

Do Arguments About Immigration Ethics

Change Minds?

Abstract: This chapter considers whether expressing a moral philosophy argument to the general public can shift their opinions, and whether there is value in such a shift. We first argue that there is: if an argument can shift minds about specific policies, this can increase the democratic legitimacy for these policies, and can decrease bias. When this is the case, there is one moral reason to express the argument. If there is, then there is value in learning about whether arguments can shift public opinion. We present steps that political philosophers can take to learn about whether an argument can shift public opinion, and then illustrate these steps in our own work. Our work began in 2020 when we formulated a philosophy argument in defence of granting permanent residency to frontline workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, and then exposing this argument to 2,024 US citizens. We found that the argument increased these citizens' desire to grant migrant workers more expansive rights to remain in the US. These findings suggest there is at least one moral reason to express the argument to the broader public, though these findings also give rise to new philosophical questions worth exploring in the future.

Philosophers write arguments. It is not always clear if these arguments change people's minds. We think they can, and that this matters. It matters in particular whether expressing an argument causes citizens to support greater justice. When it does, this can create a moral reason to express the argument. We defend this and related claims in the next section.

We then consider how philosophers can find out if their arguments change minds. To find this out, philosophers should engage in five steps, including (1) formulating an argument that is not only philosophically valid but likely to be impactful; (2) formulating hypotheses as to whether and how the argument impacts the public's opinions and then (3) presenting the argument to subjects using a survey experiment, followed by (4) analyzing these findings to understand the moral implications they give rise to, and (5) raising any new philosophical questions the findings might pose.

We explain how we utilised these five steps in our own work, starting with the first: we present an argument relating to migrants who take substantial risks to help citizens. We focus particular attention on migrants who, during the Covid-19 pandemic, supplied food, healthcare, and sanitation. Such migrants were viewed as especially deserving of gratitude during the pandemic, and many policymakers argued that they should therefore be given more extensive visa and citizenship rights (Siddique 2020). We present a "cleaned up" philosophical version of this argument, followed by our hypotheses that the argument would - if presented to the public - increase support for migrant rights and reduce bias against undocumented migrants. After that, we describe the survey methods

we utilised to test these hypotheses. Our survey involved presenting our argument to a sample of US citizens, and comparing its effects to a placebo in the form of a different argument unrelated to immigration. We find the argument we presented did increase the public's desire to reward migrants by giving them more expansive rights to remain in the US. We then describe these findings' philosophical implications. One is that the argument we have formulated could, if expressed to the broader public, create a more just world, creating one moral reason for the argument to be expressed.

Why it Matters if an Argument Impacts Opinions

Before delving into our study, we want to spell out why we thought it had value.

One reason is that understanding an argument's effects on opinions gives us guidance as to whether the argument should be expressed. This is because we assume that one moral reason to express an argument is that it changes the public's mind for the better, such as by encouraging support for marginalized individuals, or discouraging discriminatory views. If arguments have these effects, they are more "fruitful" at fighting bias. Assuming there is value in fighting bias, there is value in expressing arguments that have these effects, and so value in knowing if arguments have these effects (Lindauer 2019). For example, consider the sphere of immigration, and the fact that many citizens hold certain biases against migrants, including simply not caring about the welfare of migrants as much as the welfare of citizens. This is sometimes wrong (Hidalgo 2018,

Carens 2013). Imagine there is an argument that, if heard by citizens, would cause them to care about migrants more. If so, then the argument would be fruitful, and there would be one good reason for the argument to be expressed.

Moreover, if an argument changes the public's minds and this actually brings about greater justice, there is an additional moral reason to express the argument. In the context of immigration, an argument which encourages citizens to support rights for migrants can bring about a more just state of affairs, assuming citizens' support leads to policymakers granting greater rights for migrants. Or put a little differently: if we learn that certain arguments increase public support for migrants, the arguments are useful tools for pro-immigrant policymakers hoping to bring about positive changes for these migrants (Gerver, Lown, and Duell 2023a). Of course, positive changes from an argument are not all that matter: if the argument is weak, or includes false premises, there may be decisive reasons to not express it after all. However, we think - in line with some others (Parfit 2011, Sidgwick 1907, Buckland et al. 2021, Lawford-Smith 2012) - that the ability of an argument to shift opinions towards a more just outcome is one relevant consideration for whether it should be expressed, and so understanding the effects of an argument has value.

A related value concerns feasibility. What is feasible for a given agent is what is possible for the agent to bring about if she tried (Brennan and Southwood 2007). If she cannot bring about the outcome even if she tried, she has no duty to do so. Some outcomes are impossible to bring about because of strong public opposition. For

example, a philosopher cannot bring about a perfectly just society if most people oppose such a society, and nor can an idealistic policymaker (Swift 1999). However, sometimes a philosopher or policymaker can change the public's minds, and so a policy is feasible after all. For example, if justice requires that migrants are treated fairly in various ways, but the public disagrees, then even if a given philosopher or policymaker is not able to pass legislation which would treat migrants fairly without public support, they could perhaps gain public support if they present the public with certain arguments. If that's true, there is value in finding out if an argument actually does change minds in the public: this information tells us whether the policy the argument defends is one any given agent has a duty to implement. They hold no such duty if no argument will change the public's mind (assuming the public can block passage of the policy), but might if an argument will shift public opinion.

Putting aside what is feasible, sometimes it matters whether an argument can change people's minds because, even though a policy will be implemented regardless of public opinion, the policy can be made more democratically legitimate if it gains more support. For example, if most voters wish for migrants to live in the country for five years before obtaining the right to citizenship, and not just three years, then a policy which grants migrants the right to citizenship after three years is less democratically legitimate than a policy which requires migrants to wait five years. If a policymaker or advocate can persuade most citizens to support the policy of citizenship after three years, this has value because it can increase the democratic legitimacy of the policy.

Now, as with bringing about positive changes, we don't necessarily think democratic legitimacy is all that matters: it may be all-things-considered justified to grant citizenship to migrants after only three years even if most citizens oppose the policy, and maybe even if all citizens oppose the policy. But the policy is better in one respect if most support its existence. Maybe it's better simply because it is better for more individuals to support a justified policy than not, and perhaps citizenship after three years is justified and making them wait five years is not. But it also seems true that if either policy - citizenship after three years or five - are equally justified in all other regards, the policy that has greater support is better in at least one way.

It is also worth noting that we don't think whether migrants should be admitted in the first place, and allowed to remain in a country, should necessarily be subject to democratic support: perhaps all immigration control is wrong, and just as wrong whether most citizens of a country support such control or not. Proponents of open borders, and those who think there is a human right to immigrate, might support this view. However, this view is compatible with our claim, because immigration policy involves more than just whether and when migrants are allowed to enter and remain. Immigration policy includes - as already noted - rules about citizenship, and also whether migrants have a right to various welfare provisions, public healthcare, the ability to serve on juries, vote, and join citizen councils. We think it matters whether most citizens think a given group of migrants - and in particularly newly arrived migrants - should have access to these and other rights. A policy which grants migrants these rights and is supported by most citizens is better than a policy that grants them these rights and is opposed by

nearly all citizens, all else being equal. If this is true, then it also matters whether most would support migrants accessing these rights if certain arguments were expressed. For example, if a policymaker is now granting a given group of migrants citizenship despite these migrants having arrived relatively recently, and most citizens do not support this policy, then if the policymaker can persuade citizens to support this policy she can increase democratic legitimacy. If so, then there is value in finding out which arguments actually persuade citizens to support this policy.

The above point is about what most citizens support, but perhaps a policy is also more democratically legitimate if more support the policy, even if most don't. Or sometimes one policy may be more democratically legitimate than another if this policy is supported more than the other, and all other morally relevant facts are equal, even if there is no policy that most support. For example, assuming that granting migrants citizenship after five years is not morally better than after three years, and 30% of citizens support granting migrants citizenship after five years whereas only 20% support citizenship after three years, then the first policy is more democratically legitimate than the second. At least, this is true if the first policy is not extremely unjust.

When a policy is extremely unjust, we don't think the above claim holds. There is little value in presenting arguments that persuade more people to support extremely unjust policies, and indeed value in not presenting such an argument. We take it that waiting five years for citizenship is not extremely unjust, but certain types of deportation, or separating children from their parents, would be. If so, then an argument which

persuades people to support such unjust policies would not increase democratic legitimacy. Or, at least, the value of expressing this argument would be greatly decreased, and there would probably be value in not expressing the argument.

This claim can be defended if we first accept this assumption: a world with more people committing injustice is worse than a world with fewer people committing injustice, all else being equal (McMahan 2009). For example, a world with thousands of people stoning to death an innocent person is worse than a world of one person executing this innocent person, all else being equal. Moreover, it seems that at least in some cases, it is wrong to hold the opinion that one supports injustice even if one's support has no effect on the outcome. It is wrong to support the execution of an innocent person, even if one is not doing the executing oneself. If so, then a world with thousands supporting the execution of an innocent person is worse than a world with only one person supporting the execution of this innocent person, even if in both worlds the innocent person is killed by only one executioner. If that is true, then when a truly wrongful policy is already being implemented, the world is worse if many people support the policy than if few people support the policy. And if that is true, it seems there is reason to not persuade people to support the wrongful policy: doing so creates a world which is worse in one way.

This has relevancy for immigration policies which are truly wrong, such as those involving extreme violence, mass and unjust deportations, and the separation of children from their parents. An argument which persuades more people to support such policies

is an argument which creates a worse world. Of course, some might claim the world is worse but the policy more democratically legitimate, but we doubt it. Regardless, for simplicity we assume that the value of democratic legitimacy is more clearly relevant for policies that are sufficiently justified along some other metric besides democracy itself.

The above focuses on the relationship between policies and whether they are supported. In other words, it focuses on what people think. It also matters how people think. A core value of understanding the effects of an argument concerns not just whether an argument changes people's minds, but whether an argument changes people's minds because it encourages them to reason. Reasoning has value, and we think opinions that are the result of reasoning are more valuable than those that are not. Or, perhaps less controversially, it may be better to change people's minds using the tools of reasoning than just vibes: if people can be persuaded to adopt a position because they can be encouraged to support certain premises which give rise to this position, this has value. Of course, this is not the only valuable way to think: there is value in appealing to emotions as well, and indeed it is difficult to appeal to reasoning without also appealing to emotions: some premises seem compelling because they feel emotionally (or "intuitively") correct, like the premise "killing innocent children is wrong." But if it is possible to change people's minds by carefully showing them why premises they take to be true give rise to a given conclusion, then there is value in pursuing this course of action. If so, there is value in finding out whether an argument really does change people's minds due to people agreeing with the argument's premises.

There is a final potential value in understanding the effects of an argument. It's just interesting - from a purely academic standpoint - to know if certain philosophy arguments shift people's opinions. There is value in gaining this knowledge. That's because there is value in learning about how society functions and could change. Just as we value uncovering scientific facts more broadly, using reliable and justified scientific methods, there is value in uncovering social scientific facts, using reliable and justified methods. One social scientific fact concerns whether an argument impacts society's views.

If establishing whether arguments change minds protects certain values - including democratic legitimacy, reasoning, and knowledge - there is then a question of how to find out an argument's effects in practice.

The method we propose involves five steps:

1. *Formulating the Argument*: The first step is to write down an argument which is philosophically valid, and which we have good reason to think will change minds. One way an argument might be likely to change minds is that it is compelling and easy to understand. An argument might also be likely to change minds because the values underpinning the argument are widely endorsed by people of influence. For example, if influential policymakers are willing to express support for certain types of human rights, an argument relying on the value of such rights might be easier to persuade the public to accept. In contrast, an argument relying in values which no people of influence are willing to endorse may never be accepted by the

wider public. Indeed, the argument might also never reach the wider public if people of influence are not willing to express the argument. If the argument would never reach the broader public because it is too radical, it will unlikely encourage support for a given policy or encourage the public to accept the policy via reasoning through the argument. So it helps to start with an argument that is grounded in values already commonly evoked in the public sphere.

2. *Formulating the Hypotheses:* After the argument is formulated, political philosophers should clearly articulate the impact they think the argument can have if expressed to the broader public. In other words, they should spell out their hypotheses. For example, perhaps philosophers who formulated the argument in the first step think the argument not only will impact opinions, but will encourage individuals to reason through the argument's structure, thinking more deeply about the values which the argument lays out. Or perhaps they think it will change minds, but not encourage reasoning. Regardless, these hypotheses should be written down.
3. *Running an Experiment:* Third, the argument should be presented to subjects as part of an experimental study. This will determine if the argument impacts views. This involves - and we'll explain more details shortly - finding a large sample of respondents, and asking a random segment of them to read the argument, observing whether they are more likely to change their minds compared to those in the sample who were not asked to read the argument. The survey should also

include questions about whether individuals hold views consistent with the argument's premises. When they do not, we would expect them to be less supportive of the argument's conclusions. At least, that is what we would expect if they are reasoning through the argument. This will therefore help philosophers evaluate if reasoning is taking place.

4. *Spelling out Philosophical Implications:* Fourth, the philosophical implications of the findings should be laid out in terms of the values articulated above. For example, if the study indicates that the argument shifts opinions to support existing policies, this suggests that the argument could increase democratic legitimacy if articulated to the public. This means there is at least one moral reason to express the argument to the public.
5. *Spelling out New Philosophical Questions:* Finally, if the findings raise new philosophical questions, these should be articulated as well. For example, the study may indicate that the argument increases democratic legitimacy in terms of increasing support for an existing policy, but does not encourage individuals to reason. If so, there is a question of whether the argument ought to be articulated.

The next five sections present an example of a study we conducted that included these steps. However, before we get to this study, some warnings.

First, our method is not very effective at helping philosophers learn from the general public. In this sense, it is different than methods which have these aims in mind. For

example, Avner DeShalit and Jonathan Wolff conducted qualitative interviews with hundreds of respondents in a range of cities around the world, aiming to understand how different people thought "disadvantage" and "equality" should be understood, and what policies the government should implement to tackle inequality (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007, Wolff and de Shalit 2023). Their approach emphasizes the need to learn from the public. Our approach is more elitist: we want to understand what the public can learn from us. Or, more precisely, we want to understand the extent that a philosophically-valid argument can shift the public's opinion. This is not because we think this is the only way to engage with the public's views or gain data of value, but because we think it is a method that has been largely ignored.

Relatedly, our methods are not helpful for understanding the experiences of those who are marginalized, or for learning about new forms of oppression, discrimination, and injustice. An example of this sort of work can be found in studies by Amy Reed-Sandoval, who interviewed migrants in the US to understand their experiences. She concluded, based on her fieldwork, that some migrants are socially undocumented. By this she means that, though they have the legal right to live and work in the country, they are treated as if they do not, sometimes because of their skin color or the languages they speak. She provides philosophical analysis of the implication of these empirical facts, including recommendations for what states ought to do (Reed-Sandoval 2019). Unlike Reed-Sandoval, the method we present does not aim to understand how empirical facts impact what ought to be done in general. We only care about how empirical facts about what arguments influence opinions impact whether these arguments should

be articulated. This is a narrower focus, because there are many empirical facts that can impact what ought to be done, and many things that ought to be done besides articulating arguments. On the other hand, this narrow focus allows us to test specific hypotheses, including not only whether an argument impacts opinions but how it does.

In this sense, the narrow focus we present is similar to broader "experimental philosophy" (x-phi) studies. X-phi traditionally involved asking subjects to decide what should be done in fictional thought experiments formulated by philosophers, such as asking subjects to decide if they thought the man in Thomson's trolley problem should be pushed onto the train track to stop a train from running over five innocent people. More recent x-phi has examined intuitions about more realistic cases, including cases of executives who knowingly harm or help the environment (Knobe 2003), employers who select candidates based on their gender or ethnicity (Lippert-Rasmussen et al. 2024), and immigration officials who deport migrants to low-income countries (Gerver, Lown, and Duell 2023*b*). More recently still - and directly related to our study here - philosophers have examined whether arguments impact opinions and actions, as when Schwitzgebel et al examined whether students who were assigned to an ethics class about the wrongs of factory farming later bought less meat than students assigned to a class about a different topic (Schwitzgebel, Cokelet, and Singer 2023). Similarly, Buckland et al examined whether subjects exposed to philosophy arguments about the value of donating to the global poor were more willing to donate their money to alleviating global poverty (Buckland et al. 2021). Our methods build on this growing work, exposing individuals not only to an argument to examine its effects, but examining whether there is evidence

of individuals reasoning through the argument's premises.

With these clarifications in mind, let us now see how the five steps we described were applied to a recent project we conducted.

The First Step: Articulating an Argument

The first step in our project took place in 2020, at the height of the covid-19 pandemic, when some policymakers began calling for frontline workers - including healthcare, sanitation, and agricultural workers - to be shown gratitude for their contributions. These policymakers argued that gratitude should not only be expressed symbolically, as when citizens stood outside every night at 8pm and clapped for nurses and caregivers. They argued that gratitude should also be expressed via concrete forms of assistance. Assistance relevant for migrants included providing visas and faster routes to citizenship. For example, in France an official said migrants who were on the frontline “proved their commitment to the nation, and it is now the turn of the republic to take a step towards them” (BBC News 2020) and in the US Senator Alex Padilla stated “we must honor immigrant essential workers with more than our words. They have earned a pathway to citizenship.” (Bernal 2020). In the UK a group of parliamentarians requested permanent residency specifically for workers in the National Health Service (NHS) by saying: “If someone is prepared to risk their life for this country, they must be allowed to live in it. This is not just a gesture – it is our moral responsibility.” These arguments, evoking val-

ues raised by some philosophers (Sullivan 2019, Rubio-Marin N.d., Shachar N.d., Jensen and Nielsen 2023, Song and Bloemraad 2022), were made alongside concrete actions: governments in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East halted deportations for key workers, changed visa rules and permits, and offered citizenship to key workers – at times going beyond what was necessary to address labor shortages (Kumar et al. 2021).¹

Because policymakers appealed to moral obligations, and this seemed correlated with at least some policy changes, we suspected that these sorts of arguments might actually be changing minds. More to the point, we suspected that a philosophically-valid version of these arguments, rather than only general statements as made by politicians, would change the minds of citizens.

Due to this suspicion, one of us first worked to create a philosophically-valid variant of a gratitude-based argument. To ensure that it was valid, or at least deemed valid by some, the argument was first published as a philosophy article, undergoing blind review in 2020 and published in 2021 (Gerver 2021).

The resulting argument was complex, but here is a simplified version.

¹These sorts of arguments and policies – where migrants are given visas in virtue of risks assumed – have been found in the past. Almost seventy years before the pandemic the United States government provided visas to Asian ‘war brides’ to reward service members and their spouses for their loyalty during World War II, despite significant anti-Asian sentiment (Wolgin and Bloemraad 2010). This legislation paved the way toward the more race-neutral admissions policies that would characterize US immigration law after 1965 (Wolgin and Bloemraad 2010). Similarly, foreign collaborators in war efforts are often rewarded with the right to remain despite prejudice against them among the voting public, and the policymakers defending these policies often appeal the state’s moral obligations towards migrants and their families (Landay and Lewis 2021).

First, assume that sometimes gratitude is owed to others in virtue of the risks they assume for the benefits others obtain. In particular, gratitude is generally owed to a benefactor when

1. the benefactor risks her life or welfare to increase a beneficiary's odds of survival
2. she has freely taken on risks beyond those she is morally obligated to assume and
3. the beneficiary has consented, or would have consented if possible, to the benefactor assuming these risks.

These conditions are not all necessary for owing gratitude, but they are jointly-sufficient (e.g., Manela 2015, Walker 1980, Simmons 1981). For example, if a lifeguard risks her life swimming out to sea to save a drowning victim, the victim owes the lifeguard gratitude once he is saved. This implies that he owes her thanks, and should help in the future if she later finds herself in grave need. For example, if she later needs help accessing food, he should provide some help that is greater than the help owed to a stranger who never risked her life for his (Roberts 2004, Haidt 2003, Gerver 2021).

This claim applies to groups: when one group of individuals assumes non-morally obligatory risks for others, those who benefit owe gratitude. This can be true even if beneficiaries are not directly saved. For example, an individual swimming in the ocean might never actually need rescuing, but if they would be rescued by lifeguards should the need arise, then their odds of surviving a given swim may be greater as a result of lifeguards being present (Gerver 2021).

Individual citizens who live through a pandemic might never actually need medical care, but the presence of available healthcare professionals - including those providing treatment for Covid-19, and those providing other life-saving treatments - means that many will experience an increase in the odds of survival. Similarly, agricultural and sanitation workers might never directly save a life, but their work increases food security and sanitation for nearly all, increasing citizens' odds of survival. If that's true, and it's also true that health, agriculture, and sanitation professionals experience sufficiently increased risks in their work due to the pandemic, they are owed gratitude from citizens who benefit from the risks they assume. One way of showing gratitude is to provide them right to remain, including the right to welfare provisions should frontline workers later find themselves in need. This requires providing them the right to permanent residency (Gerver 2021).

We can summarise a version of the above as follows:

1. It is important to show gratitude to those who risk their lives for citizens.
2. Many migrants risk their lives for citizens.
3. Therefore, citizens ought to show gratitude to migrants risking their lives for citizens.
4. One way to show gratitude is to grant permanent residency to migrants who have risked their lives for citizens.
5. Therefore, citizens can fulfil their duties of gratitude by granting permanent res-

idency to frontline workers who have risked their lives for citizens.

The above argument, it is important to note, won't be supported by every reader of this chapter. That is fine: our aim is just to illustrate the general method we propose.

It is also worth noting that the argument is a little different than the argument we ultimately presented to subjects, as we will explain when presenting the survey experiment we ran to understand the argument's impact. Regardless, our point here is that we formulated an argument appealing to gratitude which policymakers are likely fine with presenting to the public, given that many have already drawn upon the same value when defending rights for frontline workers. We also had general reasons - not unique to the pandemic - to think the argument would be effective. That's because (A) gratitude is a value that tends to move people in general, and not only during pandemics, and (B) we suspected that the argumentative structure itself would be particularly persuasive. We now examine each of these explanations in turn.

Gratitude: Philosophers' claims about gratitude in general, and gratitude towards frontline workers in particular, run parallel an understanding of gratitude amongst social scientists. Social scientists define gratitude as an "other-praising" positive emotion felt towards those who provide substantial benefits at substantial personal costs (Haidt 2003). Importantly, individuals who feel grateful will also feel a desire to reward a benefactor. In fact, some have argued that gratitude is the root of all generalized reciprocity underpinning exchange systems in ancient and modern cultures (Simpson et al. 2018).²

²More generally, inducing other-regarding emotions tends to increase the likelihood of

Of course, reciprocating out of gratitude can take various forms. It can be a small token of appreciation, or a reward that the benefactor truly values. In the case of migrant key workers, one might choose to award them with a plaque rather than the right to remain. However, psychological research has shown that beneficiaries will often take into account the benefactors' goals and wishes (Mendonça et al. 2018). Thus, if a benefactors' subjective well-being is enhanced by the provision of a given right, a grateful individual may wish to support the provision of that right. Given that many frontline workers seek rights to citizenship and permanent residency (Budiman 2022), we think that if citizens can feel gratitude towards such workers, they can be persuaded to grant them such rights.

There is another reason we supposed that that appealing to gratitude would be persuasive: it counters prejudice. In particular, it can counter prejudice when it comes to citizens' decisions about whether to grant rights to various *individual* migrants. Accounting for individuals is important, because individual migrants often belong to various out-groups (such as ethnic minority groups, or the group labeled "undocumented") and some of these out-groups may be subject to discriminatory attitudes. Gratitude is an emotion that may counter some of this prejudice, given that it is an other-regarding positive emotion. Other-regarding emotions, in contrast to self-enhancing emotions, can expand individuals' moral circles (Stell and Farsides 2016, Legault et al. 2021). Although researchers have not yet examined the way gratitude itself can expand moral circles

reciprocity, even if reciprocating is costly in the short term, or even if the benefactor is a stranger (DeSteno et al. 2010).

(Legault et al. 2021), it is likely to behave like alternative other-regarding emotions such as empathy or admiration, which other studies have found evoke more favorable attitudes toward a broader range of individuals (Todd et al. 2011, Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000, Paluck et al. 2021, p. 544).

Gratitude has a final argumentative benefit. It is a *moral emotion* – an emotion linked to the “welfare of either society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (Haidt 2003, p. 853). Moral emotions are particularly energizing, providing “the motivational force – the power and energy – to do good and to avoid doing bad” (Kroll and Egan 2004). They are also impersonal and universalizable (Haidt 2003) and, thus, can be helpful for persuading individuals to support rights for a broad range of individuals.

Why the argumentative structure helps. We also had reason to suppose that gratitude would be particularly persuasive when presented as part of a *moral argument*. Moral arguments are useful persuasion devices, in large part, because of their logical structure and the fact that they are inferential.³ More specifically, arguments demonstrate how a set of premises leads to a conclusion on the course of action that should be followed. The component premises of an argument are, generally, individually uncontroversial, but each logical step can help us arrive at a favored conclusion that might have been controversial in isolation (McDermott 2006). If so, we expect a moral philosophical argument to be particularly persuasive compared to just presenting the value

³This contrasts with the non-philosophical conception of a moral argument, which is tantamount to a narrative containing moral claims aiming to persuade politicians or the public to adopt a certain policy position (e.g., Ryan 2019).

of gratitude on its own, or presenting the argument's conclusion on its own.

Relatedly, moral philosophy arguments can also be persuasive because they are *transparent*. This can be useful when people are protective of their existing beliefs, and efforts to counter them simply cause people to become defensive (e.g. Kalla and Broockman 2020, Hart et al. 2009). People can double-down on their beliefs when they are challenged, but literature on attitude change in scientific communication shows that individuals are more likely to be convinced when interventions clearly describe the mechanics underlying the favored conclusion (Albarracin and Shavitt 2018). For example, Jamieson and Hardy (2014) persuaded individuals to accept certain claims about climate change by being “knowing and respectful of [their] audience’s intelligence” where the messaging explained how scientists arrived at certain conclusion through the scientific method (p. 13599). Like the scientific method, moral arguments follow a clear, systematic structure, and show the full process through which conclusions are derived, thereby giving interlocutors the opportunity to evaluate and raise objections at each stage (McDermott 2006). If interlocutors deem each premise reasonable, they might be more likely to accept the conclusion than if just told the conclusion in isolation.

In short, appealing to gratitude sparks a desire to reward and may counter out-group prejudice, and appealing to moral arguments helps avoid quickfire judgements about out-groups due to the arguments’ transparency and logical structure. We therefore expected to convince citizens to grant greater rights to key migrant workers when exposing them to an intervention that elicits gratitude *and* is in the form of a moral argument.

The Second Step: Articulating Hypotheses

We formulated four pre-registered hypotheses concerning the effects of a gratitude-based argument on views concerning migration.⁴ The first is general:

H1: Exposure to a gratitude argument will increase support for migrant rights.

We also wanted to examine if support for the premises themselves would impact whether the argument was effective. We anticipated that pre-existing beliefs about the premises would weaken the effects of the argument. This is what we would expect if the argument would change minds because it encouraged reasoning: if people were reasoning through the argument and persuaded to adopt its conclusion, this should be because they supported each of the premises, such that those who rejected any of the premises would be less likely to accept the conclusion.⁵ As such:

H2: The effect of the gratitude argument should be weakened among respondents who agree with key objections against it, including objections to premises.

We also expected, as noted in the last section, that a philosophically-valid argument about gratitude would counter prejudice. It dawned on us that prejudice is likely salient against those without a visa, given that existing studies have found widespread prejudice against such migrants (Wright, Levy, and Citrin 2016). We therefore hypothesized that exposure to our argument should have a significant effect when respondents are deciding whether undocumented migrants should be given visas and/or citizenship. As such:

⁴An anonymized version of the pre-registration for our research design can be found at <https://anonymous.4open.science/r/ethicsImmigration-EFBA/pap-redacted.pdf>

⁵We include a separate hypothesis for each objection in our pre-registration plan.

H3: Individuals exposed to the gratitude argument will support greater rights for undocumented migrants than individuals who are not exposed to the gratitude argument.

The Third Step: An Experiment

Below is a description of experiment we conducted to test the above hypotheses, with each sub-section describing the methods and associated findings.

Does the argument impact opinions?

To evaluate if our argument would change minds, we conducted an online survey of the general U.S. population (N=2,024) between late September and early October, 2021. Our analyses use sampling weights, constructed based on the US census, to approximate a nationally representative sample.⁶

In the first stage, we randomly presented respondents with a *gratitude* argument or a *placebo* argument, shown in Figure 1. Because politicians throughout the pandemic have appealed to national loyalty when arguing that frontline migrant workers should be given the right to remain (Siddique 2020, BBC News 2020, Kumar et al. 2021), the gratitude argument we presented was built along similar lines. In this sense, the argument is a little different than the argument described in Section 1. However, we wanted to find out if the argument itself - and not just the framing of the argument in

⁶See Appendix A for details on sampling, survey administration, and survey weights.

terms of loyalty - had an impact, and so also tested an argument that does not mention loyalty. In particular, we presented an alternative variant of our gratitude argument framed in terms of migrants displaying caring behavior, and found similar effects across all outcomes (Appendix E.1).

Both the gratitude and placebo arguments (shown in Figure 1) follow proper and identical philosophical form and are of similar length. The gratitude argument begins with two main, connected, premises that state, briefly, (i) the importance of showing loyalty to the country and that (ii) the government should show gratitude to those who are loyal. This is followed by three additional premises needed to take the argument to its conclusion. We state that (iii) risking one's life for US citizens is an expression of loyalty and that (iv) many migrants have risked their lives for US citizens. To strengthen this fourth premise, which is empirical, we offer examples of legal and undocumented migrants who have risked their lives for US citizens during the pandemic. We then offer the claims that (v) giving migrants the right to remain is an effective way of showing gratitude, and that (vi) governments have good reason to implement policies that are effective at showing gratitude. Finally, we conclude that governments have good reason to give migrants who have risked their lives for US citizens the right to remain in the US.

In the placebo condition (right panel), respondents read an argument in favor of compulsory high school education, a topic which was deemed to be irrelevant to Covid-19 or migration, as well as unlikely to be very divisive among the general public. Our

(a) Gratitude treatment

Carefully read the following argument:

It is important that people show loyalty to the United States, and the U.S. government should show gratitude to those who are loyal.

People show exceptional loyalty when they risk their lives for U.S. citizens.

Many migrants risk their lives for the benefit of American citizens.

For example, many nursing assistants have risked their lives during the Covid-19 pandemic to keep Americans safe. Similarly, many agricultural workers secured America's food supply while the country was locked down. This is true for legal migrants as well as undocumented migrants.

One very effective way for the U.S. government to show gratitude for migrants' loyalty is to give them the right to remain in the US.

When the government has an effective policy for showing gratitude, it has good reason to implement this policy.

Therefore, if migrants risk their lives for American citizens, the government has good reason to give them the legal right to remain in the country.

You will be able to continue after 30 seconds.

(b) Placebo

Carefully read the following argument:

It is important that all children have access to a high school education, and the US government should help children have access to a high school education.

Children can only be certain they have access to a high school education if they do not feel pressure from their parents and community to drop out of school at age fourteen.

Some children feel pressure from parents and their community to drop out of school.

For example, some Amish children living in small communities feel pressure to leave school at age fourteen. Similarly, children who are not good at school may feel pressure to leave school to work.

One very effective way for the US government to help children not feel pressure from parents and their community to drop out of school is to legally require children to attend high school.

When the government has an effective policy of helping children not feel pressure to drop out of school, it has good reason to implement this policy.

Therefore, if children are feeling pressure to drop out of school, the government has good reason to legally require children to attend school.

You will be able to continue after 30 seconds.

Figure 1: Arguments

design employs a placebo control – instead of a baseline control where no stimulus is presented – because of concerns over the effort that participants may need to exert in evaluating an argument. If the effort respondents exerted is different across treatment and control groups, then results could be attributable to exertion. As such, the placebo argument was constructed with identical structure, features and language: It is formed of six premises and a conclusion; the first two premises are connected statements; and the argument contains an empirical premise in the same position as the treatment, which is also supported by two examples. We also offer similar claims foregrounding our conclusion that the US government should require children to attend school.

After respondents were shown the argument, they were given a comprehension test

to make sure they understood what they had read. This test had five questions, and the median mark was 4/5 for both treatment and placebo conditions. This indicates high and equal levels of comprehension between those given the gratitude argument and those given the placebo (see Appendix F for details).

After completing the comprehension test, respondents were first asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Immigrants who provide important services should be rewarded” (rated on a 7pt Likert scale, *Gratitude*). Respondents were then asked about the level of rights they would award migrants who provided important services: deportation, no action, temporary visas, permanent residency, full citizenship and no action. This item was coded in terms of progressively greater rights, with no action and full citizenship at each end of the scale. In eliciting rights, we distinguish between respondent’s views about what rights migrants with temporary visas should be given (*Rights, Legal*) and what rights migrants who were unauthorised should be given (*Rights, Undoc.*). Legal and unauthorized scales differ slightly: Support for rights to migrants with unauthorized status included the value “given a temporary visa.” For the item on migrants with a temporary visa, this value was replaced with an option for extending their visa. Participants could only choose one value on the scale. The full text of all items is available in Appendix A.5.

When it comes to whether the argument increased support for rights for frontline migrants (hypotheses H1 and H3), we found the argument to be effective. Figure 2 shows the average treatment effects (ATEs) for each of our dependent variables. Receiv-

ing the treatment resulted in a 4.0% increase in reported gratitude (what we call the *Gratitude* outcome), and an increased willingness to award greater immigration rights to both undocumented migrants (3.9%) and migrants with temporary visas (3.8%). More precisely, the treatment effect on the 7pt Likert scale is 0.28 (0.13, 0.43) for the *Gratitude* outcome measure; it is 0.26 (0.12, 0.41) for support of giving rights to legal migrants (*Rights, Legal*); and 0.27 (0.10, 0.43) for support of giving rights to undocumented migrants (*Rights, Undoc.*), all with $p = 0.00$.⁷

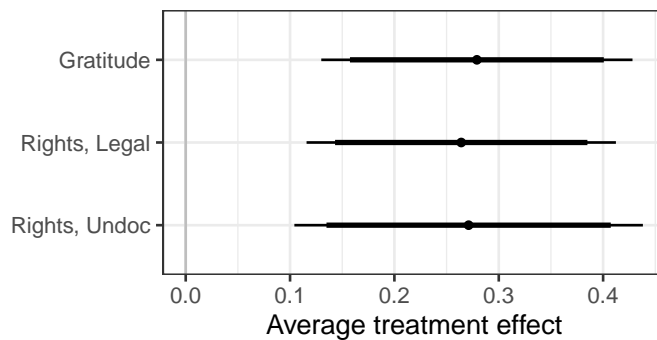


Figure 2: Average Treatment Effect of Arguments on Gratitude, Giving Rights to Legal Migrants, Giving Rights to Undocumented Migrants. Respondent-level analysis.

Is there evidence of reasoning?

In addition to evaluating whether being exposed to the gratitude argument impacted respondent’s views, we also utilised a novel method for understanding if objecting to the argument would lead to the argument being less effective at encouraging support

⁷Estimates in the figure are taken from the regression shown in Table S7 in the Appendix. The treatment effect is the coefficient on an indicator variable of observations in the argument treatment group (over a reference category for the observations in the placebo group; the p-value is obtained from a hypothesis test of that coefficient being zero. We provide 95% confidence bounds on the estimate based on respondent-level clustered standard errors. Ordinal logit tests in Table S8 show similar results.

for rights. In particular, we designed a method to evaluate if respondents objected to the argument in at least one of two ways: rejecting specific premises (e.g. rejecting that frontline migrant workers are exposed to risk from Covid-19); or, second, supporting countervailing reasons to reject the conclusion (e.g. believing that migrants have enough rights as it is). It is impossible to anticipate all possible objections, or examine whether these objections might arise among our respondents. As such, we focus on testing potential objections related to our main moral claims, and for which we expected high levels of variation in support.

In Table 1, we examine whether each potential objection moderated the treatment effects (see Appendix B for all results). We find no robust evidence that potential objections to either the premises or conclusion significantly hamper the effectiveness of our argument.

Rejection of premises. We begin by examining potential objections to individual premises, both normative and empirical. If a respondent simply does not believe that the government should show gratitude to migrants who show loyalty, including by being frontline workers, they would not agree that we should express our gratitude to migrants who embody this value (premise 1).⁸ The effect of the argument may have also been diminished by respondents' objection to our empirical premise (three), which states that many migrants risk their lives for the benefit of American citizens. Individuals may have objected to this premise on the grounds that they do not believe that migrants working

⁸We used items from the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al. 2011) on the relevance of loyalty to individuals' moral choice.

on the frontlines are exposed to significant risks. We asked three questions to gauge perceptions on the probability of contagion and severity of the illness. We found that most of our sample is well aware that Covid-19 can be spread among people without symptoms and that it is possible to get the virus more than once. However, nearly 40% believe Covid-19 is not more contagious and severe than the seasonal flu (at the time of survey, the dominant strain was Delta). The belief that Covid-19 is not risky did not have an influence on whether the argument effected opinions.⁹

Our third premise also included examples of vocations in which migrants – documented are undocumented – are known to work (NAE 2020). If respondents do not believe undocumented migrants work in these professions, they would not support greater immigration rights for undocumented migrants based on the argument we put forth. As it turns out, this objection was unlikely. As shown in the third column of Table 1, respondents believe there are “some” or “many” undocumented migrants in the frontline vocations to which we referred. We therefore could not evaluate whether disagreement with this part of the premise would reduce the argument’s impact.

Objections from countervailing considerations. Even if individuals agreed with all premises, and agreed with the conclusion that the US government has good reason to grant permanent residency to frontline workers, they might have thought this reason was not decisive (i.e., it is merely a *pro-tanto* reason). Individuals may have thought this reason was not decisive because they had their own, countervailing reasons to oppose granting

⁹See Appendix C.

more rights to frontline migrant workers. They might have thought that migrants have enough rights as it is, or that immigration imposes undue costs on US citizens, and it is all-things-considered justified to deny frontline workers permanent residency because of these reasons. If this was the case, then the argument would not shift these individuals' opinions.

To measure the belief that migrants have enough rights, or that immigration imposes undue costs on US citizens, we examined preferred levels of immigration.¹⁰ This did not weaken the effect of the argument.

The legal status of the migrant also presents a potential countervailing reason to reject granting permanent residency or citizenship to frontline migrants, even if one accepts the argument's conclusion that there is one reason to do so. Respondents may have believed that migrants' past infractions make them deserving of either less gratitude or fewer rights. We find no evidence of this: as noted in Figure 2, we find roughly similar effects across legal status.¹¹

External factors. In addition to potential objections to the argument itself, lack of engagement with the argument could reduce the argument's effects. This would be

¹⁰In particular, to measure this we modified the widely-used Racial Resentment Scale (Kinder and Sanders 1996) to consider both racial and ethnic minorities, thereby making it more amenable to migrants from a wider range of origin countries (see also Enns and Ramirez 2018). The RSS scale taps into support for the belief that racial minorities are undeserving of special treatment by the government (Huddy and Feldman 2009). To measure the belief that immigration is detrimental, we examined preferred levels of immigration.

¹¹Wording of survey items eliciting countervailing reasons and other measures is given in Appendix A.5. Note that we do not include this countervailing reason in Table 1 because we distinguish across legal and undocumented migrants explicitly in all our tests, as shown in Figure 2.

Table 1: Potential objections

		Descriptive results	Effects on treatment
Premises	‘Loyalty is not important’ (reject premise 1)	<i>Relevance to moral choice:</i> Loyalty: $\mu = 4.03$ (‘Somewhat relevant’)	None
	Disagree that frontline migrants exposed to risk from Covid-19? (reject premise 4)	“Covid-19 is similar to the seasonal flu.”; True : 39.48%; Unsure: 15.37%; False: 45.16% “It is NOT possible to get Covid-19” more than once” True : 10.38%; Unsure: 11.17%; False: 78.46% ”Covid-19 can be spread among people without symptoms” True : 83.79%; Unsure: 8.64% False: 7.56%	Beliefs that Covid-19 is not risky alters treatment effect in 3/12 comparisons. ($p = 0.07$, $p = 0.08$, $p = 0.08$)
	Disagree that undocumented migrants work in jobs mentioned in argument? (reject premise 4)	“How many undoc. migrants work in...?” Agriculture: $\mu = 3.59$ (‘Many’) Health: $\mu = 2.52$ (‘Some’) Store clerks: $\mu = 3.12$ (‘Some’) Overall: $\mu = 2.90$ (‘Some’)	None
Counter-vailing reasons	‘Immigration is detrimental’	<i>Support...</i> Increasing immigration: 22.63% Keep same: 32.95% Decrease immigration: 44.42%	None
	‘Minorities have enough rights’	<i>Modified RSS</i> $\mu = 3.13$ (/5)	None

See Appendix A.5 for question wording and C for analyses. ‘Minorities have enough rights’ could also be considered an objection to our penultimate premise – ‘When the government has an effective policy... it has good reason to implement this policy’ – rather than a countervailing reason. If individuals believe migrants already have enough rights, they might believe that a policy of granting additional rights is not necessary even if it would be effective at achieving its aims.

expected if some subjects were reasoning through the argument’s premises, engaging with each premise, such that those who were not engaging as strongly with the argument would be less impacted by the argument’s premises. Though we partly accounted for this with our comprehension test, which assured us that our argument was easy to understand, we might still expect respondents to vary in their willingness to engage with the argument in terms of thinking through each step.

To see if this makes a difference, we included in the survey a series of questions called the Need For Cognition (NFC) scale, which captures individuals’ willingness to engage with complex information (Cacioppo and Petty 1982). We find that NFC does not condition the effects of the treatment. This suggests that perhaps the argument was not effective due to individuals reasoning through each premise, given that willingness to engage in complex information had no effect on the argument’s impact. However, we are not entirely certain this is the case: because we had high comprehension scores, it could be that the argument was relatively easy to understand, and so thinking deeply about the argument was not necessary for individuals to reason through each step. Relatedly, it could be that individuals had already thought about some or all of the premises before seeing the argument, given that policymakers had been speaking about citizenship for frontline workers throughout the pandemic.¹²

¹²It is worth noting that Conservative ideology does diminish the effect of the argument on the rights afforded to undocumented migrants ($-0.06, p = 0.01$), but not legal migrants. This reflects a potent ideological divide on attitudes toward immigration, captured in US polls, which is particularly salient when it comes to the undocumented (Pew Research Center 2018). The full set of hypothesis tests over moderator effects are shown in Appendix C, Table S3. Figures S2 and S3 give a visualizations of the absence of difference in treatment effects across objections and moderator variables.

Fourth step: philosophical implications of findings

If the argument we formulated persuaded people to support more rights for migrants, this has certain normative implications. One implication is that there is at least one moral reason to express the argument, a reason that would not exist had the argument failed to have an impact on opinions. This is because, as noted in Section 1, one reason to express an argument is that it encourages citizens to hold less biased views. Our argument did decrease bias against undocumented migrants, in that it increased support for granting them visas and citizenship.

It's also worth noting that, if this increase in support can encourage policymakers to expand rights for migrants - and our experiment did not measure this effect - then there is even greater reason to express the argument. This is because, as noted in Section 1, there is greater reason to express an argument that not only decreases bias in people's opinions, but leads to a more just outcome in practice.

Importantly, even if changes in opinions do not impact policies, they could increase the democratic legitimacy of existing policies. Existing policies in the US, at least at the time that the survey was launched, included some benefits for frontline workers (Gerver 2021); if such benefits are more democratically legitimate if supported by more citizens, there is reason to persuade citizens to support these benefits, and our survey indicates that such persuasion is possible via our argument. There is therefore reason to express our argument to the general public.

The above are implications related to the specific values laid out at the start of this chapter. However, we realised in hindsight that the findings could have implications not only for what people have moral reason to do, but for broader stances taken by some political philosophers.

Some political philosophers hold that there is no place for moral analysis in the political domain. This is because morality is simply not the currency of politics. Just as morality is not the currency of, say, your local bakery - you can't buy bread with good moral arguments - morality is not the currency of our political system: you can't bring about political change with good moral arguments. If that's true, it seems like a waste of time to put so much effort into figuring out what is morally correct.¹³

This claim has been called "political realism," and there are many potential responses one might posit. For example, even if morality has no impact on what the public thinks, it can still tell us what the public ought to think, and this is valuable in and of itself. However, even putting this aside, it could be that a key realist claim - that moral arguments just don't impact opinions in the political sphere - is not true. If it turns out that moral arguments do impact opinions, then this is one small piece of evidence against the realist claim. Or, perhaps more accurately, if moral arguments change minds, and this in turn helps bring about changes for migrants, then it is not true

¹³This bakery analogy is inspired by a similar one from Felix Bender, who aptly describes the realist stance: "Applying moral arguments to a world that does not function according to moral imperatives is like trying to pay at the bakery with truth—certainly, the baker might be interested in knowing about the tiny single-celled microorganism that is yeast and how exactly it functions as a raising agent, but it does not pay the bill. Appealing to truth, in this sense, is simply misplaced in this situation. Similarly, applying moral arguments to the political realm gets wrong its currency" (Bender 2024).

that morality has no currency in the domain of politics. It might not be a very valuable currency, or one used by all, but it is a currency valued by some. It is valued not only by the policymakers who appeal to moral values - as when policymakers appealed to gratitude to grant many migrants visas and citizenship - but a value that also impacts the public's views. Our findings lend credence to this claim. More importantly, even if opinions don't lead to actual political change, they still create a better world: as argued at the start of this article, the world is better if people support justice. If that is true, then morality can bring about a more just world, and if we assume that a more just world is a politically different kind of world, then morality can impact politics in this sense.

Of course, our findings are in a way mixed: we only found evidence that a moral argument changes minds compared to a placebo, and not that people are utilising moral reasoning when determining their opinions. We found that individuals were not more likely to support migrant rights if they held views consistent with any of the premises, or views consistent with any major objection to the argument. If so, perhaps the realist might claim that moral reasoning has no role in politics, even if moral arguments do.

However, we think this might be too quick. While it is true that we have no evidence of people utilising reasoning, we think this simply raises new questions worth exploring. We now articulate these questions.

The Fifth Step: Asking New Questions

Our findings raise a number of philosophical questions, and the first concerns transparency. In some sense, the argument we presented was transparent in that the premises were spelled out, yet agreeing with the premises had no impact on whether individuals were impacted by the argument as a whole. The fact that individuals were impacted by the argument even when they exhibited opinions inconsistent with one or two of the premises suggests it was not the agreement with the argument in its entirety which mattered. If so, then a question arises as to why the argument had an impact.

If it had an impact just because people were given an argument aiming to persuade them to change their mind, and not because they agreed with the argument as a whole, then perhaps the argument did not work in a way that philosophers value: philosophers value persuading people by appealing to their reasoning skills, and if people were instead impacted by the argument's general direction - and not the relationship between premises they think are true and the argument's conclusion - then perhaps the value of expressing the argument is diminished. Yet, perhaps people were still responding to reasoning in one sense: perhaps they agreed with only some of the premises, but had some additional premises in mind (even just implicitly) which would render the conclusion true. Or, more interestingly, perhaps individuals were persuaded by our argument simply because the premises were transparent, even if they did not agree with them, because they appreciated being told each premise: they appreciated the transparency, trusted us more as a result, and so were more likely to trust the conclusions we laid out. Further

research can assess if this sort of phenomenon - people being persuaded because premises are transparent even if disagreeing with these premises - ever arises, but if it does, there is then an important philosophical question: whether this phenomenon counts as individuals responding to reasoning, and whether there is value in such responses. As far as we are aware, no philosophers have addressed this specific question of whether trusting a speaker who spells out each premise is a type of reasoning of value, separate from the reasoning of agreeing or disagreeing with each premise.

Another question concerns the content of the argument: we imagine many will strongly disagree with the argument we presented, and feel uncomfortable with an argument which claims that migrants must be loyal to the nation. While the argument was effective even when the particular sentence about loyalty was not included (see Appendix E.1), some might even reject the general claim about gratitude, including that gratitude can ground citizen obligations or obligations of the state. If one disagrees with the argument, there is a question of whether there are all-things-considered reasons to express the argument. On the one hand, there is good reason not to express an argument that has untrue premises, and perhaps other arguments with true premises or more true premises would be just as or more effective at encouraging citizens to increase their support for migrants. On the one hand, the consequences of expressing an argument matter, assuming one accepts that consequences matter to an extent; even non-consequentialists accept that whether one ought to engage in an act is partly dependent on whether this will contribute to greater justice (Lindauer 2019, Lindauer et al. 2020, Parfit 2011, Gerver, Lown, and Duell 2023a), and we think that greater rights for

migrants constitutes greater justice.

There is a related question: it is not clear if an argument ought to be expressed if, though there are false premises, individuals are more likely to believe in the true conclusion than if they were not exposed to the argument with false premises. On the one hand, we might think that an argument with untrue facts is perfectly acceptable to express when it aids in individuals understanding true conclusions. Indeed, untrue facts are often expressed even in scientific theories. As Maxime Lepoutre has demonstrated, certain scientific models include untrue facts that aid understanding, as when the ideal gas law represents gas molecules as infinitely small, when they are not, creating a model that allows us to understand thermodynamics. Similarly, Lepoutre argues, people can accept untrue facts that nonetheless aid in their understanding about political and social scientific facts (Lepoutre 2023). The same is probably true for moral understanding: it might be easier for citizens to grasp what is owed to migrants if they imagine that migrants are owed gratitude, even if they are not. If it is easier to grasp what is owed because of the argument, and indeed more people understand that migrants are owed a range of rights because of the argument, then expressing the argument could be justified.

Or put a little differently: if it turned out that any of the premises we expressed were untrue, but it encouraged individuals to believe that a range of migrants ought to be given visas and citizenship, and this was a true belief they otherwise would not have, then expressing the argument could be justified. On the other hand, there is still something suspicious about an argument that includes a blatantly untrue premise,

especially when - unlike with scientists and their models - citizens do not realise they are being told something false.

Further philosophical work is necessary to grapple with this question. However, we hope to have shown that this question was sparked from our findings.

Conclusion

It is not always clear when philosophical arguments can shift public attitudes, and so we presented a method for understanding when such shifts occur. We also provided reasons to suppose this method has value, and an illustration of this method in practice. Our illustration included a philosophically-valid argument, and evidence that respondents exposed to the argument were significantly more likely to support rights for frontline migrants, as compared to respondents not exposed to this argument. The argument also countered bias against undocumented migrants by extending to them rights. This is important, as there are good moral reasons to express arguments that counter bias, especially against particularly marginalized populations. However, we found no evidence that subjects were engaging in reasoning when impacted by the argument: they were not more likely to be impacted by the argument when agreeing with any of the premises.

This last finding raised a new philosophical question: it is not clear if there is value in an argument's transparency when it encourages individuals to accept the argument's conclusions despite not agreeing with the argument's premises. Moreover, it is not clear

if a transparent argument should be expressed if one or more of the premises are false, even when it encourages individuals to believe a true conclusion they might otherwise not believe. Our empirical data inspired us to think of these questions, and made it clear that these questions could be particularly relevant if less-than-perfect arguments lead to a range of greater rights.

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