

Immigration

Some of the Moral Issues

Human Rights

- The Modern Idea of Universal Human Rights:
Every human being, regardless of nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc, deserves equal respect and concern.
- John Locke (1632-1704)

Human Rights cont'd

- The Duty of Benevolence. We also find in the philosophy of John Locke the claim that those who have a surplus have a moral duty to help those who are in dire need.
- But do the needs of one's fellow countrymen take precedence over the needs of those in other nations?

Implications

- What are the implications for immigrants and immigration?

Economic Issues

- 1. Does large-scale immigration depress wages for native-born workers?

The Consensus

- Among leading academic researchers the consensus is that immigration lowers wages for low-skilled, low-wage workers.

National Academy of Sciences Study

- Landmark scholarly study
- Immigration has been responsible for 40 to 50 percent of the wage depression for workers without a high school degree in recent decades.
- Immigration has a significant negative impact on lower-skilled, less-educated workers.

Leading Economists Agree

- Robert Reich: "Undoubtedly access to lower-wage foreign workers has a depressing effect [on wages]."
- George Borjas (Harvard University) estimates that the typical high school graduate saw his annual wage fall by \$1,800 from 1980 to 2000 due to large-scale immigration.
- Simon Kuznets' research at Harvard

2. Does immigration displace American workers?

- The consensus among scholars is: Yes it does.
- For example: Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, argues in a major study that immigration displaces native-born workers.

Questions

- But are these legitimate grounds for limiting immigration? That is, does a nation have the right to limit immigration on the grounds that it depresses wages and displaces native-born workers?
- Or is limiting immigration for these reasons *unjust*?

4. Does Large –Scale Immigration Increase Inequality?

- The consensus among the leading academic researchers is that large-scale immigration significantly contributes to the growing disparity between the rich and the poor in this country and to the shrinking of the middle class.

Questions

- But does the effect on income inequality justify restricting immigration?
- Or would it be *unjust* to restrict immigration on the grounds that it increases inequality?

Arguments for Open Borders

- **Cosmopolitanism** argues that (a) each human being, regardless of nationality, is equally valuable and equally deserving of concern and respect; (b) any difference in well-being that is due to morally arbitrary factors (factors beyond an individual's control) is unjust; (c) it is morally arbitrary what nation one is born into; thus, (d) someone born in Somalia etc has as much a right to live in Seattle as anyone else, including you or me.

Arguments for Open Borders

- **Libertarianism**
- Protection of basic rights is the only legitimate function of the state. Every human being has a right to right to migrate to anywhere in the world. Restricting traffic across a national border violates a basic human right.

Arguments for Open Borders

- **Utilitarianism:**
- Justice requires that we maximize the sum total of human satisfaction or happiness. Each person counts equally, nobody is special—this includes anyone anywhere on Earth. Only if national borders are open will the sum total of human happiness be maximized.

Arguments for Controlled Borders

- ***Communitarian and Cultural Continuity Arguments.*** States have the right to decide who crosses their borders and who does not, and even to close borders to outsiders when doing so is necessary in order to preserve a nation's distinctive culture.
- ***The Political Functioning Argument.*** The modern welfare state must exclude outsiders in order to function properly. States of this kind are able to function only because many of their citizens are willing to make the enormous political sacrifices required to sustain various welfare state measures; but citizens are inclined to freely sacrifice only if they identify with one another.
- ***The Political Self-determination argument.*** A state has the right to self-determination; one component of self-determination is freedom of association.

Arguments for Controlled Borders, cont.

- ***Realist Argument.*** There is no world sovereign capable of punishing states. Therefore states cannot be morally bound by any moral contracts and they owe no duties to foreign individuals. Thus states have no moral duties to open their borders.
- ***Population Control argument.*** Immigration improve humanity's ability effectively to address population control. We will make progress in population control only if leaders in overpopulated countries are willing to enact relatively unpopular laws limiting population growth.
- ***Ethical Particularism argument.*** One has special obligations to one's fellow nationals.
- ***Economic Argument.*** Immigration exerts a significant downward pressure on the wages of low-skilled and low-wage workers, and increases income inequality, and this hurts the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.