Meeting the Authors: A Workshop on Social Justice in Public Health with Ruth Faden and Madison Powers

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In this editorial we introduce the special *Public Health Ethics* symposium on social justice in public health. We present here a select set of papers arising from an international workshop, organized on 4–5 June 2012 by the Institute of Biomedical Ethics, in collaboration with the University Research Priority Program for Ethics at the University of Zurich. *Meeting the Author* is a series of international workshops organized by the Ethics Center of the University of Zurich. In this workshop format, a selected group of junior and senior researchers discusses a seminal work in ethics together with the authors.

The call to discuss Madison Powers and Ruth Faden's book: *Social Justice. The Moral Foundations of Public Health and Health Policy* (2006) brought together close to 30 junior and senior international researchers with diverse backgrounds, including bioethics, philosophy, public health, biology and medicine. Papers selected for presentations covered theoretical ground by discussing and critiquing specific aspects of Powers and Faden's theory (e.g. concepts of justice, health and essentialism). Other speakers discussed the application of the theory to a wide range of topics (e.g. humanitarian action, immigration, right to health, policy-making, vaccination and organ transplantation). The 2-day workshop allowed for a rich exchange among those presenting, other participants and the authors, each bringing to the table their own perspectives and expertise, both theoretical and applied, under the banner of social justice.

In their book, Powers and Faden provide bioethicists in general, and public health ethicists in particular, with one of the most compelling frameworks for assessing public health ethics issues based on the idea of social justice. In our view, it is essential to build fundamental concerns of social justice into a moral theory of public health and health policy. This is not only because health very much depends on socioeconomic status and other social determinants (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006), which in turn leads to significant health effects at the population level (Dawson, 2011: 17), but also because health care itself should be distributed in a way that addresses the concerns raised by social justice. It is the rich manner in which Powers and Faden's theory captures and presents health and well-being within a social context, which makes it particularly relevant. At the core of their theory are six fundamental dimensions that are crucial to human well-being and flourishing. One of the six dimensions is *health* itself, but the other dimensions reach beyond health-related concerns: *personal security, reasoning, respect, attachment and self-determination* (Powers and Faden, 2006). Justice, on their view, does not only require achieving sufficiency in health but also in the other dimensions of well-being. Moreover, justice urges us to address the needs of those who are not only systematically disadvantaged but are also often trapped within a complex web of multiple structural inequalities. Given its non-ideal nature, Powers and Faden's theory is also sensitive to, and dependent on empirical facts and practical applications, providing a practical and accessible framework for scholars particularly concerned with topics in applied ethics and real-world problems.

The papers selected for this issue of *Public Health Ethics* are representative of the rich platform for discussion that the book *Social Justice* provides.

Inspired by the potential practical applications of Powers and Faden's theory, Lyn Horn examines the problem of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in South Africa. FAS in South Africa has deep historical roots and continues to be a significant health concern. Horn explores Powers and Faden's six dimensions of well-being in turn and applies them to the problem of FAS, with a view towards further enhancing existing public health measures (Horn, 2013).

Alison Thompson uses the example of school-based HPV vaccination programs in Canada to further explore the relevance of Powers and Faden's theory of public

health and social justice. Thompson analyses the vaccination program in terms of priority setting and cost-effectiveness—also in light of the six dimensions—to provide a nuanced commentary on the programme that had been seen by many in the public health sector as a 'no brainer' (Thompson, 2013).

Among the theoretical papers, Akira Inoue discusses Powers and Faden's claim that theirs is a *moderate* form of essentialism. Given the non-ideal nature of the theory, it must provide an answer to the question 'which inequalities matter most?' (given that we cannot achieve ideal justice). In doing so, Inoue argues, the normative force of the theory must be derived from holding a dimension of well-being, such as health, as intrinsically valuable (Inoue, 2013). This provides the normative guidance to policy-making when answering the question of which inequalities matter most. Inoue suggests that while Powers and Faden do insist on the value of health, they must do so at the expense of their own view of moderate essentialism.

A. M. Viens addresses the question of paternalism in public health interventions and policies which focus on considerations of social justice. Viens contends that public health measures targeted towards benefitting disadvantaged groups and individuals are susceptible to various charges of paternalism (Viens, 2013). Examining these however, Viens suggests that theorists and practitioners should choose to 'bite the paternalistic bullet', opening up the discussions on the other merits and faults of such measures instead of allowing objections of paternalism to entirely block public health efforts.

Diego S. Silva tackles the theme of liberty and obligation in arguing that the concept of self-determination that Powers and Faden present may go against their own notion of justice, which includes securing a sufficient amount of well-being, and not merely freedom to achieve it. According to Silva, it remains unclear whether Powers and Faden argue for the provision of social conditions to achieve a sufficient amount of well-being, leaving it to the individual to freely choose whether or not to achieve that threshold, or whether they also argue for a moral obligation on the part of the individual to achieve a sufficient amount of well-being (Silva, 2013).

We are indebted to Ruth Faden and Madison Powers for writing a response paper for this issue, addressing the concerns and questions raised by each of the papers (Powers and Faden, 2013). This dialogue will no doubt provide as much food for thought as did the exchanges during the workshop. Frameworks in these fields can only be enhanced and eventually fruitfully applied with the concerted efforts on the parts of theorists and practitioners. We hope that these papers will testify to the great need for continued debate on social justice in the fields of public and population health as well as policy-making.

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