

# Discounting For Kinship?

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## Partiality and $\delta > 0$

A moral argument *against* a positive rate of pure time preference:

A person's place in time is not, in itself, the right kind of feature of a person to affect his/her entitlements. For example, it does not make someone more or less deserving or meritorious. Similarly, it does not, in itself, make anyone's needs more or less pressing. . . . It is not the right kind of property to confer on people extra or reduced moral status.

**Response:** We can be justified in caring about some people more than others without thinking that some have 'reduced moral status'. It's okay (and, in some cases, maybe required) to be *partial*.

*Discounting for Kinship.* The people born into the next generation are our children.

We are permitted (required) to be strongly partial to the interests of our children.

We are also permitted (required) to be partial to our grandchildren, but to a lesser degree.

For each succeeding generation, the degree of partiality declines as the closeness of the bonds linking present and future people declines.

Therefore, on grounds of partiality, we can permissibly weight the welfare of each succeeding generation less than that of the generation preceding it.

Questions:

1. Is it true that we are permitted to be partial to some over others? Are we required?
2. If so, who are we permitted (required) to be partial to? To our kin? Only our kin?
3. Must partiality decline in the manner described?

## Worries about Discounting for Kinship

- (1) Partiality is grounds for caring about some people *more*, given their relationship to us, than strangers. So how can partiality justify *discounting*?

Recall the Ramsey equation:

$$r = \eta g + \delta$$

Where  $r$  is the discount rate;  $\eta$  is the elasticity of the marginal utility of consumption;  $g$  is the growth rate of consumption; and  $\delta$  is the rate of pure time preference (and the catastrophe rate).

(Caney 2014, p. 323-4)

There is a distinction between *agent-neutral* and *agent-relative* moral reasons.

Note: This isn't *genuine* pure time discounting because it isn't the sheer passage of time *itself* that justifies the discount rate.

Is this view, then, subject to the same kind of object that Cowen & Parfit raised against *The Argument for Probability*? Why or why not?

Perhaps its okay to care more about my children than my great-great-great-grandchildren. But I shouldn't care less about my great-great-great-grandchildren than some presently existing strangers!

- (2) Partiality might justify caring about those of my descendants who are nearer to me in time, but it provides no justification for caring differently about the welfare of unrelated strangers based on their locations in time.
- (3) Because (on this account) the reasons for discounting are agent-relative, there will be no one discount rate. Different people will have different pure time preferences.

### *Mogensen's Global Collectivism*

For some questions, the appropriate perspective is not some particular individual's and is not wholly impartial—but rather: the point of view of *all currently existing humanity*.

Can the collection—"all currently existing humanity"—have reasons of partiality?

*Collective Rescue Analogy.* Suppose that there are three children drowning in a pond: child *a*, child *b*, and child *c*. Nearby, *A* and *B* (who are otherwise strangers to each other) can together save exactly two of the children—but neither can save anyone alone. *A* is *a*'s parent and *B* is *b*'s parent.

*Claim:* *A* and *B* together have most reason to save *a* and *b*.

There are reasons of partiality that the two have *together*, but which is not had by either individual alone. Similarly,

[*Global Collectivism*]

We together may have greater reason to care about the next generation than about later generations, because those who are born into the next generation are our children, whereas succeeding generations will be more and more distantly related to those of us living now.

The debate between Nordhaus and Stern about climate change, for example, is about what 'the world community now' should do. So, shouldn't we take up *that* point of view when answering it?

(Mogensen 2022, p. 13)

How does Mogensen's *Global Collectivism* answer the three worries?

*Worry (1):*

*Worry (2):*

*Worry (3):*