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Book Review: How Many is Too Many?: The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States by Philip Cafaro

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PHILIP CAFARO
How Many is Too Many?: The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 336 p. $27.50.

This past March during their last Democratic debate before the Florida primary, US Presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton openly sparred over who had the more "progressive" immigration policies. Both called for comprehensive immigration reform that would grant quick citizenship to "dreamers," offer an eventual path to citizenship for most of the rest of the nation's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants, and continue policies aimed at family unification. Neither candidate's "progressive" policies resemble those recommended by Philip Cafaro: permanently cutting annual legal immigration, now running at about one million, to 300,000, half of which would be reserved for refugees and no more than 100,000 for family unification; initiating a temporary moratorium on all non-emergency immigration until there have been three consecutive years of under 5 percent unemployment; ending birthright citizenship; and constraining illegal immigration, not with a wall, but with "serious civil and criminal penalties" for any employer who does not E-Verify the employment eligibility of all new hires. Early on (p. 6) Cafaro, professor of philosophy and a faculty member in the School of Global Environmental Sustainability at Colorado State University, acknowledges that any immigration policy entails economic tradeoffs ("cheaper prices for new houses vs. good wages for construction workers"), environmental tradeoffs ("accommodating more people in the United States vs. preserving wildlife habitat and vital resources"), and social tradeoffs ("increasing ethnic and racial diversity in America vs. enhancing social solidarity among our citizens"). After presenting a concise history of immigration numbers and laws (Chapter 2), he spends the rest of the volume arguing that the "correct" progressive stance would be one favoring higher wages, preserving wildlife habitat, and enhancing social solidarity, all of which would be promoted by reducing immigration. His treatment of the economic tradeoffs of "mass" immigration (Chapters 3–5) is relatively conventional, if somewhat one-sided. He concedes that the mass immigration of low-wage workers might fuel economic growth by lowering certain industries' labor costs, increasing the number of domestic consumers, and reducing the price of many goods and services. But he contends that this kind of economic growth is associated with enhancing capital's bargaining position with labor, lowering the economic security of workers, increasing income inequality, and enhancing the political influence of corporations. Clearly no progressive should favor such growth. In Chapter 5 he goes where few progressive politicians dare to venture, questioning whether economic growth is, in itself, a worthy goal. In Chapters 6–8 he treats the environmental tradeoffs of "mass" immigration, contrasting the environmental challenges associated with two population projections for the year 2100 (p. 124): a population of 560 million resulting from total (legal and undocumented) annual immigration remaining at 1.5 million and a population of 343 million resulting from all immigration ending immediately. Whether one is concerned with air and water pollution, species loss, or urban and suburban sprawl, Cafaro contends that "population matters": a 2100 population of 560 million necessarily makes accomplishing all environmental

goals much more difficult than one of 343 million. In a rapidly warming planet true sustainability, he contends (Chapter 8), will remain out of reach unless population growth ends, and the US should lead the way. After outlining his progressive immigration policies in Chapter 9, he attempts to counter (Chapter 10) possible progressive objections to them. He is well aware of the fierce backlash that 1960s and 1970s environmentalists experienced when they made population control a central policy position (Chapter 7), but he concludes that now is the time for US progressives to come to terms with the close connection between ending population growth via restricting immigration and attaining central progressive goals. Yet the 2016 Presidential race is one in which "closing the border" has become universally identified as a conservative Republican position. So few progressives, especially progressive politicians, now find themselves in a position to objectively consider this proposal. But who knows what the future holds?

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