

Open Borders as Ultra-Effective Altruism

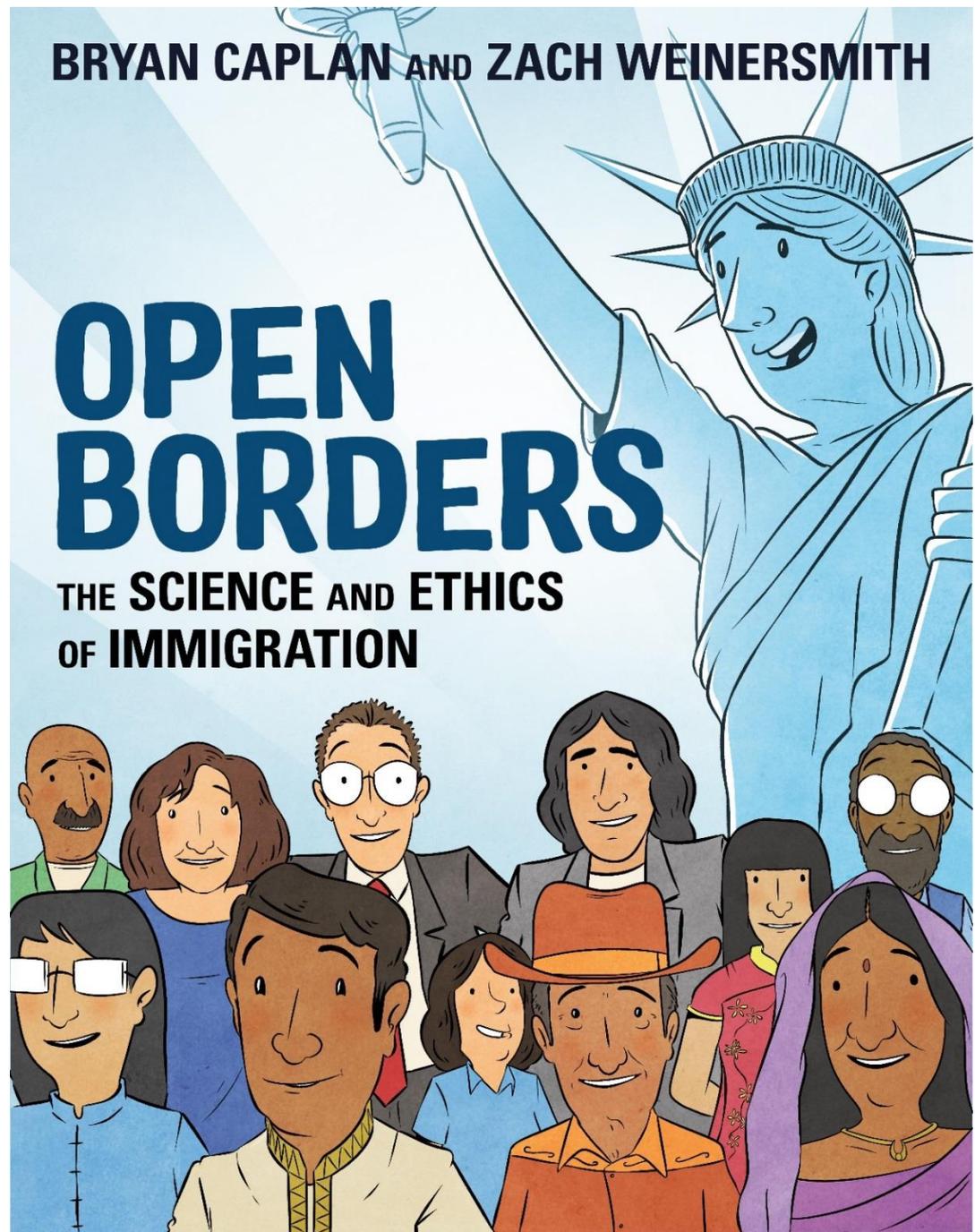
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End Poverty the Easy Way

- Absolute poverty is terrible.
- Almost all absolute poverty exists outside the First World.
- When absolutely poor people move to the First World, they almost always escape absolute poverty *immediately*.
- How? Normally, by getting a “low-skilled” job.
 - A Haitian who earns \$5 a day in Haiti can easily earn \$75 a day in Miami.
- Immigrants from poor countries earn moderately less than natives, but *vastly* more than they did back home.

So Why Does Poverty Persist?

- If migration lets almost any able-bodied adult escape absolute poverty, why is there still so much poverty?
- “They don’t want to move”?
 - Global surveys say over a billion want out.
- “Transportation costs”?
 - A rounding error – and don’t forget borrowing.
- So why not?
 - Because all First World countries strictly regulate immigration – especially of low-skilled workers!
- How can we be sure?
 - Black market prices
 - Immigration lottery

The Great EA Opportunity?

- This points to an incredible EA opportunity: free immigration, a.k.a. *open borders*.
 - Huge demonstrable gain.
 - No donation required.
- Big worry: Fallacy of Composition
 - Migration works great for one migrant, but can it work for hundreds of millions? Billions?
- Good EA news: Yes it can.
 - How? Open borders solves poverty not by zero-sum redistribution, but by *drastically increasing global production*.

The Logic of Open Borders

- People migrate to earn more, but why do such opportunities exist?
 - Because *productivity* is higher in some places than others.
- Can productivity really be so different in different countries? Definitely.
- Immigration restrictions' chief point is to stop labor from moving to higher-productivity places.
- Scrap the laws, and you stop missing this great opportunity.

The Empirics of Open Borders

- How big is the missed opportunity?
- Standard estimate:
Open borders would *double* GWP.
 - GWP = Gross WORLD Product!
- How is this possible?
 - Large gain per person
 - Large number of would-be migrants
 - Large * Large = Massive
 - “Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk”

Table 1

Efficiency Gain from Elimination of International Barriers
(percent of world GDP)

All policy barriers to merchandise trade

1.8	Goldin, Knudsen, and van der Mensbrugge (1993)
4.1	Dessus, Fukasaku, and Safadi (1999) ^a
0.9	Anderson, Francois, Hertel, Hoekman, and Martin (2000)
1.2	World Bank (2001)
2.8	World Bank (2001) ^a
0.7	Anderson and Martin (2005)
0.3	Hertel and Keeney (2006, table 2.9)

All barriers to capital flows

1.7	Gourinchas and Jeanne (2006) ^b
0.1	Caselli and Feyrer (2007)

All barriers to labor mobility

147.3	Hamilton and Whalley (1984, table 4, row 2) ^c
96.5	Moses and Letnes (2004, table 5, row 4) ^c
67	Iregui (2005, table 10.3) ^{c,d}
122	Klein and Ventura (2007, table 3) ^e

Niagara Falls Economics

- Most people who analyze immigration policy ignore almost all of these foregone gains.
 - Even pro-immigration writers normally focus on high-skilled immigration.
- Rare analysts who acknowledge these gains, however, usually dismiss them by insisting that “almost all” the gains go to immigrants.
- This is strange, because big increases in production almost always end up being *broadly* beneficial.
 - Uber, internet, vaccines, tractors, etc.
- Since immigration restrictions drastically reduce global production, they’re almost surely impoverishing us, too.
 - Trickle-down? No, Niagara Falls.



IT'S
NIAGARA FALLS
ECONOMICS!

A large speech bubble is positioned in the middle of the scene, containing the text: "IT'S NIAGARA FALLS ECONOMICS!". The man in the barrel is shown in the foreground, floating in the turbulent blue water of the falls, looking back over his shoulder with a shocked expression.



Swamping?

- Borjas (2014, 2015) correctly points out that billions have to move to realize all these gains. He infers:
 - Either estimates are way too high because too few will come...
 - Or estimates are way too high because sudden movement on this scale will totally disrupt society.
- But Collier's (2013) work on "diaspora dynamics" implicitly answers this critique.
 - Actual migration begins slowly, then snowballs. So while billions will ultimately come, we have decades to adjust.
 - The case of open borders with Puerto Rico.

TABLE 1-1. Puerto Rico's Net Emigration, 1900–2000

Years	Net Number of Out-Migrants
1900–1910	2,000
1910–1920	11,000
1920–1930	42,000
1930–1940	18,000
1940–1950	151,000
1950–1960	470,000
1960–1970	214,000
1970–1980	65,817
1980–1990	116,571
1990–2000	130,185

Note: Net emigration is the difference between in-migrants and out-migrants.

Source: Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz and Carlos E. Santiago, *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 45; with data for 1990–2000 added from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing*, PHC-T-22.

So Why Not?

- Estimates of massive economic gains rarely change people's minds about immigration. Why not?
- People who know the numbers rarely challenge the effect on global production. Instead, they point to offsetting concerns.
 - Protecting native taxpayers.
 - Protecting native culture.
 - Protecting native liberty.
 - Protecting the global environment.
- How weighty are these objections?
- For numerate EAs, not very.
 - \$1T - \$1B \approx \$1T
 - Keyhole solutions!

A Match Made in Heaven

- *Ineffective* altruists like symbolism and sacrifice.
 - Look at Vandy’s inane Covid policies.
- Effective Altruists like substance and savings.
 - Open Borders delivers both on a massive scale.
- EAs like adjusting for probabilities.
 - Unlike speculation about “catastrophic risk” avoidance, the gains of open borders are *demonstrable*.
- EAs don’t accept evils because they’re familiar.
 - Such as: death.
- Challenge: Name *any* cause that deserves EA support more than open borders!

