



OPEN BORDERS

ECONOMICALLY BENEFICIAL, MORALLY VIRTUOUS

BY DR. MIKAYLA NOVAK

The scenes of mass migration in southern and eastern Europe today is, to be frank, a harrowing indictment of the misery and suffering posed under present regulatory regimes, stifling the free movement of human beings.

Grown men, women and their children, tired and hungry, have been undertaking a perilous journey under a hot summer sun, looking for a new place they can call home. At of mid September 2015, it was estimated that close to 500,000 people have crossed by boat into Europe in that year alone, and migration experts have predicted that this influx of people is nowhere near complete.

The transit of migrants looking for a safe haven hasn't only been frustrated by geography and climate. But a mix of indifference and callousness by several European countries, notably Hungary, has been a key factor - unceremoniously closing their borders, contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the open European Union. It should also be said there has been a fair mix of dysfunction in state action regarding the migration situation, as typically

inflexible governments struggle to respond to the fast paced situation of thousands literally on the move.

One of the tragic aspects surrounding these events is the notion that many ordinary people would intend to flee Middle Eastern conflict zones - when they themselves are the products of age old sectarian animosities and disastrous yet predictable Western military interventions. Indeed, it was by many outside of the inner sanctum of public policy design.

And because the present refugee crisis was entirely predicted, developed countries around the world (including distant Australia) could've prevented it. They should've pre-empted the resulting mass movements of people, by not maintaining economically retrograde and morally dubious "border control" policy.

This piece is an unqualified defence of open borders: That people should be free to move between political jurisdictions with limited or, better still, unrestricted movement. In simple terms, open borders are not a left or right political issue, but a

fundamental human liberty issue.

ECONOMICALLY BENEFICIAL

For its part Australia may have moved on from its disgracefully xenophobic White Australia Policy, but what remains today in immigration policy is far from a non discriminatory environment, that only open borders can provide.

The Australian government enforces a mind boggling number of visas to control who arrives in Australia, and the obligations and restrictions are placed upon their arrival. Many types of visas limit the amount of time people can stay in this country, whilst the working visa categories tend to privilege skilled workers, on conditions stipulated by politicians and bureaucrats with scant regard for changing market conditions.

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Australia maintains punitive restrictions against the entry of refugees, including strict quotas on the numbers of people that may be classified as 'refugees,' and, controversially, detaining those without the desired official paperwork for long periods, at the expense of their health and well-being.

But the problem with these restrictive immigration practices is that it is causing our own country, and not others, the most harm, which is akin to deliberately shooting ourselves in the foot.

This is because tearing down the walls that are national borders would yield immense benefits for all humankind.

A 2011 study by American economist Michael Clemens found the gains from eliminating migration barriers dwarf the gains from eliminating barriers against the cross border flows of goods or capital.

Removing all barriers to capital flows would raise global income by between 0.1% and 1.7%. Removing all barriers against merchandise trade would increase income around the world by between 0.3% and 4.1%.

Removing such restrictions would be most welcome in a world struggling under the weight of flagging economic growth, but eliminating all barriers to labour mobility is estimated to increase global income by between 67% and 147%.

Allowing people to move more freely would be enormously beneficial in an economic sense, potentially doubling the world's output and eviscerating global poverty in the process, making the removal of immigration obstacles the defining global reform movement of our age.

MORALLY VIRTUOUS

Alongside the compelling argument to allow people to move about to discover the most highly valued uses for their labour, their entrepreneurial talents, financial and other resources is the idea that it is morally virtuous to break down the barriers to movements across political borders.

One of the common values of humanity, found in all cultures and at all times, has been the freedom to

pursue the life they best deem fit for themselves, and, as most powerfully portrayed in classical liberal philosophy, the best way to unleash human potential is to treat each and every individual as free and equal people.

This liberal dictum of freedom stipulates that freedom applies for everyone, regardless of their age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, creed - and, in the present context - on which side of a political border they were born.

For governments to impose limits on where people should live - especially knowing the availability of viable opportunities for individuals to fulfil their own unique potentials are not evenly distributed across physical space - is nothing short of an unmitigated, immoral attack on the essence of individualised personhood itself.

We know in the case of refugees, desperately seeking a safe haven elsewhere in the world, that to force up regulatory roadblocks to easy entry into another country only magnifies the risks that their lives be curtailed by tyranny and oppression.

It is not only moral to allow refugees safe haven in the most congenial circumstances possible, but it is also moral. Open borders effectuate constructive, peaceful change, dispossessing tyrants and oppressors of the most valuable resource they have - people.

The moral case for opening the borders was no better expressed than by American left libertarian Cory Massimino, stating that, "preventing people from freely trading with their fellow humans because they happen to be born on the other side of the fence is more reminiscent of 'separate but equal'

laws that divided people based on arbitrary characteristics than it is of a compassionate, progressive society that provides opportunities for everyone to climb the socioeconomic ladder.'

With that in mind, the onus of proof firmly remains on the proponents of the status quo, to morally justify why governments should continue to limit the freedom of individuals to migrate for whichever reasons they see fit.

A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF THE CRITICS

To be certain there have been numerous objections raised against the ideal of open borders, and even concerns about more generous migration quotas under existing regulatory regimes.

Arguably the greatest objection to a more relaxed attitude towards immigration is about the welfare state. They argue migrants to developed countries will simply overwhelm public welfare systems and taxpayers will have to indulge migrant preferences for leisure over work.

This is admittedly a complex matter that isn't easy to resolve, not least politically. But the first thing that could be said is that the welfare system is designed to financially assist people facing genuine hardships - so why would we necessarily decry welfare working in conformity with its intended purpose?

It has been pointed out by some critics of Australian immigration policy that humanitarian migrants tend to earn lower incomes on average, than entrants on skilled visas. However, these accounts fail to recognise that refugees are much better off here, even on welfare, compared to the much lower

incomes they are likely to earn in their original countries.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics pointed out in a study released in September 2015 that humanitarian migrants just so happen to report a higher proportion of income from their own unincorporated businesses, with this form of income rising significantly after five years of residency.

We also should acknowledge that the non pecuniary benefits of resettling in a politically stable country with low levels of violence are immense for refugees, even if these benefits are not adequately captured by official statistics.

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Now for many, including most classical liberals and libertarians, this might be a rather inadequate response, so we need to take our line of argumentation a few steps further.

Some have argued that it would be more desirable to put a wall around the welfare system, restricting the eligibility of migrants to receive tax funded payments and subsidies. These arrangements could assist in fostering the development of mutual aid societies and charities providing generous support for migrant communities, but do expose resident taxpayers to further spending pressures.

David Boaz points out in his latest book ' The Libertarian Mind' , that immigrants to the United States during the effective ' open border' period

prior to the 20th century formed many fraternal associations, such as the Croatian Fraternal Union, Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society, National Slovak Society, and so on, to provide assistance to migrants in need.

In any case, governments should reduce the extent of their fiscal and regulatory interventions in the economy. This would enable entrepreneurial and work ready migrants and incumbent residents to earn greater income without fostering a reliance upon the welfare state.

Another issue does not come so much in the form of an objection, but a question: why won't the migrants just stay in the nearest safe place?

There is no doubt that this matter has been raised in the present European immigration debate, with friends and critics of the new arrivals alike pointing to the reticence of nearby stable Middle Eastern countries to accept large numbers of migrants from strife torn Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

But studies are telling us something which is obvious: Refugees are capable of making choices and, so, they may look most favourably upon safe havens that are economically freer than other places.

An August 2015 study by Maryam Nejad and Andrew Young confirmed an earlier study by Nathan Ashby, finding that improving economic freedom is a major attraction for migrants: 'Our results suggest that migrants look to exit their origins towards destinations where they breathe more economically free.' These sorts of empirical findings are consistent with the ideas expressed earlier, that migrants, just like other people, are looking to make the most of

their life potentials, but that political restrictions on the free flow of people can greatly stymie those noble aspirations.

CONCLUSION

Many political figures fervently yearn to keep the nation state as a holding pen into which nationals are kept inside, presumably for taxation and regulation purposes either for now or later, whilst keeping foreigners outside. Some prominent examples of anti immigration nationalists include Democrat Bernie Sanders and Republican Donald Trump (both United States), Marine Le Pen (France) and, infamously, Pauline Hanson of Australia.

It would be tempting to mention to each of these figures and to the anti-migrant racists elsewhere, the fundamental hypocrisy of their closed border stance given their ancestors were once, in a sense, migrants (and recalling, of course, we all came from the African Savannah, regardless of where we are located now).

But the far more important point to make, is that there has been only one group within contemporary societies who have maintained logical consistency

over the borders issue, the classical liberals and libertarians.

After all, it is the liberals and libertarians who refer to the logical consistency of their position, supportive of the free movement of people, their consumption and capital goods, and their finances, to those spatial locations most conducive to their productivity. Only liberals and libertarians can point to a rich intellectual tradition in favour of mass immigration and scaling back of entry restrictions at the border, from the writings of Adam Smith onwards.

As European political authorities struggle to deal with the contradictions of their own restrictive positions on immigration from the Middle East and Africa, classical liberals and libertarians maintain a simple, yet powerful, message for all reformers worldwide to aspire to:

Let the people be free to cross the borders!



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