Seymour J. Mandelbaum

Open Moral Communities

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Seymour J. Mandelbaum

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London, England

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for our grandchildren

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Preface

In the late 1960s, I dreamed of creating a two-way cable television system and public production center in North Central Philadelphia. I failed to realize that dream and settled for writing a book about it. Enthralled by the latest innovations in a long "communications revolution," I defined 'community' as meaning a group of people who communicated with one another. I poked and prodded at the ways of communicating in the hope of illuminating the tasks of enhancing intelligent governance by "democratizing access to knowledge" (Mandelbaum 1972).

By the mid 1970s I had largely abandoned my initial hopes for cable television and turned away from networks and telecommunication policies toward theories of planning. I never completely stopped poking and prodding, and I have lately begun to attend to the "new information technologies" and the "information infrastructure." (There are plentiful signs of that old and now refreshed interest scattered through this essay.) Thinking in an abstract way about planning has, however, changed the way I understand 'community'. There are no communities without communication, but there is a great deal more to a communion than the exchange of messages.

'Community' appears in this essay as a term in moral philosophy. The reframing of the term began with the realization that when we argue with ourselves or with others about the morality of collective choices our speech is embedded in communal images. For some, 'community' provides the elemental referent that allows us to distinguish "right" from "wrong." ("This is how we do it around here. This is our way.") Others insist that ethical judgments are appropriately grounded in abiding universals rather than in temporary communal claims: that God, Nature, or Reason dictates the

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major features of our moral codes and intuitions. Community operates only in the large but morally peripheral domain of local custom.

Both philosophic communitarians and universalists, however, share in an instrumental appreciation of 'community' as a description of the social arrangements that make it possible to cultivate a moral order. Alas, even the will of God or the obligations of a transcendent Reason require communities to socialize new recruits and to sustain the commitments and practices of members.

This essay is an exploration of three stylized images of these magical social forms. I've chosen to call these images myths because they are compounded of description and aspiration; of detailed narratives, parables, abstract theories, and archetypes. Each of the three myths—*contractual, deep,* and *open*—commands my respectful though not entirely equal treatment. I am principally concerned with the overtly simple idea that we *should* imagine ourselves as simultaneously belonging to a field of overlapping communities. In each community we encounter a moral order of rights, obligations, constraints, and opportunities. These orders sometimes unambiguously reinforce one another: acting appropriately in one communion bolsters the discipline of another. For the most part, however, the dense variety of claims—whether overtly conflicting or only intractably different—defies all efforts at radical simplification and unambiguous hierarchical organization. Even as we speak within one community, we subtly acknowledge other claims and multiple identities for ourselves and for those with whom we are (partially) associated.

This open myth shapes a robust sensibility that allows us to deal with ethical pluralism and essentially contested claims to truth without collapsing into skepticism, grasping for communal purification, or subordinating the field to a single way of talking. Robust but not heroic: the rhetoric of the open myth is often ironic and hesitant. At one point in the essay I describe it as "weak tea." (Alan Wolfe (1998), in a similar vein, writes of "morality writ small.") The myth, however, provides a compelling complement to its more confident and familiar competitors: the notions that communities are legitimate only when they are grounded in a voluntary contract or in a deep moral consensus.

I suspect that I understood the open myth in my bones long before I had words for it, knowing even as a child that Judaism both informed my con-

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ception of "enlightenment" and warred against it. Later, the myth provided a way of understanding how overlapping memberships threatened true believers and the communal boundaries they defended; how a tolerant "liberal imagination" could bolster complex fields against simplifying utopias and horrific malevolence.

Writing this essay, I've frequently opened the morning paper with a grim sense of vindication: it would surely be a better world if neighbors in the Balkans or the Middle East saw themselves in a field of overlapping communities rather than a cockpit of contending communions. Though good news is hard to find, it is not entirely absent. Whatever its ultimate fate, in its conception the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland articulated the sensibility I associate with the open myth: a willingness to legitimate overlapping and ambiguous authorities, to allow competing places to exist in the same space, and to treat passionate memories ironically.

This essay does not, however, point directly to the play of the three stylized myths in the bloody inter-communal conflicts of our day. Two chapters—one dealing with exclusionary zoning in New Jersey and the other with redemption after the 1985 attack on the MOVE compound in West Philadelphia—describe events and texts that in their moment aroused considerable passion. They are, however, of little global significance: New Jersey is not a Gulag, and West Philadelphia is not Pristina. Indeed, I want the two cases to be understood as only modestly "out of the ordinary"—just different enough to illuminate ubiquitous representations of community and daily communal practices. If the essay is persuasive, its power will rest in the reader's sense of recognition rather than in my compelling description of unfamiliar relations. I have largely taken that recognition for granted, exploring its implications rather than its origins.

This account of the communal myths we shape and within which we act is framed in the terms of the conversations that swirl around city and regional planning in North America and, indeed, across much of the world. I've chosen those conversations opportunistically: those are the arguments and the affirmations of collective identity that occupy most of my working hours.

There is, however, a better or at least less personal reason to examine the talk of planning: there is probably no other group of collective practices that points to 'community' more insistently as a description of its settings,

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active subjects, and moral objects. The urban and regional stage is populated with a great cast of communities, each entangled with another in a way that frustrates our simple hopes of understanding (let alone changing) one unit at a time. On that stage, families and firms overlap (at least a little) in their membership and moral claims: churches and street corner gangs, unions and neighborhoods, cities and nations. In that overlapping field we must invent public orders that sustain the complex pattern and make common sense of ethical difference.

The chapters are arranged in three parts. Part I sets out the role of communities in the creation of moral orders and the implications of the three stylized communal forms. In part II, I turn to six terms—*theory, story, time, city, tool,* and *plan*—that figure largely in both the lay and the professional construction of public orders. (Only the treatment of tools in chapter 8 is cast in the specialized language of professionals: the rest of the lexicon shows few marks of the planning guild.) In each of the six cases, my argument appears in a similar guise. The consensual dream of a compelling integrative discourse is "impossible," but that is not a damning flaw. Indeed, it preserves the instrumental and normative resources of communal pluralism.

In part III, I look at two cases in which compelling moral claims for redemption and justice challenged the ambiguity and pluralism of the open myth. In both cases, those claims were limited. Redemption was transformed into History, and Justice was moderated by Prudence. My appreciation of that "weak tea" is complemented in the final chapter by a reflection on the appropriately "thin" virtues of citizens in a liberal republic that serves both as a distinctive community and as a guardian of the field of communities.

At the end of the day, I suspect that very few readers will be surprised by my account of these three myths and their implications. I hope, however, that the recognition of familiar but usually tacit understandings will bolster an appreciation of the links between moral orders and communal practices.

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I

A Communitarian Sensibility

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1

Moral Orders and Communities

A Communitarian Sensibility

From time to time, a voice—our own or that of an external challenger—questions the ethical bases of our actions and leads us to pause in the midst of making decisions. In the hiatus between one step and another, our ordinary uncertainty about the instrumental links between choices and outcomes is suddenly extended. We wonder not merely whether our deeds will be effective but whether they are morally right; whether the outcomes we seek will be normatively justifiable; whether our talk of morals and values will survive close scrutiny. Once we represent ourselves as speaking within an ethical domain—once we allow that some questions are distinctively "moral"—we must bolster our disposition to do this or that with something more than an appeal to ordinary practice, preference, intuition, or interest. With good reason, we may complain if those common forms of self-assertion are denied entirely, but something grander and less personal seems necessary if we are to respond in an appropriate form to the seriousness of our doubts.

The disposition to address those doubts with formal arguments is most intense whenå the pall of uncertainties is cast over collective rather than merely personal choices. In the collective forum, we confront other minds and voices reminding us of our own inner turmoil and asking for reasons. "Feeling right" isn't reason enough.

Whether we regularly or only occasionally don a philosopher's hat, when we pause in this way to examine, refine, and justify our moral choices it is difficult to avoid framing our search within the terms of a

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conventional dichotomy that characterizes ethical systems as either universal or communal.

Within a universal frame, we attempt to invent or (some would say) discover a small set of elemental ethical principles without which it would be impossible to imagine Man or Society. In the simplest cases, the principles we seek will speak so directly ("in their own voice") to a prospective deed that all doubts will be dissolved: it will be obvious what must and what must not be done. Most adults, I suspect, understand that, for the great mass of complex and murky decisions that fill their daily lives, the ethical mandates and decisions are not likely to be quite so apparent: our judgments will inevitably be infected by the difficulties of forecasting, of reconciling individual and collective moral claims, and of finding a way when principles that are harmonious in the abstract conflict with one another in particular cases. The search for an elemental ethical core is arduous and contested. The universalistic frame, however, shapes and sustains the search by defining the form and role of the core.

Within the communal frame, the core disappears and all that remains are groups of people struggling to define a moral order that they never fully achieve. Ethical principles may be immutable and universal in Heaven, but on Earth they require human interpretation and are embedded in the language, assumptions, and social relations of particular moments. Within the communal frame, the ethical search is shaped by our image of a community deserving of respect rather than by our (vain) aspiration for a transcendent set of ethical principles.

I have tried in this essay to locate a safe path through a ground strewn with the explosive mines of these philosophic arguments. Without embroiling myself directly in the arguments of philosophers, I've sought to cultivate a communitarian sensibility and a craft of community design.

I start to elaborate on those objectives with three quite simple observations that are, *mirabile dictu,* remarkably similar:

• Moses, preparing for Sinai and then coming down (twice) from the mountain, faced the problem of designing a community that could sustain the universalistic elements of the ethic inscribed on the tablets. All his successors—humble teachers, prophets, and professors alike—have faced the same problem. Even ubiquitous or innate human capacities for moral reasoning must be cultivated "in community."

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• Communitarian critics of universalistic ethics must often (to their explicit consternation) evoke a community where none of sufficient moral heft appears to exist. They simultaneously lament the absence of community and rely upon the specter to provide a moral order.[1]

• Plans, policies, technologies, institutions, and the built forms of settlements literally and figuratively crumble in our hands if there is no community to attend to them.

Alas, these observations drive me deep into the dense semantic forest that surrounds the concept of community. Treating 'community' as a term of ethical discourse does, however, allow me to avoid some particularly overgrown thickets or, when trapped in conversations not of my choosing, to clear some of the underbrush. This introductory chapter consists of a series of forays into that forest.

We commonly speak of a community as a small group of people occupying a bounded space rich with affective meanings and shared memories. In these "places," the members of the community interact in many of life's domains, speaking to one another face to face. In contrast with the small circle in the delightful TV pub called Cheers, everyone may not "know your name," but they nevertheless ascribe to you an identity within a web of linked associations. When we talk in this way, we imagine that individuals may belong to one and only one community, as if membership were governed by the legal concept of a single political residence. We speak confidently in the singular, using the unambiguous definite article. We seek to improve "the community," designate some organizations as "community-based," and recognize some actors as "community people."

This common usage is not, however, strictly applied. From time to time we talk of great cities and nations, tribes scattered over space, professions, churches, business firms, and all sorts of voluntary associations as "communities." Lately we have begun to distinguish "real" and "virtual" communities (though not, I think, with a great deal of confidence in the distinction).

If somehow we could not speak without assuring ourselves and others that each of our words had only one meaning, this would be a very silent world. Accepting and even cherishing our polymorphic practices, we may nevertheless pause to reflect on our lexical flexibility. Is there a common set of attributes that mark the varied communities of our mind and our tongue?

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Should we wisely attend to the word with greater care in order to speak in the moments of ethical uncertainty?

Places and Artifacts

There is no particular mystery to the ways in which inanimate objects such as national flags, historical monuments, and corporate logos symbolically represent communities. Most of us are not confused by such conventional devices. We know that communities are composed of human beings, and that signs and their referents may have quite different forms.

At times, however, our grasp of rhetorical conventions is overcome by the physical reification of communal relations. The land, the flag, or the city becomes one with the people and their faith. In a similar though less passionate way, local community development corporations and public agencies often pride themselves on the houses they have built, as if the physical structures were the community that they sought to design. We drive past a block of run-down houses and exclaim at the community in disrepair.

There is something vaguely idolatrous about such physical reification. The land or the flag may symbolize a community, but it can never be a moral subject. New houses may strengthen a community or attest to its vigor, but they cannot be cast as moral guardians. (New houses may also signal the conquest of one community by another.) We recognize the fragility of reification when we try in vain to imagine spaces and buildings acting collaboratively or conflicting—when (in the role of tourist, museum curator, or imperialist) we make a site or an artifact our own but realize that we do not possess the community that endowed it with meaning. (Symmetrically, we may be struck by the ability of the dispossessed to recreate their communities and places in unfamiliar spaces.) The spatial choices made in the process of rebuilding a devastated city may alter communal relations, but neither the buildings nor the place *are the community.*

Groups

We often perceive people as joined by an objective interest or as at risk from a common environmental threat from which they might possibly save themselves through cooperative action (residents of a flood plain endangered by

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the growth of an impervious cover on the land, neighbors of a toxic dump, inhabitants of Spaceship Earth peeking though a frightening hole in the ozone layer). At the other extreme but with a similar insight, we may see them as sitting on a golden opportunity (a sea of oil, a pool of untapped human resources) that they could exploit if only they would get their act together.

Community organizers moved by perceptions of interest, risk, or opportunity may be forgiven modest rhetorical excesses. For example, the "global community" threatened by warming or the "neighborhood" threatened by a renewal project is often represented as nascent or emergent. It must be "empowered," "developed," or "mobilized," but it is, at the outset, a moral fact. In the same way, we may ascribe a group identity to individuals—they are, for example, black, or rich, or hypertensive—and assume that they are, therefore, "members" of a community defined by that ascribed identity. In many such circumstances, however, honesty would compel an acknowledgment that there is no community there, only a set of persons to whom we have imputed a common fate, opportunity, identity, interest, or market niche.[2]

Even that formulation doesn't quite capture the political burdens of transforming groups into communities. New communities are characteristically designed and mobilized on a crowded communal canvas. Attempting to turn a politically or economically salient group into a community necessarily presses for adjustments across the canvas. As revolutionary parties have long understood, if the "wretched of the earth" are to act communally they must realign their established memberships in families, religious and neighborhood associations, networks of friends, and polities. In the United States, the American Association of Retired Persons enrolls "seniors" with the same message.

The geography of the community canvas is complex and contentious. It is difficult to distinguish the boundaries of communions and their interactions—to decide whether new identities and relationships can be built on established networks or whether the ground must first be cleared and the social web reconstructed. The difficulties are only multiplied if we put on blinders before we start by dismissing or ignoring existing communities or moral sentiments, by specifying the conditions for respect in a way that excludes virtually every established community. If the only true communities

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are noncoercive and fully responsive to all their members, then we are dealing with shadows; if they are united by a coherent and fully shared system of values, then the few examples of the species are so short-lived that they disappear under our gaze.

The transformation of groups into communities is risky for communities and groups alike. Communities often adopt a group as a moral object, insisting that "we" be concerned with the well-being of "them." (Service bureaucracies of all sorts make and justify their livings in just such ways.) The "other" who commands this obligation may consist of all living human beings, of unborn generations, of innocent children, of trees, or of adults who are vulnerable to our self-regarding choices. Those groups are not, however, thereby members of the community; they are not moral subjects (Feinberg 1980, pp. 159–184; Goodin 1985).

The relationship between objects and subjects is asymmetric: the initiative lies always with communities, not groups—with subjects, not objects. A community that obligates itself to external moral objects or that enjoins its members to care about "all the children" or "all those who seek freedom" must set limits to its role as a trustee if it is not to risk destroying its own internal moral commitments and structure. (This is the other side of the classic worry that the charitable impulse that begins at home may be exhausted before it reaches the distant needy.[3]) A community that has learned to deal charitably with moral objects must also be wary of stumbling on a community of subjects—for example, not all poor people, but those particular ones over there with voices, proper names, personal ambitions, and social commitments. A charitable community that refuses to acknowledge subjects and communities retains the familiar object relationship at the heavy cost of treating human beings as savages, wards, numbers, or children. The subjects, on their side, may risk losing their protected status and their entitlements as innocent victims.

Institutions

The line between institution and community is difficult to observe in the semantic forest. Even the most experienced guides may sometimes lapse from one word to the other. A family, for example, is undoubtedly a community; the Family, as a set of practices and normative relations, is undoubt-

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edly an institution. Capitalism and Democracy are sets of institutions that shape communities and are shaped by them. Like communities, institutions often are articulated as systems of rights and obligations; like communities, they survive by maintaining a rough balance between predictability, discipline, and order on the one side and spontaneity and innovation on the other. Is it useful to distinguish between the crafts and technologies of institutional and community design when they are so tightly connected? Might I have as well started this chapter by suggesting that in the moment of ethical uncertainty we should ask "What sort of *institutions*—rather than what sort of *communities*—do we value?"[4]

In *The Good Society,* Bellah et al. (1991) struggle with that issue and implicitly suggest a reason to distinguish between communities and institutions and to appreciate and preserve their entanglement. They remark that Americans (and, one might easily suspect, most other people) are intimidated by the idea of institutions.[5] "Normative patterns embedded in and enforced by laws and mores" (Bellah et al. 1991, pp. 10–11) loom as faceless specters—roles, not people. Framed in this way, institutions belong to the world of stable "structures" that we cannot readily change and that we should perhaps (the Declaration of Independence warns us) be hesitant to overturn lightly. Communities, in contrast, appear as the domains of empowered "agents." The fatalists in our midst may see only institutions that severely constrain our options, but most of us want to believe that we can alter our individual families, neighborhoods, schools, or firms without undertaking the redesign of Family, Neighborhood, Education, or Corporation. It is that lower-case intimacy and plasticity that we should properly cherish even in huge communities. Russian planners engaged in a community may think and act strategically about the development of market institutions; the emergent market cannot in the same way engage to plan Russia.

The instrumental craft that serves a communitarian sensibility does, however, depend on a lively sense of the dynamics of institutions. Beyond some threshold, successfully changing communities—my family, this neighborhood, our profession—requires the reconstruction of institutions. Symmetrically, the maintenance and the adaptive change of institutions require communities to recruit and to discipline law-abiding citizens, reformers, rogues, conservators, soldiers, workers, and nurturing caretakers.

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Institutional change without substantial coercion characteristically depends on the social capital of communities in which people trust one another and their own social competence enough to risk altering established norms and conventional practices.

Communities

The world is crowded with communities. Most of them—as communitarians often aver—cannot sustain a deeply reflective ethical discourse; cannot carry the burdens of universalism or justify their practices as part of a richly considered way of life or tradition. Even the humblest communities, however, create a moral order. That is their nature, and that is the stubborn fact that the communitarian sensibility brings to their design. Even the drivers in a group of closely spaced cars speeding along a highway develop a sense of solidarity and an appropriate practice. They resent and (weakly) discipline putative members who violate that practice by going too slowly or darting in and out dangerously, and they snarl at outsiders—such as the police—when they intrude on the custom of the road.[6]

The core of the communitarian sensibility and the beginning of the search for a craft of community design is the notion of membership. Members are bound to one another by a web of rights and obligations. The web is articulated in practices, sustained by recruitment and socialization of new members, and controlled by ongoing processes of reward and discipline. Nonmembers who interact with the community are also fairly entitled to forms of respect and are bound by a web of obligations: if they behave in valued ways, they are entitled to appropriately correct responses. Indeed, as I have already suggested, nonmembers may even be treated as moral objects whom a community is bound to regard solicitously without regard to their specific earned deserts.

The other side of membership is, of course, exclusion and difference. A community that does not distinguish between members and strangers cannot construct or sustain a moral order and loses its identity. Its borders are dissolved, its discipline ended. (What does friendship matter if everyone is my friend?)

Some communities survive even though they have very little control over the entry and exit of members and cannot distinguish sharply between those

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who belong and those who are simply passing through. Residential neighborhoods in the United States are characteristically in this situation. Some never become communities; they remain groups sharing a common territory. Others succeed in creating a modest discipline and order in the face of this openness, either because the larger community protects them from being overwhelmed by strangers[7] or because they are able—legally or illegally, formally or informally—to create a protected enclave. The devices are legion: guards, gates, parking privileges, gangs, political incorporation, zoning, restrictive covenants, homeowners' associations (Ellickson 1982; Suttles 1990; Rosenblum 1998). Mass political parties in a competitive democratic regime face the same issue in a quite different way. Confronted with the neighborhood problem—openness, vulnerability, lack of discipline and distinction—they sometimes choose to intensify their communion by increasing the commitment of dedicated members and building walls around the periphery. That is not, however, usually a winning strategy. The electoral incentive encourages opening the gates and reducing differences. Paradoxically, in order to sustain itself as a community, a party focused on the recruitment of strangers must develop small cadres whose commitments to one another are strong enough to sustain the largely undisciplined and weakly affiliated voters. If the "democratization" movement destroys the possibility of sustaining cadres, then the party becomes an occasional framework or theater for a coalition of communities.

Most of us belong to many communities simultaneously. Even tightly integrated communions built around a deeply shared religious faith are composed of communities superimposed on one another—sometimes by force of arms—and struggling always with the tension between competitive allegiances. In the pluralistic and fragmented circumstances of a liberal society, we live in fields of open and often temporary communities, reconciling our many faces and identities within our own minds and speech (Galston 1991, pp. 22–41).

The field of communities takes on qualities of its own. At virtually every scale, some communities assert their superordinate standing and their self-serving account of the open field's history and prospects. The field is shaped by the struggles over those hegemonic efforts. In a quite different way, some communities represent themselves as mediators across the field. Enrolling in these therapeutic communions, we seek to reduce and reconcile our com-

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petitive identities, learning (at least overtly) only to be ourselves (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 113–141; Kadushin 1969).

The structure of the open field is simultaneously shaped and maintained by three distinctive modes of speech—each of which, I suspect, we may discern in our own conversational practices. Faced with a pluralistic field, we are sometimes tempted to be shrill and simple, our voice a bugle call to action or a bell clanging in the night, warning of danger. We are also tempted, however, to be tentative in our speech, accepting of interpretive differences, prudent, ambiguous, ironic, alive to dilemmas in our values, and proudly liberal in our rhetorical sensibilities. Finally, in many professional roles we struggle to create what Gouldner (1979) called a "culture of critical discourse"—a way of talking that will stand outside the field of communities and will be fully public and uniquely compelling. The frequent evocation of science (e.g., "planning science," "management science," "decision science," "complexity science") is an expression of this honorable but ultimately futile aspiration to overcome the merely partisan and the contingent in our (or, for most of us, "their") professional practices.

This brief tour has, I hope, suggested ways of designing communities in their respective fields:

- Change the conditions of membership, the relations between members and nonmembers, and the terms of exclusion.
- Shift commitments to moral objects and the relations of objects and subjects.
- Alter the processes of recruitment, socialization, and discipline.
- Weaken or strengthen a community's competence to command resources and to satisfy its members.
- Change the discursive practices of the communion and its field.

Even this brief and only cryptically specified list of tasks hints at a large but contested set of design instruments and a thick manual of both confident techniques and uncertain technologies. Thick manuals are not easily digested. Current expressions of a communitarian sensibility tend, understandably, to simplify the design craft into two broad accounts of the origins and character of communities and—within those accounts—styles of approaching the tasks in my short list.

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The first account is that communities are essentially voluntary associations originating in a covenant among their members. The original compact may be far in the past, but it retains a commanding presence. New recruits—particularly those who join freely—are presumed to accept the community's obligations as if they had been parties to the initial bargain. Their acceptance is ratified and repeated in periodic rituals of affirmation and allegiance. If the community seems adrift, conservators of the moral order characteristically appeal for exceptional acts of renewal that reinvest in rituals that have been routinized, neglected, or stripped of their original meaning (Lincoln 1989).

This image, Janus-like, also faces in the other direction. A community that stems from a covenant may present itself (at some risk) as a set of autonomous souls and then undertake to form a new contract or to dissolve. The "members" of a firm that has lost its markets and its élan sit down together not to renew the original mission (whose time may have passed) but to re-create the enterprise in the present moment. Members of a family may act in the same way, setting new terms for their relationships or stepping away from them.

The image of "a new social contract" appears as a powerful design instrument even in a community whose scale precludes universal participation in the process of bargaining. The television images of vast parliamentary assemblies in Russia encourage a sense that we are watching "the people" at work, crafting a new community. (In comparison, the central room of Independence Hall in Philadelphia seems tiny.) On a much more modest contemporary scale, the elaborate forms of participation in what is ironically described in the United States as "comprehensive" urban planning suggest that the wisdom of the entire community is being mobilized to create a new vision and a new future.

We all understand, of course, that the new compacts are not written on a clean slate, that the processes of bargaining and the modes of participation are embedded in established organizational and discursive forms, and that there is a powerful theatrical element in the construction of the "political spectacle" (Edelman 1988). Indeed, a great deal of contemporary social and political theory has been driven by the image of simulating an idealized state that escapes from those biased forms. The simulation, we are encouraged to hope, might then allow us to specify the results of an

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interaction that we cannot possibly create on the ground. Just as we think of "shadow prices" as perfecting real markets for the purposes of weighing costs and benefits, so we have been variously encouraged to shape in our minds an "original position" in which we can define justice objectively or an "ideal speech condition" in which coercion is removed from our conversations. Such perfectionism does not sit easily within a communitarian sensibility.[8] If meanings and identities are shaped and reshaped by relations within and among communities, then how can the specters that survive the stripping away of bias or coercion be recognized and trusted?

The second broad account of the origins and dynamics of community does not depend on a covenant. In this account, the central concept is "practice" (or better, "practices") rather than "compact" (Oakeshott 1933, 1975; MacIntyre 1984; Turner 1994). Both our deep identities and the faces we present to the world are shaped in communities that, for the most part, precede our existence and are not of our making. If we want to design those communities, we must undertake to know "how we do things" within their social borders and then either to reinforce or to amend the practices that socialize and discipline members. We must ensure that members are protected in their entitlements and insist that they meet their obligations. (In a different voice: we must "help them meet their obligations.")

Even in communities that are of our making and that originate in a recent compact, the strategic style that is centered on practices directs us to attend to the countless ways in which original intentions are realized or thwarted in emergent traditions, in administrative procedures, in exemplary behaviors, in the web of daily life, and in the forms of speech. A constant evocation of what we said "before"—before the treaty was ratified, before we were married, before we agreed to be partners in the firm, before we undertook to stage the play—does not substitute for practices that sustain the flow of recruits, socialize them into the new arrangements, protect the boundaries, and encourage members to behave appropriately. (In contrast, of course, practices must and do take on a life of their own that largely displaces appeals to the original compact, to the vision of the founders, or—as many planners will attest—to an idealized future.[9]) Even shared values—the defining element of many images of community—seem secondary to practices: our communion is defined not by what we value but by what we do and what we allow to be done.

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Ethical arguments within this account and within this strategic design style are particularly complex. Appeals to origins and compacts are largely misplaced. Abstraction of principle from practice and the construction of simple evaluative hierarchies risk the destruction of meaning and the distortion of exemplars and parables. Policy analysis as a sparse and analytic discursive technology (whose standard literary forms are the columns of a cost-benefit analysis and the graphic sweep of intersecting preference and production functions) gives way to the novelistic writing of scenarios that virtually defy consensual cardinal ordering of alternatives (Pincoffs 1986; Nussbaum 1990).

Paradoxically, when practices rather than compacts are the core of the communitarian sensibility even the design of new communities in a crowded field appears a classically conservative act: it appears to be engaged with daily life more than with commanding visions; with routines, social bonds, and the web of interactions (albeit new ones) more than with charisma. Calls to a new moral order are suspect unless they have the density of the mythic world of J. R. R. Tolkien.

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