

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	The Ethical Obligation of Humanity towards Refugees
Author of the thesis:	Douglas Radcliff
Referee (incl. titles):	Janusz Salamon, Ph.D.

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background: The theoretical components of the thesis are vast, diverse and highly ambitious. While delving into the literature on refugees, Douglas also incorporates the legal, economic, ethical, political and religious aspects of this phenomenon. However, as a result the theoretical grounding of the thesis is wanting in some places, since each of these aspects calls for somewhat different methodology. However, the central argument of the thesis is an ethical one, thus calling for a methodology typical for philosophy, rather than social or empirical sciences, and so the most philosophical chapters (“Philosophical Background – What is a Human?” and “Ideologies”) can be considered methodologically convincing. So while it would have been good to see more theoretical developments in some parts of the work, such as the inclusion of the security debate conducted in the context of the current ‘refugee crisis’, some omissions appear excusable as such burdensome inquiries would make the thesis overly expansive while also not contributing directly to the main argument which is ethical in nature.

2) Contribution: A bulk of this thesis is merely a review of existing debates and literature, and in most cases this would be highly ill-advised for a masters thesis. For instance, the chapters “Statistical Data Analysis,” “Ideologies” and “Legal Debate” are, for the most part, a rehashing of already well-documented points in existing literature. If this was the heart of the thesis, it would be highly problematic. However, due to the central ethical nature of the thesis, it becomes less about what is said than how it is engaged with. The existing literature is not merely laid out, but it is then richly engaged with in some sections. In essence, these debates are laid out to see if they justifiably defend the political positions they are rooted in, which simultaneously requires an in-depth analysis of the arguments already present in the literature. Of course, this also makes the survey of various publications rather dry at times, yet this has allowed Douglas to take a fresh perspective on some otherwise stale issues. For instance, the subsections on political ideologies cover some fundamental principles of the European politics, particularly whether they hold up to empirical evidence and underlying ethical beliefs. While Douglas may not have proven the central argument overall – as this would require a much richer analysis of these issues in a far larger text – he did an excellent job of problematizing the political tactics taken towards refugees on numerous fronts. One notable instance is the discussion on the “Costs and Benefits of Accepting Refugees.” Douglas questions whether refugees pose an increased rise in crime, illustrating some examples (such as Germany) where the statistical data is misleading and even contradicts strongly-held anti-refugee beliefs. At the same time, Douglas concludes that the data at present does not allow to answer definitively the question of the risks of accepting refugees. In other words, Douglas found out that his argument cannot be answered, but he still manages to make it harder for either side to make such claims, thus proving the need for more sufficient research. Thus, I think the biggest contribution this thesis makes is the problematization of refugee literature from many different perspectives, rather than settling the question of the ethical obligation to accept refugees irrespectively of their numbers.

3) Methods: The methods employed by Douglas are rather strategic and innovative. Although the central argument is an ethical one, Douglas sought to find a bridge between the ethics of accepting refugees and the empirical reality of the situation, including statistical research and discursive accounts. To overcome this problem, he employed middle-range theory, which allowed him to take

raw data and discourse in a rather analytical manner in order to convert them to a format whereby he can make his more theory-oriented ethical claims comprehensible. Moreover, he gives sufficient reasons for choosing his specific cases, and he works with a wide variety of sources to avoid data-bias. While this technique can prove overdone and cumbersome at times, such as the sections on the treaties, it is far better to be too thorough and have unsupported methodological conclusions.

4) Literature: Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of the thesis is the vast reference list, which far exceeds the average standard of Master's theses. Yet, like the vastness of the central argument of the thesis, this too has costs and benefits. At times, one would wish to see more engagement with the authors and documents that are cited rather than just an overview of what an author or treaty argues, such as the section on "Political Ideologies" or the "Legal Debate." While Douglas engages with the texts extensively at some points, such as the "Philosophical Background," one would like to see more of this at other points in the thesis (though it is not clear if this would have actually made the central argument any stronger or weaker, so perhaps this is an overly taxing request). At the same time, Douglas was able to relate these various sources and put them into a coherent and structured dialogue throughout the thesis, which is a considerable achievement.

5) Manuscript form: Overall, it is clear that Douglas has put quite a lot of effort into structuring his thesis very carefully. In terms of spacing, it seems like, for what the thesis covers, the sections are proportionally distributed in terms of space rather well. Nevertheless, it still would have been good to see greater engagement with certain texts, such as in the section on treaties. Otherwise, graphs and charts were, for the most part, optimally used, and though some arguments seem to take on a "straw man" quality, such as the sections on political ideologies, this is generally not the case and Douglas gives various scholars and data their due (such as in the section on crime rates). Citations, quotations and data are used consistently and properly. Moreover, Douglas made sure to clearly address all of his hypotheses, whether he was able to fully answer them or not.

Box for the thesis supervisor only. Please characterize the progress in the working out of thesis (e.g. steady and gradual versus discontinuous and abrupt) and the level (intensity) of communication/cooperation with the author:

Douglas has been highly engaged in writing his thesis for over a year now, and he has been actively doing research, revising and adjusting his thesis accordingly. More than simply taking on a great deal of independent work, he was constantly been in communication with the thesis supervisor and the thesis advisor and more than adequately incorporated, or at the very least addressed, any problems or concerns raised by them. While he did take these comments and concerns into consideration, the thesis can be defined as wholly belonging to Douglas. The idea of the thesis came from Douglas, he carried it through, shaping on his own the research, data he gathered or revelations he had. The bulk of the text has been prepared for months, yet Douglas has intensely and critically continued to refine and revise the final version with particular attention to small details and coherency. His personal interest in the topic nurtured his attentiveness and dedication to hard work that execution of his plan called for.

Suggested questions for the defence are:

1. "To what extent can you say you have shown that countries have a moral obligation to accept refugees?"
2. "You chose to incorporate religious ideologies into your analysis and defended your choices rather well. However, do you think this is a viable political defense for accepting refugees? Oftentimes, religious institutions can be more politically-driven than ethically-driven. How do you account for the political dimensions of religion in this context?"

I recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: A

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS	
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	18	
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	17	
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	18	
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	19	
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	19	
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	91	
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	A	

DATE OF EVALUATION: 12.08.2019

Janusz Salamon

Referee Signature