

MORALITY AS META-RANKING
RANKINGS AND METARANKINGS: SEN

Sen (1974) proposes to view a morality as a moral ranking of the rankings of actions, i.e. as a moral meta-ranking. More precisely, let A be the set of alternative and mutually exclusive combinations of actions under consideration, and call $R_i = \langle A, \succeq_i \rangle$ the ranking of A in the i -th respect. Further, call $R = \{R_i \mid i \in \mathbb{N}\}$ the set of all the rankings under consideration. Any ranking of this set R will be called a meta-ranking of action-set A . A meta-ranking is then a partially ordered set $M = \langle R, \succeq \rangle$, where ' $R_i \succeq R_j$ ' abbreviates "ranking i is preferable to ranking j ", or "preference i is (meta)preferable to preference j ". Such a meta-ranking is what Sen calls a morality. The root or first element of R in such ranking is the morally best ranking. Presumably the morally best, or ideal, ranking is actually unattainable in practice. There is more: in any pluralistic society and, a fortiori, in the world system,

there is a whole collection \mathcal{M} of moralities, where $\mathcal{M} = \{M_j \mid j \in \mathbb{N}\}$. According to radical ethical relativism, neither of them is objectively preferable to any other, i.e. they are all mutually equivalent. While this is certainly false, it does have a grain of truth: in fact, some moralities render certain societies more viable and just than others, whereas other moralities are totally inadequate to them. In other words, \mathcal{M} is neither an equivalence class nor a partially ordered set; it has no structure, hence there is not much we can theorize about it.

CRITICISM What Sen has done is not to define the concept of a morality but that of of actions, a value system. A value system may be regarded as a meta-ranking of rankings, whereas a morality is a ranking of rules of social behavior.