Theorists of immigration have largely focused on what states in general ought to do, rather than on what particular states have done. This latter, though, is an important normative issue, and in ordinary political discourse we often assume that states can do particular things that give rise to legitimate claims to admission on the part of would-be immigrants.

In this colloquium talk, Michael Blake, associate professor of philosophy and public affairs at the University of Washington, will take issue with this ordinary understanding, by focusing on two common patterns of argument and showing them to be somewhat limited. The first is that states may, by their military actions abroad, acquire obligations to re-settle individuals that other states do not acquire. The second is that states may, by relying on undocumented labor, lose the right to exclude undocumented immigrants. Both of these, Blake will suggest, are somewhat crude approximations of good arguments – arguments whose scope is more limited than the popular version of the arguments would suggest.