

**Some Essays from Mansbridge's Beyond Self-interest:
Questions and Topics**

1 In Amartya Sen's contribution, "Rational Fools", Sen explains the title (in effect) on page 37, where he remarks that

A person is given ~~the~~ preference-ordering, and as and when the need arises this is supposed to reflect his interests, represent his welfare, summarise his idea of what should be done, and describe his actual choices and behavior. Can **one** preference-ordering do all of these things? A person thus described may be 'rational' in the limited sense of exhibiting no inconsistencies in his choice behavior, but if he has no use for these distinctions between quite different concepts, he must be a bit of a fool.

Sen goes on to argue

1.1 that preference-orderings ought to be **partial** rather than **linear** -- that is (essentially), that two alternatives in such an ordering may be **incomparable**, even though a choice between them is **not** 'indifferent' to us; and

1.2 that one may have to consider indefinite hierarchies of **metalevel** orderings of (different) 'preference'-orders.

Had I had the chance to discuss this in class, I would have endorsed these arguments, and asked for examples which might help to refine and elaborate them.

Have any issues arisen in class-discussions of the historical texts we have read, in fact, that seem to you to resonate with Sen's observations in interesting ways?

Do the observations provide any insight into the recurrent problems of **cultural** (and therefore, implicitly, **moral**) **relativism** (as these arose, for example, in our discussions of Phillips' exposition of Kohlberg's ideas? Or Pogge's attempts to move beyond Rawlsianism-in-one-country? Or Jaggar's attempts to articulate a committed-but-culturally-relative socialist-feminism?)?

Might the 'hierarchies' mentioned above **also** be **partially** ordered, in potentially different ways, and thus **open-ended**? How may we reconcile an awareness that this may be so with our clear needs ^{to}act, 'within' various 'levels' (?) of such hierarchies?

Do metaphysical and epistemological questions perhaps begin to converge with ethical ones here?

Finally, if the boundary conditions of ethical as well epistemic data **are** underdetermined in this way, in turn, might this suggest ways to enlarge Kant's notions of '**freedom**' '**reasonableness**' and '**rationality**'. Might 'altruistic' acts, then (compare John Ball's "fellowship"), be instances of **all three**?

2 In "Selfishness and Altruism" (pages 48 and 49), Jon Elster makes the following rather remark, which may on close reading be somewhat less lapidary than it first appears.

Paternalism is appropriate only when freedom to choose is likely to be severely self-destructive, especially when it will also harm other people. (48)

Taking into account the very broad range of actions that might be construed as 'paternalistic', and the ambiguity of the qualifying word "severely" in this quotation, do you think Elster's remark ^I is right? That it is essentially right, but in ways that require comment and closer examination?

Might attempts to interpret and implement it, for example, encounter potentially serious practical problems of 'ascription', interpretation and adjudication?

Does it clash, moreover, with our actual, near-universal behavior with children? Or, more abstractly, with Derek Phillips' extended attempts to reinterpret Gewirth's 'principal of generic consistency' in the case of children?

If so, ought we then to begin --as childrens'-rights-advocates have long suggested -- to **reevaluate** this behavior and these attempts, in rather thoroughgoing ways?

What relevance might Elster's remark have, for example, to 'paternalist' (?) state removal of children from the 'care' of parents who may (or may not) be abusing them, physically and otherwise?

Might different levels of (social, collective and individual) 'maternalism' and 'paternalism', in effect, come in to **conflict** with each other, here and elsewhere?

And if they do, who (which designated 'matres' and 'patres') should settle these conflicts?

3 In "Varieties of Altruism", Christopher Jencks paraphrases and interprets Adam Smith (from **The Theory of Moral Sentiments**) as follows:

. . . we **value** sympathy with others as an end in itself.

We want to experience the pleasure and pain of others, and have them experience ours. . . . But to maintain this kind of emotional interchange with others, Smith argues, we must protect ourselves against one of its most common consequences: casual or unjust judgments of our behavior by others. We therefore develop standards of what others "ought" to think about our conduct. To do this, we try to see our behavior objectively, that is, as others would see it. This means trying to evaluate our behavior from a perspective in which our selfish interests count no more than the interests of others.

Might this line of argument provide a moderately persuasive '**genetic**' reconstruction of (some of) the **complex interactions between human needs for empathy as well as 'fairness' and 'objectivity'** that Aristotle, Wollstonecraft, Kant, Rawls, Kohlberg and Jagger (among many others) have tried to articulate, 'abstract', refine and generalise in different ways?

(By '**genetic**', here, I mean something like the sense Piaget had in mind with his "genetic epistemology": something which provides a rough but plausible account of the **physiological, psychological and social genesis** of these interrelated desires and needs.)

If so, might such paths to the **development** of 'moral insight' ('raised consciousness'?) be relevant as well to

3.1 the indefinitely complex interrelations **between** the "three sources of unselfishness" ("**empathy, community and morality**") which Jencks sketches on 54-55, and

3.2 the "redefinition or transformation of the self so as to incorporate 'outside' elements", to which he refers on 55?

And if **this** is right, finally, might degrees of '**altruism**' partly reflect degrees of diffusion in the boundaries of our '**selves**' -- imagined in consciously counterfactual acts of Aristotelian 'contemplation' (**theoria**) -- to embrace others as the Kantian "ends in themselves" (**Selbstzwecke**) we **wish** we were?