Part 3

Free Trade and Migrations

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A Note on Hoppe’s “Open Borders” Critics

Jeff Deist

Jeff Deist is former President of the Mises Institute and currently general counsel for Monetary Metals.

Hoppephobia, a disorder first identified by Murray Rothbard way back in 1990, is characterized by irrational and emotional outbursts directed against Hans-Hermann Hoppe and his work.[[1]](#footnote-1) Left untreated, it can last decades and render its sufferers intellectually impotent.

Today, the most virulent form of Hoppephobia is found among advocates of completely unrestricted immigration—especially among self-styled classical liberals who insist on a “right to travel” or “freedom of movement” for all people, everywhere, all the time.

These immigration advocates elevate “open borders” to an animating principle of libertarianism. In their telling, national borders are imaginary lines. Nations themselves are outdated historical constructs. All immigration restrictions are per se illiberal; after all, why should the random circumstances of one’s birth have any effect on legal rights or geographical advantages? And there are no downsides, because immigrants generate unqualified benefits, economic and otherwise, for their new host nations. Just like free trade, free movement of people simply directs human capital toward its most productive uses.

Thus, we are compelled to contemplate a very strange liberalism: one where states exists but state borders do not; where citizenship flows from physical presence; where state services and state property (so called) are equally available to all comers; where humans are likened to corporeal goods; and where negative externalities are rendered inapplicable.

Anyone in the libertarian sphere who raises concerns about mass immigration—about bringing millions of poor people from global South to North, from Third World to First—is quickly labeled a nativist. Questions about tradeoffs, in terms of crime, employment, welfare, or housing, are dismissed as evidence of a fearful mindset unwilling to embrace new arrivals and adapt to change. Economic growth is paramount, rather than amorphous worries about immigrants’ cultural, political, economic, linguistic, religious, or ethnic compatibility.

Most of all, this narrative insists that immigration restrictionists are not well-intentioned people who simply hold a different opinion. On the contrary, they are provincial xenophobes, racists, nativists, and even fascists. They resent the demographic inevitability of white minority status in America and Europe, and the decline of Christian dominance across a rapidly secularizing West. They are, in effect, bad faith actors with bad motivations.

Just ask Dr. Hoppe, who has been on the receiving end of this abuse!

But why should this be? Why must libertarians accept open borders as a litmus test or default position? Should we not consider more deeply how immigration might work in an absolutely free society, which is to say a fully private society? Or how it should work under present conditions, however imperfect? Is this argument really about libertarian principle, and nothing more?

Dr. Hoppe has some thoughts. For starters, he is a well-known critic both of open borders and the resulting “forced integration.” His seminal 1998 article, “The Case for Free Trade and Restricted Immigration”[[2]](#footnote-2) was a thoroughgoing refutation of the faulty analogy between the free trade of goods between countries and the free movement of people across national borders. He elaborated at length on these topics in his landmark 2001 manifesto, *Democracy: The God that Failed*.[[3]](#footnote-3) With chapters entitled “On Free Immigration and Forced Integration” and “On Free Trade and Restricted Immigration,” Dr. Hoppe cemented his reputation as an advocate for conditional, contractual immigration.

He also cemented his reputation as the bête noire of the open borders chorus.

To be clear, Hoppe is an avowed anarcho-capitalist who would prefer nothing less than to privatize all state property and fundamentally recast the immigration issue as a matter of private property rights. His now infamous vision for “covenant communities,” which are truly private and exclusionary, is closer to the city-states or principalities of 19th century Europe than the modern social democracies favored by DC libertarians. And so Dr. Hoppe became an avatar for the populist libertarian Right that is deeply antistate but views mass immigration as a statist political project.

From the works cited above, along with various speeches he has presented over the years at conferences and his annual salon in Bodrum, Turkey, we can attempt to summarize Dr. Hoppe’s views on immigration[[4]](#footnote-4) and borders as follows:

* Immigration involves tradeoffs, like any other political or economic policy. It is not somehow an unmitigated benefit for the receiving nation.
* No truly libertarian approach to immigration is possible when states at all levels own (i.e., control) vast amounts of “public” land, including coastlines and ports, highways, airports, roads, military installations, parks, and common spaces. Public property is an invalid concept under any libertarian worldview, but present-day reality is vastly different.
* We can reject the notion that public property should be viewed as “unowned.” Given the reality of public property, state agents should at least function as trustees or stewards of that property on behalf of the taxpayers who fund it. Immigrants do not have the same claim to use of such public property because they were not forcibly required to pay for it via the host country’s taxes, borrowing, or inflation.
* There are no facile answers under libertarian principles to the present question: how should government agents control access to public property? Real economic calculation is impossible when the state controls resources, and “non-economic” considerations are impossibly subjective.
* “Open borders,” where states take no steps to limit entry, is a form of state action. It is a conscious policy choice.
* “Welfare,” in all forms of taxpayer-provided goods and services, provides perverse incentives for immigrants. Democratic voting and proportional representation provide perverse incentives for politicians to import immigrants for political gain.
* The well-being of a nation or society is necessarily subjective. It is not measured by GDP or economic aggregates. But when considering economic wealth, what matters is average or per capita wealth in an area, not the total economic output.
* Goods are not people. Goods are inanimate. Imported goods are “invited” by whomever bears the cost or economic risk of demand for such goods. Individuals, by contrast, have will, volition, and necessarily take actions—good or bad—wherever they are. We should distinguish between and sever the free trade of goods from open immigration, both conceptually and in terms of policy.
* Immigration should be regulated under a “full cost principle,” which simply means contractual invitation and sponsorship by an individual or entity in the host nation. In Hoppe’s words, “All migration would be by invitation and invariably the full cost principle would apply. Either the inviting host or the invited guest or both jointly would have to pay the full cost associated with the guest’s presence. No cost could be shifted and externalized onto third parties, and the inviter and/or invitee would be held liable for any and all damage resulting from the invitation to the property of others.” Sponsorship is particularly important to deter and compensate for criminality or welfarism among new immigrants.
* Conditional free immigration, applying the full-cost sponsorship principle, is far more liberal, more humane, and more just than the current systems employed across the West. It also would remove long waiting time for state-sanctioned entry or residency. Sponsors could include family, employers, religious groups, civic and social groups, and for-profit sponsorship bond issuers.

Ultimately, it is state ownership (read: control) of land and resources that renders “open borders” a political mess. This applies to all states, everywhere, all the time. We cannot pretend that privatization is just around the corner. We are not required to imagine states will give up their expansive public spaces, economic interventions, and baleful welfare machinations anytime soon—we may advocate for a better approach here and now. We can propose that state agents with de facto control over government property manage such property as private owners would—preserving capital rather than depleting it and affording its primary use to the taxpayers who funded it.

Open borders is a policy, not a principle. “Freedom of movement” is a slight of hand argument which mistakes politics for natural law and confuses the right to leave a place with an imagined right to enter   
a place. It fails to recognize the conflicting right of people to use collective arrangements to associate—or not associate—with others. The conscious and designed importation of desperately poor dependents into the US and Europe for naked political gain is not somehow *incidental* to deontological arguments for open immigration, but rather clearly demonstrate those arguments are not about principle at all. The consequences *are* the policy. Today’s immigration into Western countries is in fact not a market phenomenon at all, but rather the direct result of government programs designed to radically change those countries.

Thankfully, Hoppephobia today remains isolated and largely harmless. It survives primarily among a small but noisy cadre of left libertarians, cosseted academics, and Hayekian think tankers who orbit hopefully at the edge of Beltway or Brussels respectability. Some of the latter are quite literally paid to reverse engineer empirical arguments for free immigration policies. But their efforts have done little to stem Dr. Hoppe’s growing popularity, especially among dispirited young people in search of political and economic models beyond milquetoast neoliberalism. The *luftmensch* libertarians, as Rothbard called them, may insist on appending “open borders” to their program. but Hoppe’s contractual immigration program remains rooted in private property. The cries of “Statist” and “Bordertarian” must fall on deaf ears.

As always, Professor Hoppe takes his critics in stride. Even as they loudly proclaim their undying enmity for his work, he continues his efforts to bring modern libertarianism kicking and screaming into alignment with fundamental reality and human nature. Immigration is at the fore of this Hoppean realignment. Not all cultures are equal, human beings are not fungible widgets, and the well-being of any nation or society is subjective. Importing millions of poor immigrants into western welfare states is not the path to liberty or prosperity. Everyone, in effect, wants to live in a good neighborhood—and we can expand that natural impulse outward, in concentric circles, from the most local village to the broader society. We all naturally want to live among good, hardworking, productive, decent people. Markets, in the form of true private capital and property, would reflect this. So should immigration policy.

Immigration sponsorship, applying a full-cost framework as elaborated by Dr. Hoppe, is the immediate, humane, and just way to deal with the inevitable conflicts and tradeoffs surrounding migration into wealthy countries. It comports with the political reality facing the West. Most of all, it presents the best approximation of private property stewardship we can hope for in a world of state depredations.

Hoppephobes need not fear it.

1. See Murray N. Rothbard, “Hoppephobia,” *Liberty* 3, no. 4 (March 1990; https://www.lewrockwell.com/2014/10/murray-n-rothbard/hoppephobia/): 11–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hans-Hermann Hoppe, “The Case for Free Trade and Restricted Immigration,” in *The Great Fiction: Property, Economy, Society, and the Politics of Decline*, Second Expanded Edition (Mises Institute, 2021; www.hanshoppe.com/tgf). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Democracy: The God that Failed (Transaction, 2001; www.hanshoppe.com/democracy). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Jeff Deist, “Immigration Roundtable: Hans-Hermann Hoppe,” *Mises.org* (Sep. 7, 2018; https://mises.org/immigration-roundtable/immigration-roundtable-hans-hermann-hoppe). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)