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The Moral Anthropology of International Borders

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Introduction

The policies and practices found at international borders result from a tangled and often conflicting variety of normative and pragmatic factors. In this essay we work to clarify the moral status of international borders and discuss the kinds of moral reasoning and related actions that people engage in relative to borders. While there are many different activities and thus moral issues at borders, we focus on the important topic of migration, due to the existence of a well-defined debate in moral philosophy and the wealth of anthropological evidence on the topic. We examine two common, and also absolute, moral positions held about cross-border migration, national sovereignty and moral universalism, and then we explore that presence of an alternative found in everyday border practices of border crossing and connections. From this, we develop the view that the current system of migration from poor to prosperous countries creates new

kinds of relationships between people and thereby involves new patterns of moral obligation. A proper understanding of these obligations requires detailed empirical study of the practices that constitute international borders and sensitivity to historical developments that gave rise to those practices.

In one sense, it is obvious that empirically observed features of borders have direct relevance for moral reflection on the border. Since one's moral obligations are dependent on the relationships that one has, an improved understanding of these relationships improves our moral judgment with respect to specific decisions. Anthropological and other social scientific research shed light on the moral status of international borders in at least two important ways. First, by helping us to understand precisely what morally relevant relationships we are involved in and second, by exposing the existing practices of moral reasoning in relevant agents and communities. Our view is that this understanding should make us more directly responsive to our duties with respect to international borders. While our empirical analysis is restricted to a study of the US-Mexico border we believe that some general implications can be drawn for understanding the moral status of international borders more broadly.

We begin with a brief introduction of the existing literature on borders and migration in moral and political philosophy before turning to the social scientific evidence concerning views of the moral status of the border. After summarizing the world literature on borders, we offer a useful distinction between the empirical border and the conceptualized "border," closely aligned with another distinction between views of and actions toward borders from a distance versus from close up. We elaborate on these two distinctions by surveying the literature on moral approaches to borders by interior dwellers, activists drawn toward the border, and established

border dwellers. We conclude by stating our own moral analysis of international migration and borders.

A Dilemma at the Heart of Liberal Democracy: Moral and Political Philosophers on International Borders

Although our inquiry centers on anthropology and related social sciences, it is helpful to survey the main positions in moral and political philosophy, so as not to reinvent the wheel, and also because they partially capture aspects of moral thinking and practice in the material examined by anthropologists.

Territorially-bounded geographical spaces in which people can legitimately exercise political agency have long been understood as a condition for the possibility of modern citizenship. However, transnational migration has posed a basic challenge to the idea of citizenship as a non-arbitrary and morally legitimate institution. Most obviously, the presence of migrants is a challenge for egalitarian conceptions of citizenship and civil rights insofar as migrants are persons within the territory of some community who are to some extent or another not permitted to participate in the political decisions of that community. Seyla Benhabib aptly describes the philosophical problem as follows: "From a philosophical point of view, transnational migrations bring to the fore the constitutive dilemma at the heart of liberal democracies: between sovereign self-determination claims on the one hand and adherence to universal human rights principles on the other." (2004: 2)

Migrants have a more pressing stake in the future of their host countries than tourists or other temporary visitors. However, like tourists and other aliens, migrants are excluded, to

varying degrees, from participation in political decision making. The exclusion of migrants happens in virtue of their being born beyond the territorial boundaries of the state or by virtue of not having the specified kind of putative co-ethnic or familial relation to existing citizens. Thus, the border plays a central role in the system of exclusion and self-determination that Benhabib identifies as the constitutive dilemma at the heart of liberal democracy. While not logically bound to political self-determination, and perhaps more variable for that reason, borders also affect various legal statuses, rights, and claims to societally distributed resources.

For philosophers who adopt some version of cosmopolitanism, the arbitrariness of international borders undermines their role in legitimizing exclusion. The arbitrariness of the border could be tolerated to some extent insofar as nation states were understood by analogy with persons. The border of a nation-state is like the boundaries of a human person. Just as persons have the right to maintain their bodily integrity, states have the right to protect the integrity of their borders as they see fit. Charles Beitz (1979) was one of the first to challenge the view that states have a similar moral standing to persons and that their autonomy trumped, for example, considerations of the universality of human rights, etc. Later, Joseph Carens (1987) extended the argument from the moral arbitrariness of borders to the view that we are obligated to have a system of open borders. Carens and others have argued that freedom of movement is a more significant right than the right of a political community to exclude outsiders. More recently, Benhabib (2004) and other cosmopolitans have argued against strict exclusion of migrants from membership in political communities and more specifically for a right to citizenship for aliens who have fulfilled certain conditions.

Some philosophers have argued that international borders are morally arbitrary constructions and that any theoretical position that recognizes the equal moral worth of human

beings is unable to provide a moral justification for excluding people from the rights associated with citizenship. However, this overstates the case for cosmopolitanism by taking it to an extreme. So, for example, Cara Nine (2008) has argued for a Lockean defense of international borders, arguing that political communities have the right to exclude others from access their resources. Open border policies, on her view, undermine the possibility for community self-determination. Her argument emphasizes the importance of sovereign self-determination in contrast with arguments for cosmopolitanism that emphasize universal human rights. Arguments like Nine's derive from assumptions concerning the effects of immigrants on the existing capacity for self-determination among natives. Whether it is the case whether the rights of native populations are overridden in any significant way by a growing population of immigrants is, at least partly, an empirical question; indeed, perhaps the effects of bonds brought about by migration actually strengthen real capabilities for self-determination. Establishing the precise nature in which a member of the native population is harmed by arrival of an immigrant might involve, for example, an understanding of the economic impact of migration, the advantages (if any) conferred on natives in a society that has a mix of citizens and immigrants, etc. The philosophical arguments concerning borders have, perhaps of necessity, been abstract and not directly engaged with the kind of empirical data which would settle such questions. Nevertheless, as we shall see, anthropological and social scientific study of borders is directly attuned to what Benhabib called the dilemma at the heart of liberal democracy.

The philosophical debate concerning the moral status of borders exhibits a variety of sophisticated variations on cosmopolitanism and sovereigntism. These two poles form relatively clean conceptual opposites in the philosophical literature. Naturally, matters are not so simple in the daily lives of border people. Pure cosmopolitanism and pure sovereigntism are inconsistent

with current arrangements and practices around the U.S. Mexico border. Given that agents cannot act according to pure versions of sovereigntism or cosmopolitanism, their role in moral reasoning around decision-making is a complicated matter. As we will see, a kind of folk cosmopolitanism and folk sovereigntism are often present and in tension simultaneously. Also, as actors navigate an existing political, economic, and historical reality, we note a difference between moral agency with respect to the actual border and views and policies that are organized around the idea of *the border*. Talk of *the border* often follows commitments to clear moral principles of one kind or another. By contrast, moral agency and decision making with respect to the actual border responds to complex morally binding systems of obligations and relationships. Understanding these relationships is only possible through careful empirical examination; it is not a matter that can be settled *a priori*.

Borders, the U.S.-Mexico border, and *The Border*

International borders play a variety of roles in political, economic, and social life. The multivalent quality of borders means that for some, borders are becoming more rigid and salient, while others are finding them more permeable and less important. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, helped to create a U.S.-Mexico border that is easier to traverse for privileged travelers, such as transnational managers, as well as for investments and commodities; while at the same time--and probably for connected reasons--it became harder to cross for Mexican workers and their families (Heyman 1999a, Nevins 2010). People relate to borders, practically and morally, in highly unequal ways. Yet couching the matter in terms of

wealthy and poor people is an oversimplification, given the wide variety of nationality, immigration statuses, and life experiences in both countries relative to the border.

Likewise, there are multiple registers for the moral status of the border, depending on just which specific border-crossing practice is involved. The anthropology of the morality of borders thus will differ depending on whether the matter at hand is drug smuggling (Campbell 2009), used clothing smuggling (Gauthier 2007), cooperative management of a binational baseball team (Klein 2007), shopping for consumer goods (Heyman 1997), and so forth. The distinction made by Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) between legal/illegal and legitimate/illegitimate is useful in untangling views of multiple border phenomena. Smuggling of certain consumer goods (e.g., fruits and vegetables or unprescribed medicines to the U.S. and household electronics and used clothing to Mexico) is illegal--and people are arrested or fined for it--but it is widely practiced and morally accepted by most borderlanders. Even human and drug smuggling are legitimate, in certain ways and in certain circles (Campbell 2009, Spener 2009). There is no one morality of borders, but rather a plural set of activities, roles, statuses, and values.

Much of this complexity is local to border sites, reflecting the varied and deep ways that geographic proximity encourages intensity and diversity of border crossing practices. It is not only the actual fact of crossing boundaries but a learned borderlander perspective that tends to recognize, both in personal experience and in the experience of nearby others, a certain flexibility, diversity, ambiguity, subtlety, and depth to moral issues involved in border life (Donnan and Wilson 1999). This proximal view contrasts with a commonly found distant one of borders as essentially simple. In this situation, people who live or work far from the border and have little or no direct contact with it, address it morally as an idea--often, a simple, unambiguous one--rather than a messy and quotidian site of experiences and activities.

This proximate/distant contrast overlaps with--but is not identical to--a distinction between the border as a practice and the border as a symbol. Border practices are diverse, as illustrated just above, and border settings also are diverse. An unauthorized laborer, violating a temporary border shopping card to clean houses in El Paso, is likely to be looked on as more licit by borderlanders than an unauthorized migrant in a remote desert setting, but both are viewed with more suspicion than a wealthy Mexican flying through the Houston airport. As a result, practices are morally plural and often shaded.

By contrast, the border as a symbol (*the border*) is singular and unified (at least, relatively so). In this view, border crossings are either legal and right or illegal and wrong. Or more strongly--in symbolic reasoning above and beyond formal legalism--the inside of a border is good and safe, the exterior bad and threatening. The symbolic view still entails major differences of moral evaluation (e.g., the border may either symbolize sovereignty or universal human rights) but it leaves less space for recognition of diversity of persons and activities, and ambiguity and subtlety of moral issues on the ground. It is more reified, in keeping with the simplification process of state logic (Scott 1998). *The border* operates as a powerfully evocative, highly condensed, singular symbol, while border crossing experiences and persons act and think in morally diverse ways.[i]

Border symbolism is more prominent at a distance from actual international borders. Nevertheless, border symbolism exists in border regions also. Furthermore, the practice/symbolization process is interconnected. Border symbolism, we will argue, drives U.S. boundary enforcement operations. In turn, this creates practices that are enacted at immediate border sites, by a socially significant group, central government employees. Distant border symbolism also forms a point of reference and response by local borderlanders, either using such

symbols in their own moral discourses and practices, or reacting against what they see as oversimplification and misunderstandings by interior dwellers, forming a moral resistance to imposed judgments and policies.

In exploring these topics, it is necessary to reduce the range of a diverse and sprawling subject matter, by focusing on migration, both legal and unauthorized, across the U.S.-Mexico border. This topic is usefully representative of a wider range of issues and places. It illustrates widespread concerns in the border literature with "subversive economies" vis-a-vis politics, sovereignty, legality, and legitimacy (Donnan and Wilson 1999), for example. Likewise, the U.S.-Mexico case is increasingly convergent with other world regions, such as Europe's "Schengenland" zone of free internal movement and heavily controlled external entry (Andreas and Snyder 2000), where there is a burgeoning anthropological literature on unauthorized migrants, detainees, and asylum applicants (Fassin 2001, 2005, Fassin and d'Halluin 2005, Makaremi 2009, Richard and Fischer 2008).

Likewise, our key theme at the U.S.-Mexico border of differences in moral evaluation between borderlanders and interior dwellers is paralleled throughout the world, where borderlanders sometimes identify more with the border region than the core, and more generally by borderlanders' incomplete regard for national institutions, rules, and categorizations (Flynn 1997, Ishikawa 2010, Wilson and Donnan 1998 but see Grimson and Vila 2002). Similarly worldwide is the use of borders as symbols of moral distinction and us versus them comparison (Donnan and Wilson 1999). Many, though not all, border moral phenomena are captured in our case material.[ii]

We proceed in the subsequent sections first by characterizing some moral attitudes and practices among distant social groups, then groups that mix the two moral and literal geographies, and finally border-near groups. We try to use cases where there is anthropological research, but also do include some groups of analytical interest, but where such material is missing. We conclude by suggesting that cross-border practices, including migration, challenge narrow definitions of membership in favor of more complex, multi-stranded notions of relationship and membership in the contemporary world. This is a different sort of pro-migrant moral stance than universalism, and is something that rises out of the anthropological engagement with ideas and practices on the ground.

Moral Views of the U.S.-Mexico Border From a Distance

Untangling the various interior perspectives on the U.S.-Mexico border is difficult. The anthropological source material is uneven, emphasizing arm's length analyses of commodified discourses (media and political), and poorly expressed in ethnographic case studies. While it would be desirable to begin with a thick description from fieldwork, we must begin with studies of media representations.

Leo Chavez (2001) analyzes U.S. magazine covers addressing the topic of immigration, and relies similarly on media discourse evidence in a more general book of essays (2008; also see Santa Ana 2002). Chavez finds that images of immigration in general include positive as well as fearful evaluations, but that images of the U.S.-Mexico border find mainly threats, such as long columns of Mexican-appearing male figures penetrating like arrows into the U.S., crowds of impoverished families surging northward (emphasizing the reproductive symbol of women

with children), and the border as a fractured or chaotic image. Chavez also suggested, and Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga (2010) confirm, that visual media images represent the border as empty, remote, and inhuman terrain, with lonely enforcers and surreptitious violators, whereas local borderlanders experience and envision it as a richly inhabited, diverse, and often urbanized, landscape.

Interwoven with those themes is a "security" discourse about borders, especially the Mexican border: that is, borders are prime sites for threats to security to come in from outside, and thus key locations for defeating these threats (Heyman 2008; on securitization discourse and migration in general, see Huysmans 2006). While there are indeed, internationally and domestically, genuine human security threats, their moral framing in the United States has displaced them away from their empirical sites of occurrence (e.g., international airports) and toward working class Latino migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as well as vague Muslim figures of fear (Heyman and Ackleson 2009).

Mary Douglas's (1966) classic work on the symbolism of external boundaries is clearly at play. External boundaries of many kinds (bodies, homes, nation-states, etc.) represent who and what are understood to belong inside versus outside. But items (people, substances, ideas and symbols) that cross boundaries are unusual in some way, either symbolically powerful or dangerous, or both. Impurity and pollution are conceptualized as elements belonging properly to one side of a symbolic-spatial boundary. Having crossed over to the other side, they violate the proper categorical order. By extension, border policies (especially barriers, such as walls) represent protective entities between external unknowns (heavily clothed in ideas of risk) and internal knowns (equally associated with safety).

External boundary symbolism reinforces extremes in moral thought: most notably, the border is a strong symbol of the outer limits of membership, citizenship versus outsiders, of safety inside a womb-like arrangement. Likewise, the bounded nation-state putatively equates territory with social membership. But the simplifying logic of border symbolism can be reversed; smaller constituencies see borders as symbolic gateways outward, related to strong feelings of universalism (as discussed below). While the application of a Douglas-based analysis to contemporary borders is evident (see Chavez 2008, Heyman 2008), like all symbolism, it has many potential valences. Border could be unusual sources of sacredness and power, not just pollution and risk. Hence, how and why contemporary border symbolism has its particular signifiers, signifieds, and moral weightings remains to be explained.

As provocative as discursive analyses have been, they have decoded isolated representations (e.g., Chavez's magazine covers), and there is a notable lack of ethnography directed toward the production and reception of such discourses (Heyman 2001), which is needed to understand active moralizing processes (on the model of Cohen's [1980] brilliant work on "folk devils and moral panic," which clearly is applicable to borders). Beyond the media, there is little ethnographic study of a whole series of sectors involved in framing discourses and moral evaluations of the border: politicians, business organizations, labor unions, large funders, religious hierarchies, and national level advocacy organizations. Of course, we have reams of their public products (see Nevins 2010); what is missing is ethnographic study of the processes within and between these sectors (a work containing fragments of such information involving the border wall is Maril 2011). The wider point is moral attitudes from a distance do not just exist as such, but are produced, reproduced, challenged, and transformed.

The moral attitudes about borders of interior U.S. and Mexican populations are in the main unstudied. The Mexican population in general probably regards its northern border as essentially illegitimate (stolen territory) and U.S. border enforcement as unjust and hypocritical (with respect to U.S. use of migrant labor). Although Heyman's fieldwork was not systematically on this topic, he observed a number of instances that support this generalization; for one case, see Heyman 1999b: 304). But Pablo Vila (2000) also found that Mexicans view the border positively as a stepping stone toward U.S. consumerism and modernity (their attitudes may have changed more recently due to the frustrating and saddening internal Mexican violence concentrated, in part, in the cities of its northern border). Attitudes of actual migrants are discussed below.

Views among U.S. interior dwellers are equally unstudied, except for scattered public opinion polling data. Furthermore, this is a heterogeneous set of people. They vary geographically, including by region, size of community, and the specific impacts of migration locally; and of course there are many axes of social diversity. Attitudes of settled U.S. descendents of Latin American immigrants, for example, will differ from African Americans, and from Euro-Americans of various degrees of proximity/distance to the immigrant experience. Class differentiation is also important, ranging from employers of migrants to labor organizers, and including people with less explicit class commitments, but whose social placements affect views of cross-border migrants. Finally, people vary crucially by personal moral commitments, which comes out later when we look at the Minutemen and pro-migrant religious activists.

These ranges of variation have been addressed to some extent in the burgeoning--if still small and mostly recent--ethnographic literature on local encounters between host populations and new immigrants (e.g., Chapa and Millard 2004, Lamphere 1992, Massey 2008, Zúñiga and

Hernández-León 2005). This literature does not, however, describe the ways that these local moral debates affect attitudes toward the border, even though the broader policy analysis literature and public opinion literature suggests that such displacements are important (see Gilot 2007, Nevins 2010, Segovia and Defever 2011).

Interior site case studies do offer provocative hints about how moral displacements of local conflicts to border policy occur. Host populations focus on groups with whom they have reduced contact outside of the commodity relation (employment, and that is often indirect [purchase of services from a local business that in turn uses migrant labor]). Often, then, the focus is on large groups of single male laborers, or to a lesser but still important extent, families of such laborers. This is by contrast with more ambivalent and sometimes favorable attitudes to individuals and families who have established longer-term residence and have to some extent climbed the occupational status and income hierarchies. The former migrants (single males, new families, occupationally lower groups) in fact may be crucial to the local economy, but they are more easily seen socially as "others," as polluting outsiders let in by a failed border. This is supported by Inda's (2006) non-ethnographic, discourse analysis of Latino migrants as anti-social beings in the U.S. post-social formation.

In the current U.S. racial hierarchy, Latino migrants are the most stigmatized group in reports of local immigrant-host relations. This reduces the diversity of Latino migration, both source countries and legal statuses, into an image of illegal Mexican aliens (as seen in several instances of violent attacks on non-Mexicans by persons shouting anti-Mexican phrases). Chavez (2008) refers to this as the "Latino Threat Narrative." It has roots in enduring U.S. imperialist relations with Mexico, defending the symbolism of domination (involving the border, of course), as well as skin color racism. It also draws on the salience of Mexicans as the largest

and thus most representative group of new immigrants to the United States. The "border" then becomes a dominant trope in the United States for new Latin American migration, and migration issues in general.

Chavez (2008: 10-15) convincingly argues that border discourses address membership: who is contained inside, and who is outside; who is a citizen (and in what senses: legal, practical, cultural, and so forth); what is a national identity and what is not; and who is and should be a member of the collectivity. The ethnographic literature see the these sort of moral membership debates as crucial in local settings in the interior, such as schools, housing codes, police stops, and so forth, but also as made ambiguous by the dense web of interactions between migrants and hosts. The border then, imagined at a distance, is a crucial simplifying move, giving "order" to ambiguous membership. In our conclusion, we will suggest that such on-going relations cut across the border as well, and that the border is thus equally morally complex, but this not what largely occurs in interior U.S. opinion formation, mass media representations, or political practice.

From Distance to Proximity: Direct Activists

Here, we focus on people (other than agents of the state) who act primarily and directly on their moral convictions about the border: “Minutemen” and border humanitarians (the Minutemen are volunteer, non-official border guards, focusing mainly on unauthorized migrants). Clearly, both groups go beyond symbolic thinking to practical action. But at the same time, the moral reasoning involved is relatively simple and pure: the border is in one case a location threatened by illegitimate invasion of non-members; in the other case, a representation

of illegitimate barriers to universal humanity. They are also ambiguous geographically: many of their members come from the national interior to the border--some do originate in the border region--with the goal of acting at this specific moral site (more humanitarian activists are long term border residents and more Minutemen are outsiders, however).

Accounts of the Minutemen are not ethnographic; they are based on documentary research on key members (e.g., Holthouse 2005), secondary analysis of journalistic accounts (Chavez 2008: 132-151) and an interesting opinion survey of both Minutemen and humanitarian activists (Cabrera and Glavac 2010). The broad patterns are clear, however. They have a strongly felt, highly distilled sense of threat to enclosed membership. The U.S. government has, in their view, failed to protect adequately the territorial boundary, the core entity that delineates and guards this membership from unauthorized claimants. Their degree of racism is debated (in a politically correct society, racism can be displaced onto criticisms of the migrants' lack of legal status), but the Latino threat narrative is certainly present. We have seen these themes in a more diffuse way in the U.S. interior; what is striking in this case is the drive to purist moral rectification, and the entrepreneurial moral volunteerism involved.

There are a number of ethnographic studies of border humanitarian activists, many of whom, though not all, are religiously motivated (Cunningham 1995, Doty 2006, Dunn 2009, Heyman, Morales, and Núñez 2009, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, 2008). Not all of these activists fit the following generalizations; the more pragmatic political wing discussed by Heyman, Morales, and Núñez, in particular, has related values but different moral practices (working with the existing nation-state and border frame). Broadly, though, the activists express and act on a moral skepticism of borders. A telling example is Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2008: 133-69) description of a religious ritual (the "Posada sin Fronteras") protesting against deaths in unauthorized border

crossing. This uses the border precisely as the setting of ritual negation of current migration policies. She terms this "Christian Anti-Borderism"; it could also be termed Christian universalism, with a sacred vision of "the human in God's image" set against the nation-state. Likewise, Doty's study of Humane Borders, a coalition with both religious and secular members, identifies their moral action, providing water to help migrants survive in the desert, as precisely acting against the normalized (and deadly) political-social order. Activists often do not articulate a clean, clear philosophical universalism (some do), but Dunn's study of El Paso, Texas activism in the 1990s identifies a secular human rights universalism that breaks with citizenship viewed as strong but bounded rights.

The Minutemen and humanitarian activists interestingly both hold critical attitudes toward dominant patterns of globalization (Cabrera and Glavac 2010). Both are critical of the North American Free Trade Agreement, for example, and further proposals to create a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. It seems likely that both sides insist on a moral reading of an amoral, power and profit-driven agenda of the dominant political-economic order. That dominant agenda values specific capital, commodities, and people who are free to cross borders, denies the value of others, and ignores alternative visions of either national or global communities. The two groups differ, however, with humanitarians tending to favor free trade agreements with cross-border labor and environmental protections, as well as arrangements for the free(r) mobility of labor, and the Minutemen disapproving of such measures. The Minutemen target the border in order to reinforce national unity and closure; the humanitarians target it in order to move toward globalization of human membership and related rights.

It is striking, in both cases, that the border becomes the physical symbol for moral positions and actions. These issues--migration, free trade, etc.--are, after all, matters of whole societies and indeed transnational orders. The border is merely a passageway; it does not cause them *per se*.[iii] Borders help to delineate relevant entities--in this case, the sovereign territorial state, and its patterns of membership--but the delineation then stands for the totality. This is a problematic simplification of borders and their relation to wider processes and places.[iv]

From Distance to Proximity: Migrants and Enforcers

Long distance unauthorized migrants experience the border crossing as a passage of considerable uncertainty, danger, and expense. They are aware of their categorization in the United States as "illegal" (though they may understand little of the actual laws and penalties), but also as desired by U.S. employers as well as by friends and families. In this context, Sandell (2009, 2010) sensitively elicits migrant and migrant family perspectives. They recognize as an external reality the various categorizations, barriers, and risks, but give this no moral recognition as orderly, right, or meaningful. This is part of a wider sense of alienated subordination to various powers. They view migration as a practical necessity, part of a lifeway centered on crafts of survival;[v] their own local moral orders build on age, gender, kin relations, religion, land, house, and so forth. The practical logic of migration thus impels people into morally incomprehensible and tragic encounters with domination, including border crossing. It seems likely that migrants also view U.S. border and immigration policy as unjust and hypocritical.

Heyman's (2000) ethnography with U.S. border enforcement officers, which explicitly examined their moral understanding, included both people who had grown up in proximity to the

border and people from the U.S. interior who moved to the border region because of this or other jobs. It examines their moral reasoning within a context of enacting public policies driven in part by distant moral frameworks discussed above. Unsurprisingly, he found that bureaucratic legality and orderliness was a central value, which unauthorized migrants violated, but also found a paradoxical identification with the needs of migrants to seek to work in the United States. To counteract this sense of understanding of labor migrants, there also was a strong emphasis on dangerous border crossers (e.g., criminals, drug smugglers). This partly served to comprehend morally the task of sealing the border outside of ports of entry.

Heyman found that otherwise "innocent" (in this specific view) labor and family migrants were seen as human (not dehumanized), but as lower kinds of people. Higher kinds of people were insiders, citizens, among whom border officers counted themselves. Insiders have complex abilities to choose and act, and deserve respect; migrant-outsiders are one-dimensional beings, with simple motivations and moral characters, who upon being apprehended and processed should abandon their volition and obediently follow the imprisonment and expulsion process. While clearly this is a generalization of practical needs on the part of a police force, it also is a moral model for construing the border as a line between members and outsiders, dominant and subordinate.

Borderlanders

Borderlanders are, of course, diverse. First off, it helps to distinguish between Mexican and U.S. side borderlanders, though there is a substantial population of in-between transnationals (Mexican citizens, say, living in the United States, but commuting to Mexico to work, and vice-

versa). This makes generalization more difficult, but supports our main point about the penetrability and ambiguity of the boundary line to borderlanders. Likewise, there are many lines of division: citizenship and legal status, race, class, gender, age, and personal value choices. Our main sources (Heyman 2001b, 2010, Martínez 1994, Vila 2000, 2005) offer a great deal of variegated and subtle information. Here, due to space constraints, we will focus on a few key instances.

Mexican borderlanders, following Vila (2005),[vi] identify themselves by a series of contrasts. They see the border as a positive, providing to them the best of both countries, and as a symbol of progress and modernity. It contrasts with the backwardness of provincial interior Mexico and the political and social arrogance of Mexico City, the center of national power. At the same time, they consider themselves morally superior to Northamericans, as having human values, caring, family bonds, and so forth. They are nationalistic, but also positively disposed to border crossing and hybridity.

U.S. borderlanders Vila splits into several ethno-racial groups, and then splits people of Mexican origin into recent immigrants and generationally deep Mexican Americans. The latter are a useful example for our purposes (besides making up the majority of U.S. border communities except San Diego). They tend to offer negative narratives about present-day Mexico side--it is corrupt, it is poor, it is dirty--mixed with positive narratives about an idealized Mexican past. This draws strong lines at the border, with Mexican Americans self-identifying as U.S. members strongly separate from Mexico. It also resists dominant Anglo American stigmas directed at them as permanent outsiders (the Latino Threat Narrative). At the same time, such Mexican American borderlanders (and some, but fewer, Anglo and African American borderlanders) frequently practice border crossing, including both legal visiting and shopping,

and also petty smuggling. Employment of unauthorized workers (domestics, gardeners, etc.) who commute from Mexico is widespread and morally tolerated by all ethno-racial groups (Heyman 2009). In summary, U.S. evaluations of the border are complex, ambivalent, and situationally variable.

To generalize broadly, borderlanders of both sides tend to have direct personal practices, personal and official/business relationships, and broader sorts of knowledge (i.e., storytelling and listening) that bring the geographic proximity of the boundary to bear on moral evaluation of "the border." The border in this view is, first off, intimate, a part of the self-identity, and this includes to some extent the nation on the other side, even when people are critical of it. Second, the border is recognized as complex, nuanced, and ambiguous: not a single line of inside/outside but many different possible people and acts, with diverse evaluations. Third, there is constant oscillation in borderlands between sympathy with borderlanders of the other side and tension with them, but even statements of tension or difference are not permanent and absolute.

Fourth, borderlanders often feel alienated from the national interior, even when they broadly identify as members of the nation-state. They tend to react against reductive discourses from the interior. Finally, to make a less easily supported generalization, but one that builds on the preceding propositions: borderlanders view crossing and penetration of the boundary as normal, with complex and situational moral evaluations depending on particular circumstances. Borders are reasonable and acceptable--theirs is not moral universalism--but the morally reasonable version of borders is that they are places for interaction and transit, as well as some regulation and closure. Membership is often understood to involve complex, transnational gradations, because people in such circumstances are widely encountered. Membership, then, is not absolute, but interactive and situational.

Concluding Thoughts: From Social Science to Moral Philosophy

Whether in moral philosophy, or in the public discourse of national interiors, borders elicit idealized positions. As we saw in our discussion of debates in moral philosophy, the moral status of borders is understood according to a spectrum from cosmopolitanism to sovereigntism. For cosmopolitans, borders are the object of critique and activist resistance based on a moral universalism, whether religious or secular. For sovereigntists, borders are fundamental to defining membership in delimited political collectivities. However, the practices and ideas of borderlanders, admittedly contradictory and incoherent, point to a different approach to the moral philosophy of borders, especially for migration.

The borderlands setting focuses attention on patterns of activity and interaction that occur because of the practical personal and collective uses of moving, cutting across, and combining differences. At the same time, borderlanders recognize distinctions and conflicts. Our view is that moral decision making with respect to border practices should start with the mutual moral recognition among people that grows out of practical interactions. These practical interactions include work/employment, trade, education, family and friendship relations, and so forth. The relationships into which we enter are often forced upon us by historical accident. However, these relationships impose a set of correlated obligations on their participants. We are members of interactive sets.

While arguably, all humans should have fundamental moral equivalence, in a practical way, the persons to whom we owe moral equivalence are the ones with whom we have real, practical relations. Our decisions with respect to these relations are precisely the site of moral

obligation that forces itself on agents in ordinary life. This is particularly the case in migration, where a real interaction does emerge between the migrant and the host, not just a theoretical global equivalence between people who do not actually have relations.

Our ethical stance, then, turns away from absolutes. It builds on the particularism of the border, but seeks out of that more generalizable guidance. Obviously, a completely eclectic ethics would be open to rationalizations of potentially terrible abuses. Instead, we argue that moral obligations are an emergent feature of the pattern of relationships into which we enter. We build on the border experience, where crossing, interactions, and bonds do and should occur across lines of social differentiation, such as international boundaries. Such relations impose a set of moral obligations that should be recognized, valued, and should entail steps toward inclusion in membership.

Such a view does not entail the rejection of international borders as such. Borders have a place in the contemporary world, as ways of distinguishing and protecting collective activities and regulatory mechanisms. Concretely, for example, borders are helpful places to intercept international gun smugglers or terrorists. However, we resist the move from this sort of modest practical value toward morally arbitrary conceptions of group membership. Instead, discourse on international borders requires the interplay between clear moral principles and careful empirical consideration of transnational relations that have emerged over time. To do that requires thinking on the border between moral philosophy and the social sciences.

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[i] This dichotomy is too simple. There are border-related humanitarian practices in the U.S. interior, such as sanctuary for unauthorized migrants (Cunningham 1995) and border-like enforcement practices as well (Coleman 2007, 2009).

[ii] One theme that is important to the world borders literature that we capture only partially is borders as morally-loaded symbols of lost or stolen lands, sovereignties, and identities, as represented by Ireland (Donnan and Wilson 2010) and Israel/Palestine (Bornstein 2002). Such issues in fact have happened at the U.S.-Mexico border. On the U.S. side of the border, ethnonational irredentism by Mexicans in territories seized by the United States in the Mexican American War of 1845-1848 declined after several attempted revolts at the end of the 19th century failed, in favor of internal U.S. struggles for immigrant and racial civil rights. On the Mexican side of the border, this border moral meaning is still alive, partly because of nationalistic education in schools (of course, U.S. education is equally nationalistic [Rippberger and Staudt 2003]). While this topic informs our understanding of Mexican migrants and borderlander views of the United States, its role at the present is modest.

[iii] The border enforcement system does, however, contribute to the death of unauthorized migrants. Direct action (Doty 2006) addresses this issue.

[iv] We do not view the humanitarians as morally equivalent to the Minutemen, since they hold very different views of and actions toward their fellow humans. We just point out some structurally parallel features of their moral thinking and practice.

[v] This view is supported by David Spener's (2010) interpretation of the migration/smuggling (*coyotaje*) process as *movidas rascuaches*, a difficult term to translate but approximately "creatively absurd manuevers." *Rascuache* points to tacky or strange bricolages done by the poor and powerless. *Movida* is a hustle, a way of surviving and thriving.

[vi] Vila's work was done before the terrible outbreak of widespread violence in Mexican northern border cities. We do not have an account comparable to his for the contemporary situation.

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