

On the Immigration Issue

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1 What the immigration problem is and is not

From a philosophical perspective, the immigration issue is neither merely a humanitarian problem, nor merely a matter of security, nor merely an economic phenomenon. It is a symptom of an uneven global order, where the mobility of capital is almost absolute, the mobility of people is forced and unequal, and frontline states (such as Greece) bear a disproportionate burden.

Both the “tolerant” (usually left-leaning) and the “tough” (usually right-leaning) often participate in the same globalised system that produces migration. Thus, a large part of public debate is *ex post moralising*, not a treatment of causes.

2 Modern false dilemmas

From a Greek philosophical perspective, both dominant camps suffer from “extremity” (*akron*), that is, excess:

- (a) Absolute humanitarianism without political form:
- Turns compassion into a principle without limits.
 - Ignores that the city has a specific carrying capacity.
 - Ends up dissolving the very political community that is supposed to be the bearer of justice.
- (b) Absolute exclusion without moral discrimination:
- Turns security into a supreme value.
 - Tends to see people only as a threat or as numbers.

- Loses the Greek distinction between enemy, foreigner, and suppliant.

Both are un-Greek in the strict sense: they lack measure.

3 Greek philosophical principles that can serve as axes

Political virtue lies not in the extremes but in measure. The question is not: “open or closed borders?” but:

- what measure of hospitality does not dissolve the city,
- and what measure of protection does not abolish humanity.

The city, in my view, is not a mere administrative scheme; it is a pre-condition of *eudaimonia* (flourishing). Hence, a policy that dissolves the cohesion of the city in the name of morality is *self-defeating*. Protecting the political form is not immoral; it is a condition for moral action to exist. The Greeks were not “open-borders”, but: they recognised a **sacred obligation toward the suppliant**, yet not an unconditional integration of the foreigner into the city.

3.1 Stoic universality

The Stoics spoke of a cosmopolis, but not of abolishing particular states, rather of *recognising* common human dignity. This means humane treatment and a clear distinction of roles: asylum, immigration, repatriation.

4 Deportation vs. Repatriation

It is striking that none of the “tough” camp speak of repatriation but of “deportation”. The Greek word *apelaunō* (= from + drive) means “to drive out”. The use of the word places emphasis on removal, on violation, and on a punitive logic. The migrant appears a priori as an offender. The word carries a punitive load. It is a punishment without a criminal offence. It has the logic of the enemy and the threat, which then justifies the harshness that is not sustainable in a rule-of-law state.

Repatriation, i.e., return to one’s homeland, places emphasis on the conclusion of a temporary situation. Not punitively, but as a restoration of

order. The migrant appears as a person outside the legal status of residence, not as a criminal. The use of the word carries a clearly human-centred tone, since it recognises that the migrant does not belong politically here, but does not deprive them of human dignity.

States may act under necessity, but they are judged by how they manage necessity. **Serious states do not drive people out. They regulate.**

5 The philosophically minded Greek

In summary, I would say that a stance emerges with the following characteristics:

- Recognition of causality: The problem cannot be solved without challenging the globalised economy that generates it. Hypocrisy (whether humanitarian or nationalist) must be rejected.
- Clear defence of the political community: Greece is not a mere “transit space”. Preserving the cohesion of the city is a legitimate aim.
- Humanism with discernment, asylum where there is real need, decent management. Not a generalised moral self-abolition.
- Rejection of extremes: Neither “everyone in”, nor “no human being concerns us”.

The philosophically minded Greek does not choose between humanity and the city; they seek to save the city so that it can remain humane—but to *be* humane.

6 Proper conduct by category

There are three types of migrants. Refugees, economic migrants, and those who migrate and do not belong to the previous two categories. The first and third cases are easy: refugees migrate because their lives are threatened (by wars, climate change, etc.). They come as suppliants and providing asylum is a *sacred* obligation. They are repatriated when the threat to their life ceases.

The third category is also simple: immediate repatriation, since there is neither an economic cause nor a threat to life.

Now we come to the most difficult category, that of the economic migrant. This person bears human dignity but does not bear a claim to

permanent settlement. Economic need is not a right to political integration.

Regarding the “left-wing” stance, I would like to say that mercy and justice are not identical. Moral sentiment cannot become a political rule.

Regarding the “right-wing” stance, I would like to say that justice and punishment are not identical. We cannot deny every human dimension, nor ignore that economic migration is a **structural outcome** of global relations. Otherwise, we end up in cynicism and hypocrisy, which for migrants entails undeclared labour and exploitation (for example, in strawberry fields and elsewhere).

So what is the proper conduct? Controlled labour migration programmes; agriculture, care, construction, etc. Specific duration and renewal under conditions. Without these we will have illegal labour (for the “right”) and the opposite of humanitarianism (for the “left”).

There must be a clear link. Work implies a residence permit. Non-work (without health or other reasons, of course) implies repatriation. These protect the migrant themselves from exploitation and society from absorption without a plan. It goes without saying that employers must be severely punished for undeclared labour. This is an act of justice, not repression.

Finally, permanent settlement cannot be ruled out a priori. But it must be accompanied by criteria, such as language, respect for institutions, length of stay.

7 It is unbelievable...

It is unbelievable how in today’s Greece we have managed to ignore things that were obvious when our grandparents emigrated to the United States or Australia.

8 What do I do in my daily life?

It is not within each of us individually to exit the generative cause, i.e., the globalised economy. But by thinking rationally and within the Greek framework, we can avoid reinforcing it thoughtlessly. We should prefer local products, products of small producers and Greek processing (where available). We must reduce consumption of fast-fashion products and overly cheap imports, because these presuppose exploitation. This is not moralising but a conscious cost-based choice.

If you are an employer, you cannot pay migrants less for the same work.

Justice must be in relationships, not in words. You cannot speak of law and order while living off undeclared labour; that is self-defeating. Nor can you speak of humanitarianism while enjoying the products of exploitation (from iPhones etc. to sports shoes).

We must not engage in cheap rhetoric of the “everyone out” or “everyone in” type.

If you denounce (whether from the “right” or the “left”), remember to ask yourself: do I benefit from what I denounce?