solidarity[18].

3.1. Compatriot partiality: Permanent reality or temporary obstacle?

But to what extent is compatriot partiality an essential feature of political reality, and specifically the political reality of thriving liberal democracy? That is, to what extent is this phenomenon an indelible fact of life that makes open border policies infeasible. While the idealists accept compatriot partiality as a current impediment to open borders, they

resolutely maintain that this obstacle can, and indeed should be surmounted. Certainly, this may from our current vantage point seem like an impossible task, but the idealists take pains to show why it is better conceived as an *exacting* challenge. The first point to remark is that it may not be necessary to entirely eliminate compatriot partiality in order to enable open borders. As Carens (2013, 273–5) rightly argues, relatively open borders are not incompatible with compatriot partiality. Citizens living in states with open borders could still morally prioritize their compatriots, and so the kind of socio-political solidarity that Miller and Gibney wish to protect, and which they believe buttresses effective liberal democratic politics, would not necessarily be threatened. All that would need to be eradicated is the kind of compatriot partiality that mandates democratic states to exclude individuals who peacefully seek to immigrate and *become* compatriots. Given that immigrants would still need to undergo a lengthy process of acculturation before being admitted as fully fledged citizens, there is no reason why their presence should compromise the political solidarity of established compatriots.[19]

The question that remains is therefore whether compatriot partiality can be sufficiently attenuated to allow for the kind of open borders that the immigration idealists have in mind. And there are many who make a strong case for thinking that an alteration of this sort is indeed feasible. Huemer (2010, 460), for example, likens compatriot partiality to open racist or sexist bias in the United States. While in the not-so-distant past, these may have seemed perfectly natural – indelible even – they are now seen by most as an embarrassing historical artefact.

The idea that partiality can undergo rapid attenuation is further vindicated by the documented shifts in people's attitudes towards immigrants. For instance, according to a recent poll, the percentage of Britons opposed to immigrants of a different race or ethnicity coming to live in the United Kingdom fell from 52% in 2012 to 26% in 2018 (Blinder and Richards 2020). While this does not entail a corresponding drop in compatriot partiality, it certainly implies so much. At the very least, it demonstrates that people's ethical attitudes towards foreigners can rapidly transform. These results strongly indicate that the kind of compatriot partiality that Miller uses to justify restrictive immigration policies could sufficiently fade within a mere generation. They also indicate that proposals to open borders could potentially garner the democratic support they need in order to be implemented. The bottom line is that ethical partiality can, and does, undergo massive transformations, and it is therefore impossible to determine with any certainty what is feasible in this respect. This on its own is enough to deflate Miller's claim that compatriot partiality constitutes a psychological fact that renders open borders infeasible. Whether partiality can be sufficiently reduced to enable open borders while at the same time being sufficiently *preserved* to maintain effective liberal democratic institutions remains, however, an open empirical question – one that cannot be settled in advance of making an earnest attempt at striking such a balance in practice.

3.2. The need for public culture: Fact or fiction?

This brings us to the second pillar of realist immigration ethics: the need for public culture. I should state that my intention here is not to entirely refute the immigration realists

(especially Walzer and Miller), but rather to show that this alleged need is by no means an uncontroversial fact of political reality. A host of theorists has convincingly rejected the communitarian claim – advanced by not just Miller and Walzer but also Taylor and Kymlicka (among others) – that members of a given nation state are bound together by a fairly settled constellation of values, be these ethical, aesthetic, linguistic or religious in kind (e.g. Fine 2016; Abizadeh 2008; Waldron 1992; Scheffler 2007; Benhabib 2002, chap. 1; Blake 2003). As Seyla Benhabib bluntly puts it, '[t]he collective identities of liberal democracies have never been characterized by the degree of cohesiveness and culture-centeredness that these theorists attribute to them' (Benhabib 2004, 173). On closer inspection, even the most apparently homogeneous liberal democratic states turn out to contain a high degree of cultural diversity – so much so that the notion of a relatively stable, and cohesive public culture loses any obvious claim to reality. Miller can be said to employ a monolithic, or *billiard-ball*, conception of cultures as discrete entities with sharp borders that are often coextensive with the territorial boundaries of a particular sovereign polity. In point of fact, however, cultures are diffuse and do not usually conform to national frontiers. Queueing, for example, is just as prevalent in France as it is in Britain – so perhaps we might want to say that the joint conditions of being Anglophone *and* being inclined to queue are sufficient determinants of British culture. But then these criteria describe Australians just as well as they do the British. Moreover, plenty of British people ignore the cultural more of queuing. And since we encounter such dispersion with almost any value or behavioural tendency that we might, prima facie, be inclined to denote as quintessentially British, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a set of cultural dispositions by which the members of any given state could reliably be picked out.[20]

An illuminating case in this regard is that of multi-national liberal democracies such as Switzerland or Canada, which far more obviously seem to lack any homogeneous public culture. Miller's solution to these counterexamples is to suggest that in spite of being multi-national, each of these states is nonetheless marked by a common public culture insofar as members subscribe to shared political norms (Miller 1995, 96). But as Abizadeh highlights, multi-national states clearly lack the thick cultural unity that Miller elsewhere deems necessary for this kind of liberal democratic cohesion. The key point here is that even without thick cultural unity, such states often manage to maintain effective democratic institutions (Abizadeh 2008, 498) and, we might add, functioning welfare systems.

On the basis of similar observations, Sarah Fine (2016, 3) pointedly remarks that Miller's view 'is not a description of the world as it actually is, or even self-proclaimed liberal democracies as they actually are'. The cultural cohesion that Miller espouses is rather a normative *ideal* masquerading as a description of liberal democratic reality. As Fine points out, Miller (2016c, 180) acknowledges so much in a telling footnote:

> I concede that I am here identifying goods that actual states only realize partially, at most. But I don't believe that the obstacles to justice and self-determination that currently exist are of the kind that makes the quest to overcome them a hopeless one. The nearer we get to realizing these ideals, the greater the value of this form of association.

This reveals that Miller's conception of 'the given situation' is ambiguous in precisely the way that the neorealists lead us to anticipate: It is unclear whether his nationalist vision of democratic cohesion is descriptive or normative – and potentially *unattainably* normative at that (in his own words, actual states only realize these ideals 'partially').

A similar argument can be made against Michael Walzer's notion of cultural self-determination. To bring the shortcomings of Walzer's view into clear relief, we should briefly turn to his analysis of the Australian Government's notorious 'White Australia' policy. Walzer (1983, 46–8) argues that the aspiration of the Australian state to preserve white European culture was not, in itself, morally objectionable. As we saw above, he maintains that states are entitled to control the development of their public culture by means of restricting immigration. Walzer only criticizes the White Australia program on account of the fact that it sought to monopolize excessive territory. Michael Blake (2003, 233), however, astutely points out 'that Australia was not, and indeed never was, a purely ethnic society trying to maintain itself as such. It, like most of the world, was a state containing within its borders multiple cultural traditions and ethnic groups'. On this view, when governments decide to preserve a public culture, what they are in fact often doing is fraudulently presenting the ethnic or cultural traditions of a *particular* social group (i.e. that which is politically dominant) as representative of the national culture, and on this basis they marginalize and suppress competing traditions. Thus, the Australian government was not so much trying to *preserve*, as it was trying to *create* a nation state of exclusively white European heritage. But as we have seen, this kind of homogeneity is ultimately unobtainable. Once again, then, we bear witness to how campaigning for cultural self-determination goes hand in hand with utopian modes of political thinking.

In many ways, Miller's and Walzer's immigration ideals therefore turn out to bear all the hallmarks of utopianism. This raises the question as to why *their* ideal of cultural homogeneity is any more realistic than that of open borders, given that both may be equally out of reach. Yet regardless of which is more realist, the White Australia example highlights how the goal of cultural homogeneity may lead to consequences that most citizens of liberal democracies would find far less ethically acceptable than those associated with open borders.

3.3. Refugees: A special case?

Although Miller, Gibney and Walzer all defend the idea that compatriot partiality and the right to self-determination may be used to justify restrictive immigration policies, they do not claim that the right to self-determination has priority over *all* right-of-entry claims. Refugees, they argue, have a human right to asylum that in many cases overrides the sovereign right to self-determination. According to Miller, all states are individually under an obligation to grant asylum to a portion of the world's refugees, provided the state in question has the capacity to admit them, and has established that said refugees cannot be helped in their countries of origin (e.g. by means of foreign aid) (Miller 2005a, 203; 2016c, chap. 5).[21] Likewise, for Walzer (1983, 62), 'self-determination in the sphere of membership is not absolute' since it is constrained by the 'external principle of mutual

aid'. Crucially, both Miller and Walzer imply that this political duty is encoded in our conscience, as an ethical intuition or natural law.

One could argue, though, that these proposals vis-à-vis refugees are complicit in precisely the kind of idealism that the immigration realists expressly disparage.[22] For example, Miller's and Walzer's conviction that human rights oblige liberal democratic states to accept a quota of refugees may strike us as asking too much. Why should refugees have a *right* to asylum that trumps the right to self-determination enjoyed by individual sovereign states?[23] Walzer and Miller seem to appeal to abstract moral grounds in seeking to justify this position. They also refuse to accept the constraining presence of compatriot partiality or the right to self-determination as legitimate considerations in favour of blocking refugees.[24] It remains unclear why Miller does not consider these constraints to be serious realities in the case of refugees, when surely they remain just as *real* as in the case of economic migrants. According to what objective criterion are the human rights of refugees granted trumping status? One might be tempted to claim that this superior status derives from the intuitively true principle of mutual aid. However, many people, and, for that matter, governments, patently do not intuitively accede to this ethical principle. As Miller (2016c, 163) himself admits, where national interest comes into serious conflict with the rights of refugees to asylum,

> the obligation to admit would in these circumstances be humanitarian in nature, not something that justice demands, which also implies that it would be a matter for the citizens of the receiving society to decide upon – they could not be forced to comply, either by refugees or by third parties.

This butts up against two problems: first, nations that are hostile to refugees are, absent international pressure, going to set the bar conveniently low regarding what counts as an existentially threatening influx of refugees. Hence, what they judge to be the appropriate quota of refugees to accept is going to be significantly lower than that which the international community judges to be appropriate and fair. And second, there is significant empirical evidence suggesting that in practice the right to self-determination and the tendency of policy-makers to prioritize national interest are what have overriding force (that is, over and against the collective ethical intuition of global-humanitarian responsibilities). As Susan Kneebone (2010, 10) observes, the 'appeal to the ethical status of refugees is […] one that has had little effect on states'. Kneebone further describes how theorists have persuasively demonstrated that 'political attempts to enshrine a "right" to asylum in international law in the post-World War II period foundered in the face of claims for territorial sovereignty'.[25] It therefore seems highly unlikely that refugees' purported right to asylum is going to be honoured in a way that evenly distributes refugees across those states with the requisite resources. In this light, Miller's prescriptions regarding refugees idealistically underestimate the strength of compatriot partiality in a manner that is conspicuously at odds with his analysis of economic migrants.[26] And much the same can be said of Michael Walzer's assertion that liberal nations are morally obliged to admit refugees where the cost of doing so is relatively low. Unless this duty is enforced by an

international political authority of some description, these allegedly realist proposals are unlikely to amount to anything more than wishful thinking.[27]

Like Miller, Rainer Bauböck also ventures what he considers to be a realist account of how to ethically deal with refugees. Bauböck (2020) argues that political theorists should approach the problem of immigration from what he calls a 'democracy perspective'– that is, instead of an idealistic 'justice' perspective. In his view, when political actors and citizens discuss immigration in the public arena, they are principally concerned with securing the 'conditions of legitimacy for political institutions, authorities, and decisions'. However, as Bauböck points out, political theorists usually appeal to the fundamental rights of migrants when arguing for ethical immigration policies. In so doing, theorists neglect the actual, democratic interests that motivate political deliberation. Since political theory therefore often fails to speak to the interests of those who determine immigration policy, it correspondingly fails to be action-guiding. In order to redress this issue, Bauböck proposes to justify 'fairly open' borders on democratic grounds. In the case of refugees, he draws on David Owen's hypothesis that the admission of refugees functions as a legitimacy-repair mechanism for the global order of states (see Owen 2012). The idea here is that the legitimacy of the international system of sovereign states depends on the ability of each individual state to satisfy their citizens' basic rights and needs. Refugees would then constitute evidence of this system malfunctioning, and their presence accordingly casts doubt on the legitimacy of this system. By accepting refugees, individual states demonstrate how, despite certain nations failing to sufficiently protect their citizens, the global political order is nonetheless able to pick up the slack and make good this failing.

It is doubtful, however, whether presenting refugee admission as a means of legitimacy-repair would be any more action-guiding than more openly idealist forms of justification. Bauböck may be right that citizens and political actors often justify and support policy changes by appealing to the importance of democratic legitimacy. Notwithstanding, it is generally not the case that the electorates of individual liberal democratic states show significant interest in legitimizing the global sovereign order. Compared with domestic economic interests and the need to ensure *national* democratic legitimacy, the global political order is far from a burning political issue for the majority of current liberal democratic stakeholders. It is therefore unrealistic to suppose that in the near future this concern could guide voting behaviour in such a way as to encourage refugee-friendly policy reforms. As such, Bauböck's proposals, much like those of Miller and Walzer, would likely fail to be action-guiding in the manner demanded by problem-solving realism.

3.4. The ambiguous 'we'

In terms of the three neorealist objections to problem-solving realism that we outlined above, we have now seen how the immigration realists overlook the fact that (1) 'the given situation' is ultimately indeterminable and (2) it is practically impossible to establish what is possible in advance of actually trying. This leaves us with (3) – that establishing what is

'possible *for us*' requires arbitrarily circumscribing the collective to which the pronoun in this phrase refers.

To whom, then, is Miller speaking exactly? In other words, who is the referent of his 'we'? The first possible referent of this collective pronoun is the members of liberal democratic states. But if this is the case, Miller's position is undermined by what has been called the 'paradox of politics', which arises when we try to explain how we determine who belongs to the democratic 'we'. In short, to distinguish between members and non-members, we need a set of accepted criteria of membership; but these criteria need to be established democratically; and yet, putting this task to the demos presupposes that we already have a means of identifying who belongs to this demos. Hence, as others have contended, the referent of Miller's self-determining 'we' is beset by conceptual ambiguity (see Fine 2013; Abizadeh 2008).

But this may not be a genuine aporia for Miller. Although he addresses the totality of individuals who consider themselves citizens of liberal democracies, in reality his ethics of immigration speaks to a particular subset of this group – namely, the set of individuals who understand themselves as embedded in what they see as their national culture, and who are furthermore committed to promoting the welfare state, democratic institutions and international human rights. The guiding question of Miller's ethics of immigration can therefore be read as follows: What is feasible for those of us who want to preserve our national culture, honour global human rights (as opposed to merely *national* human rights) and maintain the welfare state and deliberative democratic institutions? But this addresses an extremely narrow slice of most liberal democratic societies. What this select group is likely to ethically endorse is unlikely to match what the typical liberal democratic demos is, as a whole, going to politically support. For example, if there is a trade-off between immigration and the preservation of public culture, there are many progressives who would readily sacrifice public culture. We should also bear in mind the many libertarians who celebrate the attrition of the welfare state, and would therefore likewise stand opposed to Miller's policy recommendations. Consequently, it remains doubtful whether Miller's proposal that we restrict immigration in order to ensure public culture, international human rights and the welfare state would feasibly win popular support if put to a vote.

When thinking about 'what is feasible for us' regarding border policy, the number of generations that we include in this 'us' is likewise going to be decisive. If we limit ourselves to what dedicated liberals can accomplish over the course of the next decade, then Miller's conservative projections are more or less plausible. But if we take this 'us' to refer to multiple generations, far more progressive policies take on a feasible light. Carens (1996, 164–6) makes a pertinent point, comparing cosmopolitan idealism to abolitionism in the 17th or early 18th centuries. At that time, slavery may have looked like an entrenched institution, one that is 'here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future'. But in hindsight we can appreciate that this belief was not enough to justify rejecting abolitionism as a feasible long-term goal: 'From our perspective today, it is surely the abolitionists […] who are the moral heroes of the struggle over slavery. Yet a realistic approach to morality would have ruled abolitionist views out of court'. The decision as to what timeframe qualifies as 'realist' is always going to be arbitrary, and one cannot

legitimately confine realist ethics to discussion of the present and the immediate future. And by the same token, one cannot dismiss any conception of the problem-solving 'we' as redundantly 'idealistic' solely on account of its broad inclusivity.

4. Conclusion

In spotlighting the problematic nature of the rift that runs between so-called realist and idealist philosophies of immigration, my intention has not been to take sides in the debate regarding what is or is not concretely feasible. While it may look otherwise, this study has not set out to vindicate advocates of open borders against those of a more conservative leaning. To the extent that many of the immigration idealists themselves employ the flawed distinction that has been our subject matter, they are just as implicated by this study as their conservative rivals.

In defending the need to posit ambitious transgenerational goals, the immigration idealist stance towards utopianism is to a large extent congruent with that of the neorealists. Yet the majority of the immigration idealists nonetheless do not go far enough when viewed from the neorealist standpoint. As we saw in the introduction, the idealists usually demand that their goals be feasible in the long-term – a condition which the neorealists deny. But perhaps more importantly, the idealists that we have been considering have all been committed liberals. It is therefore likely that neorealist political philosophers would first and foremost reject the immigration idealists on account of the latter's 'moralistic' liberal tendencies.

Finally, I would like to underscore that I do not believe the term 'realist' should be altogether eschewed by theorists of immigration. My hope is that in drawing attention to the ambiguous nature of this term, this study has laid the ground for a constructive inquiry into what a properly realist ethics of immigration might look like. In trying to address this question, an obvious point of departure would be to ask whether the neorealist framework – and the distinction that it makes between realistic and *ideological* ideals – could shed discerning light on the most significant practical differences between existing immigration norms. This task, however, falls beyond the scope of this article, which has minimally sought to demonstrate that the notion of realism that prevails in the ethics of immigration is not as it stands workable.

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Notes

1. It is nonetheless worth pointing out that many proponents of open borders remain committed to resolving current, real-world political problems (see, e.g. Carens 2013). Idealist advocates of open borders include Carens (1987), Abizadeh (2008) and Seyla Benhabib (2004, 221). Note that a number of commentators argue that our liberal commitments demand relatively *closed* borders, even in an ideal world (e.g. Blake 2013a; Wellman 2008; Pevnick 2011). However, since these theorists do not press for an overly ambitious shift in current immigration policy, they would not qualify as idealists in the sense being discussed in this essay.
2. Note that Rawls (1999) rejects strong cosmopolitanism in constructing his own vision of a realistic utopia.
3. Bauböck (2020) is an exception in this regard since he seeks to defend 'fairly open' borders from a realist perspective. It should also be noted that Miller (2016b, 18) claims that 'It would certainly be possible for states to abandon border controls and open their territories to all comers'. However, while he may consider such policies to be *physically* feasible, he nonetheless portrays them as *actually* infeasible insofar as within most liberal democratic nations they are unlikely to win democratic support, and as a result are highly unlikely to ever be implemented.
4. We should remark, though, that many philosophers of immigration neither self-identify as idealist or realist, nor do they fit neatly into either of these camps (as Carens [1996] notes).
5. The epithet 'neorealist' is also used to describe the new wave of classical realists in international relations theory (e.g. Kenneth Walz). As will become clear in Section 1, however, the political neorealists are not to be confused with their counterparts in IR. Throughout this essay, I use the term 'neorealist' to refer exclusively to the recent school of realism in political theory.
6. This does not make the neorealists mere error theorists doing political philosophy. Moral discourse has real and coherent sense for most of the neorealists. What they are opposed to is using the moral discourse appropriate to individual agency to analyse the domain of political practice. For the neorealists, political agency is best conceived as being governed by a unique set of moral norms, which are heavily context-dependent.
7. Elsewhere, Miller also directly criticizes neorealist political theory (see Miller 2016a).
8. My tripartite schema is indebted to Geuss (2017). For alternative taxonomies of political realism, see e.g. Rossi (2019); Galston (2010); Baderin (2014); Miller (2016a); Bell (2017); Finlayson (2017).
9. As Bell (2017) argues, however, realism in IR is often far more nuanced than is implied by the 'classical realist' label.
10. Galston (e.g. 2010) would be a clear example of this species of realist.

11. This is why some associate realism with a tendency to maintain the status quo (e.g. Finlayson 2017, 271).
12. Note that Michael Blake's institutional conservatism, and the account of global justice and border policy that he develops using this methodological approach, can also be considered 'realist' in the problem-solving sense. Blake (2013b, 4) thus 'assume[s] that the fundamental structure of international relations – in which states differ wildly in power and size, and in which international institutions are relatively weak and undeveloped in comparison with the larger states of the world – will continue for the foreseeable future'. The task he sets himself is therefore 'to figure out what might be done by the agents who exist under these circumstances'. Importantly, though, Blake qualifies these claims, acknowledging the long-term possibility of radically transforming institutions. Moreover, he argues that if his institutional conservatism is unable ensure global liberal justice, then we may indeed need to engage in a long-term campaign for radical institutional change (Blake 2013, 48–9). Yet this remains a last-resort for Blake and he broadly maintains that liberal justice *can* be achieved within the current global institutional framework. What is more, he fairly consistently holds that political theories should be feasible, which further distinguishes him from the neorealists. For an account of Blake's institutional conservatism that ties in with my critique of problem-solving realism in the ethics of immigration, see Axelson (2018).
13. One issue with this characterization of Miller is that if we scrutinize the endnotes of *Strangers in our Midst* (esp., Miller 2016, 180, n.10), and his writings outside the philosophy of immigration (esp., Miller 2013), it turns out that he may not believe that a theory *has* to be implementable 'in the here and now' for it to qualify as realist. In these texts, he argues that in order to count as realist, a theory merely needs to be 'action-guiding' in the sense that it 'must contain principles that members of [the society in question] could be brought to accept by reasoned discussion, which means that the principles cannot have implications that those citizens would find abhorrent' (Miller 2013, 37). On the face of things, this may look comparable to (a) the neorealist rejection of feasibility as a criterion of realism, and (b) the idealist requirement that grand ideals be action-guiding in the non-ideal world. However, neither idealists nor neorealists stipulate that a given political ideal theoretically needs to be acceptable to most citizens in order to be of real worth. An ideal may be completely unacceptable to the majority for many generations, and still genuinely motivate and guide political agency among important subsets of the body politic. Throughout the remainder of this essay, I will treat Miller as a simple problem-solving realist since what he explicitly writes on realism in *Strangers in our Midst* exemplifies, on the whole, the attitude of problem-solving realism (see esp. Miller 2016c, chap 1).
14. This also holds for Gibney (2004), whom we will be considering below, and Hendrickson (1992) (though Hendrickson also often comes across as a hardline classical realist).
15. Note that Carens (1987) also works from a Nozickean commitment to property rights, an approach that Kukathas (2004) likewise adopts. See also n.2, above.
16. Miller (2005b) also argues that this moral prioritization is positively *justified*. Since our relation to our compatriots holds intrinsic value for us (in much the same way as our family ties), it generates special duties to those compatriots. See Tamir (1993) for a comparable argument.
17. Note that various other commentators comparably claim that liberal democratic states require a relatively stable, homogenous public culture. Foremost among these are Brian Barry and Charles Taylor.

18. It is worth noting, however, that Gibney, unlike Miller, ultimately rejects the idea that compatriot partiality is grounded in a unified and relatively homogenous national culture. Rather, for Gibney (2004, 48), compatriot partiality, and the healthy socio-cultural solidarity which it fosters, arise when any group of people simply undergo the 'passage of time under the same political institutions'. This experience generates a 'sense of sharing in a common social project', which is all a collective requires to produce the necessary solidarity. It is therefore a remarkably thin notion of cultural unity which grounds compatriot partiality for Gibney. Since people of almost all thicker cultural and ethnic backgrounds can easily be integrated into this thin cultural community, Gibney does not think it legitimate for states to discriminate between prospective immigrants on the basis of cultural or ethnic considerations, that is, when choosing whom to grant admission and membership. In making this argument, Gibney directly gainsays the position of David Miller (2005a). Nonetheless, he maintains that immigration restrictions *can* be justified by the need to ensure this thin sense of cultural unity (provided these restrictions are culturally non-discriminatory).
19. For a similar argument, see Tan (2005).
20. Note that while I have categorized Bauböck a realist, he follows Gibney in rejecting Miller's views regarding public culture (see Bauböck 2016).
21. For similar arguments, see Gibney (2004, 32–41), Hendrickson (1992, 221) and Song (2018).
22. Parvin (2017) notes this regarding Miller *en passant*.
23. It should be emphasized that Miller (2005a) does not think that refugees have a right to enter their preferred country of asylum. Rather, he maintains they have a right to enter *some* state, though a given refugee can justifiably be assigned to any state that can satisfy that refugee's basic needs.
24. This is in stark contrast to Blake (2013).
25. Kneebone is specifically referring to the work of Goodwin-Gill and McAdam (2007, 355–64).
26. Recall that Miller (2013, 37) claims that for a political theory to count as realist it 'must contain principles that members of … society could be brought to accept by reasoned discussion' (see n.13 of this article). However, if we accept his claim that compatriot partiality is a fact of political existence, then it appears to be improbable that current liberal democracies *would* accept his ethics of asylum. From this, it would follow that his ethics of immigration fails to qualify as realist by his very own standards. For further criticism of the alleged realism of Miller's description of refugees, see Lægaard (2016).
27. This objection can also be levelled at Gibney (2004, 32–41) and Hendrickson (1992, 221).

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