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Review of *Open Moral Communities*. Seymore J. Mandelbaum. Reviewed by Alice K. Johnson

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of the research related to issues such as: people's attitudes about what people deserve based on effort expended, their beliefs about equality and inequities, their conceptions of fairness in the face of unmet needs, the impact of self-interest on how principles of justice are applied, and the effect of class membership on one's general attitude toward social inequality. The conclusions that Miller draws from the evidence are particularly relevant for anyone interested in trying to influence social welfare policy based on awareness of public opinion.

The bulk of the rest of the book is devoted to analyzing three principles of social justice—desert, need, and equality—in a more focused way. People's opinions about the application of these problematic principles are examined in order to show that a theory of justice rooted in popular beliefs can retain a critical edge and be connected to questions of political feasibility.

This is a complex and ambitious book. Instead of proposing a normative theory of social justice, Miller illustrates how different principles are used in different social contexts. His theory of justice does more than simply report popular beliefs, however. It presents principles of need, desert, and equality that are philosophically coherent and blended together to form a cohesive theory. Miller continues, in the final chapter, to be concerned about the practicality of social justice by returning to the question of political viability. He prospects for social justice in light of two tendencies—globalization and multiculturalism—and concludes, in part, that “the pursuit of social justice in the twenty-first century will be considerably tougher than it has been in the last half of the twentieth . . . and that we will have to think much harder about questions of scope, about what the universe of social justice should be in a world in which economic, social, and political boundaries no longer neatly coincide.”

Dorothy Van Soest

The University of Texas at Austin

Seymour J. Mandelbaum. *Open Moral Communities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. \$30.00 hardcover.

What is a community? How do we identify a moral community? What criteria do we use to determine deserving communi-

ties from undeserving communities? Not only are these questions central to the development of modern-day communitarian thinking, but they are also important issues facing scholars, teachers, and researchers who are engaged in community work.

Communitarians espouse the view that the collapse of morality and community are the major problems of modern society. This point of view emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between individual rights and responsibilities in order to construct effective communities. Civic participation, morality, and the value of community over the individual are primary tenets of communitarian thought. In many ways, this emerging intellectual perspective gets at the heart of social work's concern for rebuilding impoverished communities. Although the communitarian schema is still forming, it is impacting social policy in the areas of poverty, work, and social justice (See, McNutt, John. (1997), *New communitarian thought and the future of social policy, Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, XXIV, 4, 45–56*).

The main thesis of *Open Moral Communities* is the problem of defining communities. The book confronts the unresolved tensions that exist in a community between rights vs. obligations, members vs. strangers, and discipline vs. socialization. Mandelbaum, an avid communitarian scholar, poses no clear answers to these dilemmas. Instead, this difficult-to-read essay challenges readers to think about the aspects of a community that lie below the surface of the neighborhood—that is, about what is essential to community life.

To explore these themes, Mandelbaum identifies three myths: contractual moral communities, deep moral communities, and open moral communities. The contractual myth maintains that a community is valid only if it originates by a voluntary contract among its members and is sustained and disciplined by a general social contract with the community. Contracts manage and control a “way of life” in order to prevent multiplicity and conflict. In contrast, the deep community regards all human beings as social. In the deep community, personal and collective choices correspond to an individual's integrated place in the world. For example, “factory, family, mosque, club—are represented as parts of a single fabric so that a violation of one area endangers the entire skein” (p. 36). The deep community sets standards of true belief

and correct practice that define, for example, what it means to be an American, a Baptist, or a Wal-Mart employee.

In the narrow conceptual space between contractual and deep moral communities lies the open moral community. Open moral communities recognize that we are simultaneously members of many communities by rejecting the “fit” and “fabric” of deep communities.

Some members of community A also belong to B, but not all do. No members of C belong to A, but A and C are connected by members whom they share in D, and so forth throughout the chain. We move in a complex pattern—now emphasizing one group of claims and then another, leaving one identity and adopting a new one . . . The possibility that members will exit is implicit in every community. Images of routes of movement between communities and free spaces in which we can be anonymous or unidentified without being stigmatized sustain the openness of the entire structure (p. 40).

This concept of overlapping membership—that is, that we all belong to many different communities at the same time—is most useful because it helps resolve some of the inherent tension between contemporary communitarian thought and concerns for social justice.

The book falls short in suggesting how technological advances in communication can be used to help define a community when it is not place-based. I expected that the author’s background in telecommunications and planning theory would merge (at least, theoretically) to offer some ideas for using new forms of electronic communication (e.g., email, web pages, community computer networks, etc.) to develop open moral communities. There are, however, only hints in this direction in the chapters covering community and communication and stories in communities.

Open Moral Communities is for serious, social science scholars of a community persuasion. The book is especially appropriate for teaching doctoral seminars to students who are required to build their community research upon a rigorous theoretical foundation. I would also recommend the book to those who plan to engage in public policy analysis.

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