**Strangers in our Midst, by David Miller (Harvard University Press: Cambridge and London) 2016.**

The refugee question is without doubt the most controversial political issue in today’s Europe. Refugees from the civil war in Syria and from poverty stricken countries in Africa are trying to reach the shores of Europe, risking their lives on the Mediterranean sea, and European politicians and citizens debate if, and how many refugees to accept into Fortress Europe. The refugee question has also divided Europe. Some countries in Eastern Europe do not accept any refugees (obviously forgetting their own need for refuge during the Communist years), leaving to the others to solve the problem. Because of the migration issue, extreme right parties get off the ground in many European countries, parties that until the late 90s were marginal. Migration is indeed an issue of topical concern, and it is debateable if Europa has lived up to a minimal level on decency and human rights protection during the present crises.

There is a crucial need for philosophical analyses of the migration question and the moral dilemmas it creates, and it is thus timely that David Miller, one of the leading political philosophers, publish a book on this topic.

In this thoughtful and reflective work, Miller discusses migration from some basic moral values elaborated in an introductory chapter. One value is “weak global cosmopolitanism”; meaning that each individual can claim human rights irrespective of nationality. The second is “national self-determination”; citizens in a democracy have the right to determine their future, including who to admit as immigrants. The third is “fairness” and the fourth is ”the idea of an integrated society”. Obviously the first two values come into conflict; according to the first, one could argue that European nations should admit large numbers of refugees in order to relieve their suffering, according to the second, assuming that citizens are unwilling to have strangers in their midst, only a few are welcome.

According to Miller, we stand in special relationships to our co-nationals to whom we have stronger obligations than to others, thus Miller defends a communitarian position. However, we also have obligations to people in dire need, i.e. to those whose human rights are violated, Miller argues. These obligations form a “moral bedrock”.

In the second chapter, Miller discusses the cosmopolitan claim of open borders and in the next chapter the realist claim of closed borders. Miller then devotes chapters to the distinction between refugees and economic migrants, and he discusses the rights of immigrants and the conditions for integration. Although Miller’s book was written before the large number of migrants tried to reach Europe in 2015 and 2016, all questions are highly relevant in the present discussion. At the end, Miller also comments on this, so called, “refugee crises”.

Cosmopolitans argue that each individual have a right to equal opportunity. The natural lottery should not decide our welfare. Although Miller seems to accept this view he argues that open borders are not the best instrument to come to grips with the ”opportunity gap”. In contrast, if the best-situated people leave their countries of origin, the ones who remain will find themselves in an even worse situation. A better way is to change the institutions in the home countries. However, what to do if this is not foreseeable in failed states like Somalia or Afghanistan, or not possible as for climate refugees?

Miller makes a distinction between refugees and economic migrants. Refugees are those who suffer from persecution (in accordance to the Geneva Convention) and those whose human rights are under threat and who “...can only avoid this threat by migrating” (82). Those whose human rights are under threat, but who could be helped by other means than migration should not be included. In contrast, economic migrants try to escape “routine poverty” and they have no refugee rights. However, how to draw the line? Routine poverty implies, for example, lack of basic health care resources and access to education. It means hunger, vulnerability and early deaths. Are these threats less severe than political repression? And is it foreseeable that these threats to people in for example sub-Saharan Africa could be helped by other means in the foreseeable future?

As all serious books in political philosophy, also this book is based on some empirical assumptions. Among them are the desperate needs of refugees south of the Mediterranean, of the possibility of future large waves of migration due to environmental reasons and climate change, the tensions that large immigration causes in receiving countries and the threat that large scale immigration poses to European welfare states. The last assumption is controversial. From a Keynesian perspective, one could argue that the benefit with accepting an immigrant is that of including another consumer and future taxpayer who will increase demand on goods and services. Is it a coincidence that Germany and Swede, two countries that have accepted the highest number of immigrants in recent years also have the fastest growing economies today?

Often, Miller backs up his argument by referring to views of the “general public”. Of course it is a relevant aspect if, say, a large number of immigrants will create tensions in a receiving nation. However, the way of argumentation is also challenging because it risks adjusting normative political philosophy to present public opinions. Political philosophy will consequently lose its critical point.

In order to limit the “burden” on Europe, and to protect the values of social cohesion and community, Miller seems to support the present EU – policy to pay states on the other side of the Sea; Libya, Turkey etc. to bear the refugee burden (172). However, does this policy not imply a moral collapse? How could it be morally justified for Europe, as a rich and wealthy continent, to shift its responsibility to authoritarian and lawless nations?

A burning issue in today’s migration debate is how to integrate immigrants. Miller offers a helpful distinction between social integration, civic integration and cultural integration. Social integration means that people with different backgrounds meet at work and in their neighbourhoods. It is an important goal, argues Miller, because tensions will lessen if citizens and migrants learn to know each other. Civic integration means that people share principles and norms for social and political life. The “aim is to equip immigrants with the linguistic, social and political skills” which will enable them to take “…full advantage of the society they are joining…”(136). Also this form of integration seems to be desirable for everyone. Finally, cultural integration means that immigrants should adopt the culture of the receiving countries, for example, that immigrant Muslims should convert to say Protestant Christianity. Miller raises two arguments against cultural integration. First, it is oppressive and second, it is not necessary if civic integration works.

In the concluding chapter, Miller admits that the human disaster of the refugee flows in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Syria has not been met by Jordan, Turkey and other neighbouring states, but “…that fall outside of the main scope of my inquiry” (p. 151). That is precisely the problem with Miller’s book: it takes a Eurocentric perspective on a global problem; the interest of Europe comes first, and then we can perhaps bother about the rest. Although Miller adheres to a principle of equal human dignity, what he calls “weak moral cosmopolitanism”; “Immigrants are human beings” (!) (153), when he discusses the concrete issues it sometimes sounds more as a lip service.

Göran Collste

Linköping University