

Family models

Sir, - In an extensive article on gender (March 20), my colleague Martha Nussbaum devotes two paragraphs to criticizing alleged inadequacies in my economic model of the family (*A Treatise on the Family*, expanded edition, 1991) that are said to explain the need for a fresh departure in discussing women and the family. I like to see my work cited, but I do object when she motivates her discussion by misrepresenting mine.

She makes two unsubstantiated charges. First, that my work cannot explain conflict between men and women in incomes and other economic conditions because, she claims, it assumes that the male head of a household is a "beneficent altruist who adequately represents the interest of all his family members" and "distribute[s] resources fairly". Second, that my analysis is also unable to explain why girls have been treated so badly in many societies. However, even a casual reading of my book shows that both charges are false.

Professor Nussbaum is not the first one to

assert that my work on the family assumes an all-encompassing altruism. But she is apparently unaware that this myth has been addressed by the economist Shoshana Grossbard-Shechtman and others. A major part of my book on the family are the chapters discussing the division of labour in families, and marriage in both monogamous and polygamous societies. Yet the predominant assumption in these chapters is that both husbands and wives are completely selfish, and not at all altruistic. Other chapters do highlight the role of altruism between spouses and between parents and children. Surely, however, Nussbaum does not deny that sometimes husbands and wives love each other and their children?

Her second charge is that my analysis cannot explain why daughters have often been treated so badly by their parents. Yet I discuss precisely this issue in a chapter entitled "Family Background and the Opportunities of Children". For example, I state that "parents in poorer countries usually do invest more in the education of boys, and female infanticide has been more common

than male infanticide", that "parents in most poor societies have traditionally preferred sons to daughters" and that there is a "negative effect of the number of boys surviving in a family on the mortality of girl children".

I certainly do not claim to have said the last word on the family. Newer contributions can receive their appropriate place in the evolution of our understanding of this most important of institutions, without denigrating and misrepresenting the contributions of others.

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Sickness narratives

Sir, - I find puzzling A. M. Daniels's claim, in his review of my *Recovering Bodies: Illness, disability, and life writing* (April 24), that I hardly touch on matters such as why illness and disabili-

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London Times Literary
Supplement