University of the People

PHIL 1402 Introduction to Philosophy

Unit 5 Written Assignment 5

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### Ethics and Morality in Immigration: Balancing Sovereignty and Human Rights

Immigration remains one of the most contentious ethical dilemmas in contemporary global society. At the heart of the debate is the question: Should anyone be allowed into a sovereign country? This issue challenges both arriving and receiving societies, as they grapple with the principles of national sovereignty, human rights, and social justice. In this paper, I examine the ethical implications of immigration policies by describing the central dilemma, articulating my position with supporting examples, addressing notable objections, and defending my stance using key ethical theories, notably Kantian ethics and utilitarianism.

#### Ethical Dilemma and Position

The ethical question of immigration centers on the balance between a country’s right to control its borders and the moral obligation to provide refuge and opportunity for individuals in need. On one side of the debate, some argue that strict border control is necessary to protect national security, cultural integrity, and economic stability. On the other side, there is a compelling argument for open or more lenient borders, grounded in the belief that all human beings possess inherent rights that transcend national boundaries (Kant, 1998). I contend that while nations must safeguard their sovereignty, they also have a moral duty to admit individuals seeking a better life, particularly those fleeing persecution or dire economic conditions. This position is supported by both humanitarian considerations and ethical principles that prioritize human dignity.

One supporting example of my position is the longstanding tradition of asylum in many democratic nations. For instance, during World War II, numerous European countries, despite facing significant national challenges, accepted refugees escaping Nazi persecution. This decision, though controversial at the time, has since been recognized as an ethically sound response to a humanitarian crisis. Another example can be observed in contemporary global initiatives, such as the United Nations’ advocacy for refugee protection. These examples illustrate that ethical imperatives—grounded in respect for human rights—can justify a more open immigration policy, even when balanced against concerns of national sovereignty.

#### Ethical Objections and Critiques

Despite the humanitarian argument, several objections can be raised against a more open immigration policy. One common objection is based on the principle of national self-determination. Critics argue that a nation’s government is accountable to its citizens and that uncontrolled immigration could undermine cultural cohesion, economic stability, and social order. They posit that stringent immigration policies are essential to maintain the integrity and welfare of the host society. For example, critics often point to countries that have experienced significant cultural and economic disruptions following periods of rapid, unregulated immigration.

Another objection concerns resource allocation. Opponents of open borders contend that admitting large numbers of immigrants may strain public services, such as healthcare, education, and housing, potentially disadvantaging existing citizens. This argument is often framed within a utilitarian context, where the greatest good for the greatest number must be achieved. In this view, any policy that risks overburdening public resources could be considered unethical, as it might lead to a net decrease in overall societal welfare.

#### Defense of My Position

In response to the objection regarding national self-determination, it is important to recognize that ethical governance requires a balance between protecting national interests and upholding universal human rights. Kantian ethics, which emphasizes duty and the inherent worth of every individual, suggests that moral actions should be guided by principles that can be universally applied (Kant, 1998). Thus, if we were to universalize the maxim “we must help those in need,” it would imply that nations should provide sanctuary to individuals facing injustice, irrespective of national borders. Historical examples of successful refugee integration demonstrate that with effective policies, diverse societies can flourish without compromising their core values.

Regarding the concern over resource allocation, empirical evidence indicates that immigrants often contribute positively to the economy and enrich cultural diversity. Studies have shown that immigrants can stimulate economic growth by filling labor shortages, creating new businesses, and fostering innovation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). While initial challenges in resource allocation may occur, long-term benefits often include a more dynamic workforce and cultural enrichment that enhances social cohesion. Utilitarian ethics, which focuses on maximizing overall well-being, supports the view that the benefits of a well-managed immigration policy can outweigh the costs if resources are allocated effectively.

Moreover, policies need not be binary. A nuanced approach that permits controlled immigration can address both ethical imperatives and practical considerations. For example, implementing rigorous screening processes and integrating support systems for immigrants can mitigate potential strains on public resources while fulfilling the moral obligation to assist vulnerable populations. This balanced strategy is supported by ethical reasoning from both Kantian and utilitarian perspectives, ensuring that moral duties are not sacrificed for the sake of national convenience.

#### Conclusion

The ethical dilemma of immigration invites us to weigh the importance of national sovereignty against the universal rights of individuals. While concerns about cultural integrity and resource allocation present valid objections, ethical theories such as Kantian ethics and utilitarianism offer compelling arguments for a more compassionate approach. By embracing a policy that allows controlled immigration, societies can honor their duty to protect human dignity and promote overall well-being. This balanced perspective underscores the need for ethical reflection and practical policymaking in addressing one of the most pressing moral issues of our time.

### References

Kant, I. (1998). Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785)

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2014). Immigrant America: A portrait (4th ed.). University of California Press.