

The Philosophy of Human Migration

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(M.A.M.O.N., 2016)

The core of Donald Trump's Presidential campaign platform in 2024 is his "militaristic plan to deport 15-20 million people" (CNN, 2024). But as Kelly Lytle Hernández's excellent book, *Migra! A History of the US Border Patrol* (Hernández, 2010) amply demonstrates, (i) for more than 100 years, southwestern agribusinesses in Texas, Arizona, and California have been systematically encouraging Mexican so-called "legal" immigration, for the sole purpose of exploiting their labor, (ii) while simultaneously the Texas Rangers, the U.S. Border Patrol, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, aka INS, now the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, aka USCIS, under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, aka ICE, have also been systematically chasing, investigating, oppressing, detaining and imprisoning, expelling, or killing so-called "illegal" immigrants from Mexico and other South American countries. So, the USA systematically entices, exploits, mistreats, and expels immigrants. Robert Frost famously and poetically observed that "something there is, that doesn't love a wall" (Frost, 1914). In a similar spirit, and equally famously, even if slightly less poetically, *Pink Floyd* rock-anthemed that

All in all, it's just another brick in the wall. You're just another brick in the wall. (Pink Floyd, 1979)

Correspondingly, *human migration*—the movement of people from their original homes to somewhere else, in order to live there, across borders and over, under, or through walls—is a phenomenon that calls out for serious philosophizing.

All human persons, aka “people,” are (i) absolutely intrinsically, non-denumerably infinitely, and objectively valuable, beyond all possible economics, which means they have *dignity*, (ii) autonomous rational animals, which means they can act freely for good reasons, and above all they are (iii) morally obligated to sufficiently respect each other and to be actively concerned for each other's well-being and happiness, aka kindness, as well as their own well-being and happiness. As Immanuel Kant pointed out, because the Earth is a sphere, because planetary spheres are finite but unbounded spaces with no inherent edges or borders, and because all people live on our planetary sphere within essentially interconnecting surface-spaces, they must share this Earth with each other (Kant, 1795/1996: p. 329; Ak 8: 358). People are essentially embodied conscious, intentional animals living in forward-directed time, and living in spaces whose inherent directions (right-left, etc.) are all centered on, and determined by, the first-persons embedded in those spaces. In order to live, and in order to live well and be happy, people need to be able to occupy certain special spaces in which they eat, rest or work, sleep, have intimate emotional relationships and/or families, etc., aka homes, and also be able to move freely across the surface of the Earth, without having their dignity or autonomy violated, and without violating others' dignity or autonomy. Moreover, by virtue of the spherical shape of the Earth, by virtue of their essential embodiment, but above all by virtue of their dignity and autonomy, all people inherently belong to a single universal cosmopolitan moral community, aka *humanity*, that transcends any nation-State.

By sharp contrast, everyone also accidentally belongs to one or more arbitrarily-established social institutions, *nation-States*, that occupy arbitrarily-divided areas of the Earth's surface, and are ruled by special groups of people called *governments*, whose rule is enforced by police and armies. The function of governments is to issue commands of various kinds, without regard to their specific moral content, justified instead by *political authority*, backed up by force or the threat of force, aka *coercion*, for the purpose of protecting various self-interests of certain people specifically enclosed, governed, and controlled by that nation-State, call them *citizens*. Other people who live within these nation-states, and are also controlled by those States, but are not citizens of them, are *foreigners*.

Now, as Aristotle correctly pointed out, human animals are *political* animals,¹ which is to say that they're *social* animals who create and live inside States; and the States they create and live inside all have borders or walls, whose function is as much to trap its citizens inside, as it is to protect against invasions by foreigners. In fact, as the political anthropologist James C. Scott has shown, people lived in various kinds of nomadic or sedentary pre-State borderless/unwalled social communities for several millennia before the advent of the earliest States (Scott, 2017). Moreover, as far as archaeologists and political anthropologists can now discern, the actual lives of these pre-State people were no more solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, or short than the lives of those who were bundled and collected into the earliest States. Indeed, since the bundling-and-collection of people and non-human animals into States almost inevitably produced deadly epidemics, the lives of those who were bordered and walled inside States was in fact generally much shorter than those of the pre-State peoples on the outside (Scott, 2017: ch. 3). So "politics" in the sense of organized human communal or social life is a significantly wider concept than Statist or bordered/walled politics. In fact, it is only *Statists* who call these pre-State, borderless/unwalled people "barbarians," "brutes," "primitives," "savages," etc., especially when they want to enslave them or steal their land.

Human migration includes *political refugees*, that is, people fleeing various kinds of State-driven authoritarian coercion and direct persecution, across State borders and walls, but it is a much larger category, since it also includes (i) *environmental refugees*, that is, people fleeing disastrous climate change or other natural disasters, across State borders and walls, (ii) *economic refugees*, that is, people fleeing poverty, labor exploitation, or otherwise seeking economic betterment, across State borders and walls, (iii) *internally displaced people*, people fleeing authoritarian coercion and direct persecution, disastrous climate change or other natural disasters, or poverty, or seeking economic betterment inside States, and (iv) *nomads*, people who simply want to move freely across the Earth and live in different places, whether inside States or across State borders and walls, in order to satisfy their true human needs. In this connection, as I mentioned in passing above, we should also never forget the crucial point that State-made borders and walls are created as much to keep their own people *locked inside them*, as they are to keep so-called barbarians/brutes/primitives/savages and other "foreigners" *locked outside them*. The contemporary, real-world moral scandal and tragedy of millions of human lives lost or ruined while attempting human migration across State borders and walls or inside States therefore makes philosophizing about political borders and walls profoundly important and urgent.

An enabling necessary condition of all political borders or walls is cultural conflict.

¹ Aristotle (*Politics*, book I, 1253a8).

By *cultural conflict* I mean the mutual antagonism that arises between groups of people with different skin color, different languages, different ethnicity, different religions or religious traditions, different gender, different sexuality, different age groups or generations, different social castes, different economic classes, different political parties, and so-on, or who simply live in different places from one another. Such conflict ranges all the way from mutual distrust and insults, to mutual coercion including threats of violence or actual violence, to systematic mutual or one-way persecution including imprisonment, torture, and murder, to war, “ethnic cleansing,” systematic mass murder, or genocide. The very idea of cultural conflict, in any one of its instances, implies the existence of a centered group, *Us*, that is the *agent* and first participant in a given cultural conflict, and an external group, or set of groups, that is the *target* and second participant in that conflict, *Them*.

Let’s call the agent-group, *Our People*, and the target-group or set of groups, *Other People*. To the extent that *Our People* have *Our* own (relatively) unique political practices and policies, that set *Us* apart from *Them*, the *Other People*, these practices and policies jointly constitute an *identity politics*.

Since 2016, we’ve been living in The Age of Trump. Not only the 2016 US Presidential election, but also the 2020 election and the 2024 election, are *all about cultural conflict*, between *hyper-liberals* and *anti-liberals*, as Mark Lilla and John Gray have cogently argued (Lilla, 2016; Gray, 2016). In short, there is fear and hatred everywhere in the contemporary USA, cultural conflict everywhere, and it’s all fundamentally driven by *identity politics*, whether of the big capitalist neoliberal so-called “progressive” Democratic left, i.e., the hyper-liberals, or of the big capitalist neoliberal, neo-fascist Republican right, i.e., the anti-liberals.

Now the concept of *intersectionality* has been used by critical identitarians in order to stress the ways in which members of very different identity groups can suffer essentially the same kinds of oppression. But as Kwame Anthony Appiah has rightly pointed out, intersectionality is in fact an implicit *rejection* of identity politics (Appiah, 2018). For if intersectionality appeals to the ways in which very different kinds of people can all be oppressed in essentially the same ways, for essentially the same bad reasons, then, as autonomous individuals who possess human dignity and are worthy of respect, those oppressed people are also fully capable of thinking, speaking, and acting against oppression *for themselves*, in solidarity with other oppressed people of *all* kinds, *without* the need for any sort of of identity politics.

So identitarianism, whether of the anti-liberal right or of the left, is a moral and political *dead letter*, just as Lilla and Gray have argued.

Well, what is to be done? As the perhaps surprising solution to the problem of cultural conflict, I'm proposing what I call *2-Phase Universal Open Borders*, aka 2P-UOB (see also Hanna, 2018: part 3). For the sake of real-world concreteness, it's formulated in a way that's specific to the USA; but it can be smoothly generalized to all contemporary nation-States whatsoever. So here's 2P-UOB:

Phase 1: Starting in 2025, there will be universal open borders with Canada and Mexico, and everyone who moves across those borders and then claims residence in the USA, will receive *temporary or permanent residence in the USA* provided that *all new residents also fully respect the human dignity of everyone else in the USA and elsewhere in the world.*

Phase 2: Also starting in 2025, the USA, Canada, and Mexico will collectively form a *Global Refugee Consortium (GRC)*, with three-way open borders to *any political refugee, economic refugee, or asylum seeker from anywhere in the world (aka "global refugees")*, who will receive *temporary or permanent residence in the USA, Canada, or Mexico*, provided that *all new residents also fully respect the human dignity of everyone else in the GRC and elsewhere in the world.*

Here's another line of reasoning in support of 2P-UOB, also generalizable to all contemporary nation-States. Alexander Betts has compellingly argued for the moral and political global acceptance of a concept he calls *survival migration*, which he rationally motivates and defines as follows:

This book develops the concept of "survival migration" to highlight the conditions under which a person cannot get access to a fundamental set of rights in his or her country of origin and so (as a last resort) needs to seek those rights in another country. Survival migrants can be defined as "persons who are outside their country of origin because of an existential threat for which they have no access to a domestic remedy or solution." (Betts, 2013: p. 23)

In turn, following Henry Shue, Betts unpacks the notion of a "fundamental set of rights" as "the minimum conditions of human dignity and self-respect" (Betts, 2013: p. 23). I'm fully onboard with the concept of survival migration and Shue's unpacking of it, but I also think that this package extends *radically further than Betts himself is prepared to allow in that book*, since he explicitly wants to hold that "not all international migrants are survival migrants" (Betts, 2013: p. 24), and also that "although the term 'survival migration' is more inclusive than 'refugee', it is not intended to offer a *carte blanche* for anyone in a weak or fragmentary state to seek asylum" (Betts, 2013: p. 25). I disagree, for the following reasons.

Consider any sane person who wants to migrate across national borders because that person has what they take to be a sufficient reason for migrating, such that they are sincerely convinced that at least one, or even many, of their true human needs are not being met in their country of origin. In turn, it's self-evident that among the list of true human needs are (i) freedom from harmful and pervasive racial, ethnic, gender-based, or sexual-preference-based discrimination, (ii) freedom of opinion and/or expression, (iii) freedom from poverty and/or access to economic opportunity, (iv) free access to adequate housing and healthcare, and (v) free access to a violence-free (and especially gun-violence-free) living environment. Now the satisfiability of true human needs, *including the sincere conviction that one's own basic human needs are being met*, is a minimum condition of human dignity and self-respect. Therefore any sane person who wants to migrate across national borders because that person has what they take to be a sufficient reason for migrating, such that they are sincerely convinced that at least one, or even many, of their true human needs are not being met in their country of origin, is a survival migrant. Therefore, survival migration is merely a restricted case of what I'll call *dignitarian migration*. Or otherwise put, the direct consequence of the concept of dignitarian migration is *universal open borders*, and therefore 2P-UOB is merely *a specific instance of dignitarian migration and universal open borders*.

Here's an obvious objection to 2P-UOB, which I'll call *the inevitability of cultural conflict*:

Since people are by nature egoistic and mutually antagonistic, then whenever they group together and become an *Us, Our People*, they will naturally and inevitably engage in cultural conflict with *Them, the Other People*. So universal open borders with Canada and Mexico, or to global refugees, will never work, precisely because they would inevitably lead to even more and greater cultural conflicts than already exist, and perhaps even lead to war. Therefore, the USA should always have (more or less) closed borders to everyone, forever.

And here's my reply to the objection from the inevitability of cultural conflict, in three parts.

First, it's simply empirically false either that all human beings are inherently egoistic and mutually antagonistic by nature or neurobiology, or that all human beings are even all-but-inevitably egoistic and mutually antagonistic by virtue of culture (Hanna, 2020). Moreover, the very belief that people are inherently or inevitably egoistic and mutually antagonistic, is nothing more and nothing less than a cognitive illusion and myth that directly serves the self-interests of big capitalist neoliberal nation-Statists.

Second, as far as can be determined from the archaeological, historical, and social-anthropological evidence, cultural conflict exists, and has existed in varying degrees, from minor, to moderate, to major, to intense, all the way to catastrophic, near-satanically evil, holocaust levels, as long as *States* have existed. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, in his study of the earliest States, *Against the Grain*, J.C. Scott has pointed out that, in addition to a legalistic territorial monopoly on the power to coerce, a hierarchical and stratified social structure, sedentary grain cultivation, taxation, and the emergence of writing for the purposes of making lists, *walls*, aka borders, *make States* (Scott, 2017: p. 137). Therefore, it is entirely reasonable to hold that, conversely, *States and walls*, aka borders, *make cultural conflict*.

Third, and following on from the crucial thesis that cultural conflict is actually an artifact of Statism, it is self-evident that people are most inclined to cultural conflict with others, via their identity politics, when they are already very angry, anxious, bitter, frustrated, or frightened about other things, for whatever reasons — for example, poverty and economic oppression, being unemployed or having to do a shit job, the inaccessibility of higher education, or healthcare hell — and then they project those powerful negative emotions onto Other People. In so doing, Our People thereby cognitively demonize and stigmatize the Other People, then actively fear and hate the Other People, or even, in the most extreme cases, cognitively de-humanize the Other People, by seeing them as wild beasts or vermin, or even as human garbage or human offal, fit only to be eliminated and exterminated.

Nevertheless, holding fixed the brute fact that we live in a world of nation-States and State-like institutions, overt cultural conflict is generally a somewhat extreme, pathological situation, and very far being the normal situation between people in different cultural groups. Of course, there are always some difficulties and tensions. Consider, for example, the commonplace difficulties and tensions between men and women, or between older people and younger people, not to mention between the currently “hot button” and media-touted difficulties and tensions between people of different sexual orientations, or between cisgendered and transgendered people, etc., etc. Nevertheless, it is not at all uncommon for sharply different cultural groups, even a multiplicity of sharply different cultural groups, to get along just fine, all things considered, to their mutual aid and benefit, with only the ordinary sorts of “human, all too human” problems, whenever the larger economic, social, and political backgrounds are appropriately supportive. Real-world examples of this abound: happy marriages and other intimate partnerships, happy families, good camaraderie and friendships across even sharply different cultural groups, good working relationships across even sharply different cultural groups, and so-on. Indeed, *Canada*, is an excellent real-world example of all of this. I hasten to add that I’m *not* saying that people in Canada are perfect, or

somehow magically more than “human, all-too-human”: *far from it*. But the essential point is that people of even sharply different cultural groups inside both past and present nation-States and State-like institutions *really can* and *often do* get along pretty well, provided that, whether by design or sheer luck, there is the right background-setting of sufficiently supportive economic, social, and political structures. Canada is a real-world example. The amazing thing, then, is how often we forget or overlook this self-evident fact.

Therefore, the very best thing that could possibly be done in the face of cultural conflict in the USA is to create a 2P-UOB situation in which everyone in the USA, Canada, and Mexico is moving freely across borders between the three countries and living wherever they want to, global refugees are given universal safe-haven in the Global Refugee Consortium consisting of the USA, Canada, and Mexico, and therefore people from all over the USA, Canada, Mexico, and global refugees from the rest of the world, can thereby all actually see each other, hear each other, and interact as neighbors, without wire fences, walls, or fear of any sort of persecution or violence.

To sum up my argument in a nutshell, then, here are two individually excellent and conjointly decisive reasons for implementing 2P-UOB, right now. **First**, if 2P-UOB were *not* implemented starting in 2025, then most people living permanently in the USA would still suffer from cultural conflict and the institutional sociopathy of closed borders. **Second**, if the system of 2P-UOB *were* implemented starting in 2025, then cultural conflict in the USA and the institutional sociopathy of closed borders would be ended for the foreseeable future. So everyone—except neo-fascist demagogues like Trump, Hungary’s Viktor Orban, and France’s Marine Le Pen—would be substantially better off if 2P-UOB were implemented starting in 2025. As before, this can be smoothly generalized to all contemporary nation-States whatsoever.

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