



Chapters Four and Five provide detailed consideration of the role of empowerment within both Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach. I conclude that although neither scholar consistently uses the term empowerment, the concept of empowerment – both as agency and as capability-set expansion – plays a robust role on *both* versions of the approach. Moreover, I make the controversial suggestion that many of the differences between Sen and Nussbaum are more a matter of style than substance.

Chapter Six considers the concern that Sen does not do enough to engage the role of institutionalized power in generating inequalities that prevent individuals from being empowered. I conclude that despite valuable contributions, Sen fails to provide a complete account of empowerment issues. However, this is not a fatal flaw. Considering both Sen's contributions, and the fact that the approach is well suited to accommodate a more complete understanding of institutionalized power and of empowerment for development (for example, Naila Kabeer's Social Relations Approach), it is clear that Sen and the capability approach have offered valuable steps towards a complete concept of empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

by

Loretta Wills Keleher

Dissertation submitted to The Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2007

Advisory Committee:

Professor Judith Lichtenberg, Chair  
Professor David Crocker  
Professor Peter Levine  
Professor Christopher Morris  
Professor Joseph Oppenheimer

©Copyright by

Loretta Wills Keleher

2007

## Dedication

To my parents, Michael and Peggy Keleher, who always allowed me to love learning no matter what my report cards said.

To Michael Bursum, el major amigo que hay.

To my daughter, Katherine Anne Keleher Bursum, the very idea of whom inspires me.

## Acknowledgements

This project owes a great debt to many, but none more than David Crocker. The idea of working with David Crocker, the development ethics scholar, was a significant part of what attracted me to the University of Maryland. What I did not know when I chose to study at Maryland was how much I would benefit from working with David Crocker the person. As a mentor David has directed my progress, and helped me to sharpen my arguments, both where we agree and where we disagree. He has generously read, and thoughtfully commented on, several papers and drafts of chapters at various stages. He has encouraged and supported my professional development (on three continents). He has done all of this with the skill and knowledge of a well-practiced scholar, the kindness of a dear friend, and – at just the right times – the enthusiasm of a soccer coach. I could not be more grateful.

Judith Lichtenberg has served not only as a key contributor to this project for the past few years, but she has also been an excellent professor, mentor, and role model throughout my time at the University of Maryland. She has given generously of her time and knowledge of philosophy, teaching, and the balancing act required by academic life. I am grateful to Christopher Morris for providing the same insight into, and demand for, conceptual clarity that I have admired in both his teaching and his written work. I hope to continue to refine the arguments and concepts presented in this project in future work. Samuel Kerstein has given invaluable advice and direction on the early stages of this project, as well as on teaching and departmental service. I am also grateful to Peter Levine and to Joe Oppenheimer for not simply answering an eleventh hour call to service on my dissertation committee, but responding with insightful and very useful comments and direction.

I would also like to acknowledge just two of the many people who have had an indirect impact on this work as they helped me develop as a philosopher. Paul Sagal first introduced me to philosophy. He not only believed I could succeed in graduate school, but he first convinced me to believe it too. Jim Leshar has taught me a great deal both about doing philosophy and about being a philosophy professor.

Finally, although there are too many to name, my work has benefited immensely from my interaction with professors and colleagues at New Mexico State University, Michigan State University, the University of Maryland, the Human Development Capability Association, the International Development Ethics Association, and Development Alternatives Inc.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dedication</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iii
<b>Table of Contents</b>	iv
<b>List of Tables</b>	vi
<b>List of Figures</b>	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter One: The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach Compared Part I: A General Overview</b>	6
A Brief History of Development Economics	11
The Economic Growth Perspective and the Capability Approach	21
<b>Chapter Two: The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach Compared Part II: A Closer Look</b>	37
Health, Education, Democracy, and Freedom for All: But Not in the Same Way, or for the Same Reasons	38
The Concept and Role of Empowerment	52
<b>Chapter Three: Can Pogge be Justified? A Response to Thomas Pogge’s ‘Can the Capability Approach be Justified?’</b>	70
Pogge’s (Mis)Representation of the Capability Approach	72
The Intrinsic Value of Capabilities and Functionings	74
Not by the Distribution of Resources Alone	79
“The Relevant Difference”	86
Natural Human Diversities	89
<b>Chapter Four: Empowerment Concepts in Sen’s Version of the Capability Approach</b>	98
Sen’s Key Distinctions and Concepts	101
Agency Freedom and Agency Achievements	103
Well-Being Freedom and Achievements	115

<b>Chapter Five: Empowerment Concepts in Nussbaum’s Version of the Capability Approach</b>	123
Nussbaum and Sen; Capabilities and Functionings; Agency and Well-Being	125
The List	130
Nussbaum’s List of Central Human Functional Capabilities	156
<b>Chapter Six: Institutionalized Power and Empowerment</b>	158
Part One: Institutionalized Power	161
Sex and Gender	164
Gender Roles and the Sanctity of Culture	171
Part Two: Sen, Institutionalized Power, and Empowerment	179
Survival Ratios, Inequalities, and Empowerment	180
Sen’s Contributions Examined	187
A Promising Direction: Kabeer’s Social Relations Approach	196
<b>Conclusion</b>	204
<b>Bibliography</b>	210

## LIST OF TABLES

Table One: The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach 35	
Table Two: Means and Ends	51
Table Three: Empowerment	68
Table Four: Sen's Distinctions: <i>Agency and Well-Being</i> and <i>Freedom and Achievement</i>	101
Table Five: Sen's Realized Agency Success vs. Effective Freedom	111
Table Six: Sen's Agency Concepts	113
Table Seven: Nussbaum's Capability/Functioning Distinction	130

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Diagram: Sen's Agency Concepts	122
--------------------------------	-----

## Introduction

*"Men rape within the marriage. Men believe that paying dowry means buying the wife, so they use her anyhow at all times. But no one talks about it."* — Ugandan woman

*"When I was working I used to decide. When she is working, she owns her money and does anything she wishes."* a man from Vila Junqueira, Brazil

*"When my husband died, my in-laws told me to get out. So I came to town and slept on the pavement."* — middle-aged widow in Kenya.

*"The unemployed men are frustrated because they no longer can play the part of family providers and protectors. They live on the money made by their wives, and feel humiliated because of this."* — elderly woman, Uchkun village, The Kyrgyz Republic.

*"When a woman gives her opinion, they [men] make fun of her and don't pay attention."  
"If women go to a meeting, they don't give their opinion."* — woman in Las Pascuas, Bolivia.<sup>1</sup>

In the situations described above, groups or individuals are poor, not simply because they lack income, but because they lack power. International development theorists and

---

<sup>1</sup> These quotes are all taken from *Voices of the Poor* available on the World Bank's website at: <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/voices/listen-findings.htm>

practitioners have come to agree overwhelmingly that “empowerment” is a necessary component of good development. They disagree, however, about what “empowerment” means, how individuals and groups become empowered, how empowerment should be measured, and why it is important for international development. My project is to identify and examine some of the concepts of empowerment current in development theory, practice, and policy, before pointing towards ways to improve what I argue is the best available understanding of empowerment.

The project has three main parts and a total of seven chapters. The first part – Chapters One, Two, and Three – identify and defend what I believe is the most adequate concept of empowerment in the theory and practice of development. Chapter One begins with a brief history of international development. I then offer a comparative analysis of the traditionally and still dominant economic growth approach to development which focuses on GNP growth, and the relatively new, but increasingly popular, capability approach, which looks beyond GNP growth to *human* development, evaluated in terms of what capabilities, or freedoms, individual people have to achieve valuable or valued ways of living.

In Chapter Two, I examine the concepts and roles of empowerment in both the economic growth approach and the capability approach. I conclude that in addressing empowerment issues not just in the marketplace, but in every sphere of life, the capability approach offers a more complete, and therefore a philosophically and practically superior, concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide. Next, in Chapter Three, I consider Thomas Pogge’s critical essay “Can the Capability Approach be Justified?.” I argue that Pogge’s argument for the conclusion –

that the praise and attention the capability approach receives cannot be justified – is based on a *mis*understanding of crucial aspects of the capability approach, including the important role of empowerment within the approach.

The second part of my project – Chapters Four and Five – provides detailed consideration of the role of empowerment within the capability approach. I consider the meaning and role of empowerment within both Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s versions of the capability approach. In addition, I address concerns raised by capability scholars that Nussbaum’s account of empowerment is flawed in comparison to Sen’s. I conclude that although neither Sen nor Nussbaum systematically uses the term empowerment, the concept of empowerment plays a robust role -- as both (1) agency, and (2) capability-set expansion -- in *both* versions of the approach.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, I contend that many of the differences between Sen and Nussbaum are more a matter of style than of substance.

In the third and final part of my project I consider the challenge of fostering empowerment in the face of the oppressive and sometimes deadly “institutionalized power” structures that make up society. In Chapter Six, I consider in a general way a criticism that various scholars have made of Sen’s version of the capability approach, namely, that Sen does not provide an adequate account of *institutionalized power* and the role it plays limiting or undermining empowerment. After examining Sen’s considerable but often neglected contributions to this topic, I conclude that although Sen is certainly aware of the importance of institutionalized power and of the role it plays in generating

---

<sup>2</sup> Agency can be defined as one’s freedom to decide for oneself and “bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce.” (Amartya Sen. *Inequality Reexamined*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1992. Here p. 57.) Capability-set expansion can be understood as the expanding of the set of opportunities an individual has to be and do the things he or she values.

inequalities and limiting empowerment, he fails to provide a sufficiently complete account. I further submit, however, that this is not an insurmountable problem for Sen or for the capability approach, for at least two reasons. First, Sen has not only done valuable work on the topic, but he also recognizes that there remains important work left to do. Second, the capability approach can accommodate a more complete understanding of institutionalized power and in turn empowerment. I then point to – and plan to investigate in future work -- economic and philosophical feminist theory as a resource for a deeper and broader understanding of institutionalized power and an enhanced concept of empowerment for both the practice and theory of development.

I believe my project offers something to both the practice and the theory of development. The project can benefit the practice of development in at least two ways. First, by joining the chorus of those who identify the capability approach as superior to the still-reigning view of development as economic growth. Second, by making clear the significance of deep disagreements masked by professed agreements on the importance, not just of empowerment, but also related programs that promote education, democracy, and participation.

Development theory can benefit from a comparative understanding of the concepts of empowerment at work in development discussed in chapters One and Two, and from the theoretical examination of the capability approach. The capability approach itself can benefit from the detailed analysis in Chapters Four and Five; including the contention that empowerment is helpfully understood as both agency and capability-set expansion and that Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the approach may be similar in substance if not in form of expression. Finally, the examination of institutional power

and its relationship to empowerment found in Chapter Six, helpfully identifies an area in which the superior concept of empowerment found in the capability approach has room for improvement. It also points towards theories in feminist economics and philosophy that is not officially associated, but certainly compatible with the capability approach. In future work I plan to show that these theories can strengthen the capability approach through contributing a more adequate and complete account of institutionalized power and empowerment.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach**

#### **Compared Part I: A General Overview**

*For the past four decades, a primary focus of the world economic attention has been on ways to accelerate the growth rate of national incomes. Economists and politicians from all nations, rich and poor, capitalist, socialist and mixed, have worshiped at the shrine of economic growth. At the end of every year, statistics are compiled for all countries of the world showing their relative rates of GNP growth. . . . Governments can rise and fall if their economic growth performance ranks high or low on this global scorecard.*

Michael Todaro, *Economic Development*, 2000

*If our attention is shifted from an exclusive concentration on income poverty to the more inclusive idea of capability deprivation, we can better understand the poverty of human lives and freedoms.... The role of income and wealth—important as it is along with other influences—has to be integrated into a broader and fuller picture of success and deprivation.*

Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999

## **Introduction**

International development theorists and practitioners throughout the world have come to agree that human empowerment is a necessary part of good development. This widespread agreement is both encouraging and problematic. It is encouraging that theorists and practitioners are directing their attention and other resources towards the important goal of empowering the disempowered and oppressed. It is problematic because the agreement is relatively superficial, and masks some deep and important philosophical and practical disagreements about the goals and means of development theory, policy, and practice.

Within the field of development, there are several approaches to development. Each approach, or perspectives, reflects competing ideas about the goals and means of development, that is, about what makes for “good” development. Rival development approaches can and do agree that human empowerment is an important part of good development, while disagreeing about what it means to be empowered and what part empowerment plays in good development. These disagreements are not merely academic issues to be discussed and disputed by philosophers and economists. The way the development community, or stakeholders<sup>3</sup> of development, understands human empowerment in particular, and good development in general, has a tremendous impact on development policies and practices that shape the lives of billions of people throughout the world.

---

<sup>3</sup> For my purposes the stakeholders of development can roughly be identified as all people and organizations that have a legitimate interest or stake in development policy and practice. Thus, not only donors, lenders, NGO, governments, and others who invest in development, but also, aid recipients, borrowers, countries, communities, individual poor people, and all those who stand to benefit, be harmed, or put at risk by development, are included in the set of stakeholders. Interesting and important issues I will *not* explore here include: (1) what makes a legitimate interest legitimate, and (2) exactly how much does one have to contribute, benefit, be harmed, or put at risk to qualify as a stakeholder.

For the purpose of this essay a development approach, or perspective, is a framework of a priori, empirical and normative principles, assumptions, and other claims that constitute a way of looking at the world and posing questions about it. Frameworks extend from or are generated by a central principle or set of principles. Examples of core principles of development perspectives include: (1) “*economic growth is development*” or (2) “*efficient economic growth is good development.*” Those working within a certain perspective appeal to these core principles as an overall way of interpreting happenings within their field. For example, a person who subscribes to (1) will hold that if country X has a higher GNP than country Y, then country X is more developed than country Y. The core principles of a perspective are tied to both abstract, general, and theoretical economic (and perhaps normative and/or social) principles and formulas on the one hand, and more specific practices, strategies, institutions, and empirical data about the world on the other.

A framework – including the explanations and strategies that it generates – is not static, but can evolve over time as new theories are introduced and new evidence is discovered. For example, a perspective may evolve with respect to the role of investments in basic education. What practitioners of the perspective once saw as (1) “costly and unnecessary for growth” may later be judged to be (2) “an efficient way to bolster growth.” Moreover, as perspectives expand and evolve there may be disagreement among those operating within the perspective, or approach, about nonessential or peripheral principles. For example, some may hold (1) while others operating within the same perspective may hold (2). It is the relationship that the theories

and interpreted findings (both new and old) have to the unchanging core principles of a perspective that make them part of that perspective.

There can be considerable overlap of nonessential principles among various perspectives. The central principles of each perspective determine how theories and findings are understood within that perspective. For example, education may be seen both as a possible tool for growth within the economic growth perspective and as an instrumental and constitutive freedom within the capability perspective. In this case, practitioners in both perspectives are likely to support investments in education, but would do so for different reasons.

The core defining principles of perspectives do not change. To change the core principle of a perspective is to depart from the perspective. For example, a move from (i) *economic growth is development* to (ii) *meeting basic needs is development* or (iii) *economic growth plus meeting basic needs is development*, would be a departure of the perspective, or a shift in perspective.

In this chapter I consider and compare two development perspectives:<sup>4</sup> the economic growth approach and the capability approach. The economic growth perspective is the traditional and still dominant approach to development. At the core of this approach is the idea that development is essentially an economic enterprise of

---

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the two I consider, there are several other development perspectives including, but not limited to, the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) as pioneered by Paul Streeten (1981. *First Things First: Meeting Basic Human Needs in Developing Countries*. Chapter 8. Oxford University Press), which is often considered a predecessor of the capability approach; Thomas Pogge's international-Rawlsian Resourcist approach ("Can the Capability Approach be Justified?" in Martha Nussbaum and Chad Flanders eds.: *Global Inequalities*, special issue 30:2 (February 2004) of *Philosophical Topics*, 167-228); and the Basic Human Rights Approach (BHR) (Vizard, Polly. 2000. "The Evolution of the Idea of Human Rights in Western and Non-Western Thought." Background paper for the Human Development Report 2000. UNDP, New York.). Like the economic growth approach and the capability approach, each framework also permits variations, that is, alterations of the nonessential principles.

generating and sustaining an increase in a country's gross national product (GNP).<sup>5</sup> The capability approach is a relatively new, but increasingly popular alternative to economic growth-centered development. Within the capability perspective development is not simply economic development calculated in terms of GNP. Instead, development is *human* development, evaluated in terms of what capabilities, or freedoms, individual people have to achieve valuable or valued lifestyles.

There are many nuances and differences of opinion on specific issues within each of these two approaches. However, within this chapter a general treatment of some of the major attributes, including the primary goals and general means of each approach, will serve my present purpose of illuminating key differences between the dominant economic growth approach and the capability approach. In what follows, I provide a brief sketch of the history of development economics, in which I mention a few of the major trends and troubles of the field. I then give a general account of the key concepts, values, goals, and means of both the economic growth perspective and the capability approach. This introductory chapter suggests that there are some good reasons to favor the capability approach over the economic growth approach and concludes with a summary of the fundamental similarities and differences, including strengths and weakness, of the two approaches.

I continue my comparison and evaluation of the economic growth approach and the capability approach in Chapter Two, as I explain how the fundamental differences

---

<sup>5</sup> *Gross National Product* or *GNP* can be broken down as follows: “‘Gross’ indicates that it is measured without subtracting any allowance for capital consumption; ‘National’ that it includes residents’ incomes from economic activities carried on abroad as well as at home, and excludes incomes produced at home, but belonging to non-residents. ‘Product’ indicates that it measures real output produced rather than real output absorbed by residents.” (John Black. *Oxford Dictionary of Economics*. Oxford University Press. 2003, p. 204))

discussed in this chapter are sometimes masked and other times revealed at the level of policy, projects, and interventions. I pay special attention to the theoretical and practical roles of empowerment within each perspective. I conclude that the human-centered perspective of the capability approach offers a theoretically and practically superior understanding of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide. In Chapter Three, I consider Thomas Pogge's claim that the capability approach does not fare well when compared to the Rawlsian resource approach he favors. I leave for future work the detailed considerations of the merits of the capability approach in relation to other alternatives to the economic growth framework.<sup>6</sup>

### **1. A Brief History of Development Economics<sup>7</sup>**

One could argue that development economics began with the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. However, most agree that international development economics emerged as a sub-discipline of economics in the 1950s with the systematic study of the economic processes and problems of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The first development economic theories are firmly rooted in Smith's traditional or "classical" economics. Like classical economic theories that seek to understand and direct the economies of more developed countries (MDCs),<sup>8</sup> the development theories of the 1950s

---

<sup>6</sup> I likewise leave for future work a complete examination of the capability approach's strengths and weaknesses. Such an examination, although important, is beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>7</sup> This section owes a great debt to Michael P. Todaro's popular textbook on economic development (Michael P. Todaro, *Economic Development*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Addison Wesley. 2005.) and to Paul Strenten's article "Shifting Fashions in Development Dialogue" (in Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and A.K. Shiva Kumar eds. *Readings in Human Development*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2003).

<sup>8</sup> MDCs or "First World" countries are the economically advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Some current usage replaces MDCs with "the (global) North" in contrast to "the (global) South" but Australia and New Zealand are in the Southern Hemisphere. Deficiencies are obvious in each of these pairs of contrasting terms.

(and beyond) are economic growth centered theories designed to generate optimal growth within the relevant country. However, unlike the more traditional theories, development theories are aimed at understanding and directing the relatively complicated impoverished economies of poor, or less developed, countries (LDCs).<sup>9</sup>

Classical economic theories are growth-oriented theories concerned with the efficient allocation and optimal growth of scarce productive resources over time in order to produce an expanding range of goods and services. These theories deal with the relatively straightforward classical assumptions of “rational,” self-interested, and well informed consumers and producers, perfect competitive markets with automatic price adjustments, and predictable institutions. In contrast, development economic theories deal with consumers and producers with limited access to information, highly imperfect markets, and frequent and unpredictable, major structural changes in societal and economic institutions. In short, given the conditions of LDCs, development economics must go beyond classical economic theory. As a current economic development textbook explains:

Competitive markets simply do not exist, nor, given the institutional, cultural, and historical context of many LDCs, would they necessarily be desirable from a long-term economic and social perspective. Consumers as a whole are rarely sovereign about anything, let alone what goods and services are to be produced, in what quantities and for whom. Information is limited, markets are fragmented, and much of the economy is nonmonetized.... The ideal of

---

<sup>9</sup> LDCs or “Third World” countries or those nations in “the (global) South” have low incomes and levels of material living, high rates of population growth, and general economic and technological dependence on MDCs.

competition is just that—an ideal with little relation to reality. Instead of the equilibrium, automatic-adjustment framework of neoclassical theory, many LDC markets are better analyzed through disequilibrium, structural-adjustment models in which responses to price and wage movements can be ‘perverse.’ . . . Finally, the invisible hand often acts not to promote the general welfare but rather to lift up those who are already well-off while pushing down the vast majority.<sup>10</sup>

Since the 1950s, the goal of growth-oriented economic development theories has been to “develop” countries by generating and sustaining an increase in the country’s gross national product (GNP, or the more sophisticated alternative: GNP per capita, which takes into account increases both in population and in GNP among other things).<sup>11</sup> The idea is that once a country achieves certain GNP growth rate targets it is no longer a poor developing country. Many, but not all, who subscribe to the economic growth perspective<sup>12</sup> believe, or even hope, that growth in a country’s GNP will bring about relatively rapid and large scale – at least relative to historical standards – decreases in the economic poverty that afflicted the lives of the poor majority living in LDCs. The gains in country’s GNP are expected either to “trickle down” to the poor in the forms of jobs

---

<sup>10</sup> Michael P. Todaro, *Economic Development*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Addison Wesley. 2005. (Here p. 98.)

<sup>11</sup> Todaro. p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Some economists see the goal of alleviating poverty as a normative concern beyond the scope of the value-neutral science of economics. However, the normative goal of alleviating poverty has a long tradition within development economics including the World Bank’s Mission “To alleviate poverty throughout the world.” (For an argument that the classical economists, such as Adam Smith, William Petty, Gregory King, Francois Quesnay, Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier, see economics as concerned with alleviating poverty, see Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, pp. 72-74.) Of course, even the decision to understand international development efforts that effect millions of lives as ethically neutral, is not itself an ethically neutral decision. (See Des Gasper, *The Ethics of Development* Ch. 1).

and other economic opportunities or to create the environment required for a wide distribution of social and material goods, which in turn would decrease poverty by improving the economic well being of the poor.

Despite the fact that many less developed countries realized their GNP growth rate targets in the 1950s and 1960s, the lives of the vast majority of poor people in these countries remained largely unchanged and in many cases got worse. Development economists acknowledged that “rapid by historical standards” is by no means immediate; and that it may take several years for the benefits of GNP growth to trickle down to the poor. Yet the consensus at the time was that the immediate problems of hunger, unemployment, disease, and illiteracy, would simply have to wait. Such problems were of secondary importance to generating GNP growth and the promise of a developed economy with long term benefits for all.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many countries continued to meet their GNP growth rate targets without improving the lives of the poorest forty percent of their citizens in terms of employment, equality, or real income.<sup>13</sup> Although many held fast to GNP growth as the goal of development, claiming more time was needed to allow for the trickling down of wealth, others began to criticize the approach, calling for the “dethronement of GNP.” Alternative approaches to development began to emerge in the 1970s. Dudley Seers’ 1969 paper “The Meaning of Development,”<sup>14</sup> explicitly redefined economic development in terms of the elimination of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. In 1974 the Development Research Center of the World Bank and the Sussex

---

<sup>13</sup> Todaro, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Dudley Seers. “The Meaning of Development.” Paper presented at the *Eleventh World Conference of the Society for International Development*, New Delhi. 1969.

Institute of Development Studies published the book: *Redistribution with Growth*.<sup>15</sup> The 1976 World Employment Conference of the International Labor Office introduced the basic needs approach to development, which gives development priority to the world's poorest citizen's meeting their basic needs of food, health, education, shelter, and sanitation. However, the dominant approach to international development in the 1970s remained focused on GNP growth. Without altering the fundamental growth principle of the economic growth perspective, most development work sought to accommodate some of the new ideas and expanded its scope to include the targeting of inequality through the redistribution of economic resources within the context of a growing economy. "Redistribution from growth" was a common slogan.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, despite giving some attention to inequality and making some commitment to resource redistribution, the growth approach policies introduced in the 1970s did not succeed in bringing about relatively rapid and large scale improvements to the lives of the poor. Paul Streeten identifies one shortcoming of the economic growth approach's theories of redistribution with growth and its focus on income equality as measured by the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient is an aggregate measure of income inequality. Its numerical representation ranges from 0 (or perfect equality) to 1 (or perfect *inequality*). A high coefficient reflects high inequality of income distribution, while a low coefficient represents a more equitable income distribution.<sup>17</sup> The Gini coefficient may be a valuable tool. It provides a snap shot of income distribution, one important variable that can and often does influence the lives of individuals. However, as

---

<sup>15</sup> Hollis Chenery, *et. al. Redistribution with Growth*. Oxford University Press. 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Todaro, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Todaro, p. 746.

Streeten explains, it is not enough to represent the most relevant aspects of inequality that affect the poor:

Much of the redistribution literature measures inequality by the Gini-coefficient, which runs through the whole range of incomes, from the richest to the poorest. It measures somewhat meaningless percentiles instead of socially, regionally, or ethnically significant deprived groups. It does not tell who is in these deprived groups, for how long, or for what reasons. Nor does it indicate the scope of mobility or the degree of equality of opportunity. Normally there is no particular interest of those concerned with poverty reduction in redistribution to the middle, which would reduce inequality but leaves poverty untouched.<sup>18</sup>

As Streeten suggests, just as a country's GNP can grow in accordance with target growth rates without improving the lives of the poorest forty percent of its citizens, so too a country's Gini-coefficient can decrease without improving the lives of those who live in absolute poverty. Absolute poverty is poverty assessed not in relation to others, but in relation to a minimally adequate level of well-being. A change in the income distribution between the rich, the middle class, and even some of the poor, (where the rich earn less income and the middle class and some of the poor earn more) may result in a change in Gini coefficient, but not a change in the lives of many of the poor. After all, a reduction in a country's inequality may still not afford the (poorest of) the poor with the opportunity for a minimally decent life.

Moreover, even if the individual members of a country's poor population experience an increase in income, the country's Gini coefficient does not explain whether

---

<sup>18</sup> Streeten, p. 96.

they have more or less opportunity, mobility, or access to valuable goods. For example, getting a new job that requires working long hours in a copper mine or a factory that results in exposure to hazardous chemicals may result not only in an increase in income, but also in several serious health problems that require expensive medical attention. The end result maybe a greater gross income, but fewer material resources (after income is spent on medicine) and a lower quality of life. In such situations, improvement in the Gini-coefficient will reflect only the greater income equality and not the greater material deprivation. In short, much of the Gini coefficient-focused redistribution literature and policies that emerged within the economic growth approach in the 1970s (and beyond) did not prove relevant to understanding and directing the reduction of absolute poverty or inequality of real opportunity despite a continued focus on income equity as GNPs continued to rise and meet their growth target rates in many less developed counties during this time.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, things got worse. This was a time of crisis, criticism, and change for the international development in general and for the economic growth development perspective in particular. The majority of less developed countries stopped meeting their GNP growth rate targets, and in many cases, especially in Africa, GNP growth rates turned negative. Poor countries often sacrificed state social and economic redistribution programs as they struggled to repay mounting foreign debts. Adjustment and stabilization polices came to represent much of the work of international economic development. The needs of the poor were once again seen as secondary or even irrelevant to the needs of growth in the national economy. As Streeten puts it: “The

poor were either forgotten or, instead of seeking how to reduce their number, ways were sought to prevent an increase.”<sup>19</sup>

A great deal of criticism emerged with respect to particular economic growth perspective policies (for example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s “stabilization without adjustment” policy<sup>20</sup>) and the general top down (often called “neocolonial”) approach to the international development policies of the day (including the “Washington Consensus” discussed below). At the same time, however, scholars, policy analysts, and activists introduced into the development dialogue concerns for democratic participation, the environment, human rights, population, political and cultural freedom, government integrity, infant mortality, child labor, the roles and concerns of women, empowerment, and many other issues relevant to human well being. Several “new growth theories” arrived on the scene that changed – sometimes dramatically – the economic growth perspective. These theories continue to shape the still dominate economic growth approach, and in turn, international development today.

The “new growth theories” were motivated not only by the general debt crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s, but also by the traditional, or “old growth theories” failure to explain important empirical findings including: (1) the dramatic disparities in economic performance across countries, and (2) why capital disproportionately flows from poor countries to rich countries, despite the fact that labor costs less in poor countries and therefore (according to the IMF’s and World Bank’s old growth theories) should have attracted capital investments from rich countries to poor countries. According to the new growth theories, the key to understanding these findings lies in analysis of *endogenous*

---

<sup>19</sup> Streeten, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this policy and its criticisms see: Streeten, p. 99, or Todaro, Chapter 14.

growth. Endogenous growth is the economic growth generated by factors from *within* a country's production process, for example, a stronger, smarter, or better (technologically) equipped work force.

New growth theories explain technological advancements that result in greater production as an endogenous outcome of public and private investments in human capital. Old growth theories fail to account for endogenous factors. Instead, they consider technological advancements to be *exogenous* (outside) or independent of the country's production process.<sup>21</sup>

In recognizing that internal factors, including local technology and the skills and behavior of local people, are relevant to production outcomes, the new growth theories are able to offer an explanation for (1) the dramatic disparities in economic performance across countries, by citing cross country disparities in technology, infrastructure, education, and health. New growth theories can also explain (2) why capital flows from poor countries to rich countries, despite the fact that labor costs less in poor countries. Although raw labor costs less in poor countries than in rich countries, other costs are required to facilitate the use of relatively cheap poor country labor. These other costs, called "complementary investments," largely erode the cost savings (rates of return on investment). It does not benefit individual investors and/or companies to pay for cheap labor in a poor country if they will also have to pay to develop the country's physical, social, and technological infrastructure (for example, roads, legal system, banking system, communication services, and so forth.), and human capital pool (via. education, health services, and more).

---

<sup>21</sup> See: Todaro, Chapters 3 and 4.

The lack of reliable and well developed technology, infrastructure, and skilled labor in poor countries motivates even investors from the poor countries to invest their capital in expensive, but relatively skilled and reliable, labor facilitated by advanced technology, quality health care, and efficient infrastructure. Thus, capital flows disproportionately from poor to rich countries rather than the reverse.<sup>22</sup> The significant insight of the new growth theories is that public and private investment in research and development (R&D), technology, social and physical infrastructure, and people – or “human capital” – increases productive output, and in turn, results in higher GNP growth. This insight resulted in an evolution of the economic growth approach that has dramatically shaped the current theories, policies, and practices of development.

As a result of the new growth theories and other factors of change introduced in the 1980s, meeting certain immediate needs of the poor people that have been repeatedly (if not continuously) forgotten, or at least considered secondary to the needs of the national economy, is now recognized as a central—albeit *instrumental*—part of development within the economic growth approach. The economic growth approach is still focused on generating and sustaining GNP growth, and is still the dominant approach to international development. It was also in the late 1970s and early 1980s that 1998 economic Nobel laureate Amartya Sen first introduced his promising human-centered alternative to economic growth-centered development: the capability approach. In the following sections, I discuss and compare the current version of the economic growth perspective and Sen’s capability approach.

---

<sup>22</sup> For more on new growth theories see: Todaro, Chapters 3 and 4.

## **2. The Economic Growth Perspective and the Capability Approach**

The economic growth perspective—in one form or another—has dominated the field of international development since it emerged in the 1950s. As explained in the previous section, the perspective has undergone some modifications over the decades, particularly since the introduction of the new growth theories in the 1980s and early 1990s.

However, the essential neo-classical elements of the economic growth approach have not changed. The economic growth approach still understands development as fundamentally an economic enterprise of generating and sustaining an increase in the country's gross national product, often with the expectation and even the hope, but again, not a professed ethical commitment, of bringing about (relatively) rapid and large scale decreases in that country's poverty. Within this approach, poverty is – and always has been – economic or “income” poverty. Income poverty is identified with earning an income lower than a certain minimum, specifically, lower than the “poverty line.” The poverty line is usually defined as either one half of the median income or, more recently, the equivalent of one or two US dollars a day. Similarly, on this view well-being is economic well-being, assessed in terms of income and access to and consumption of material goods.

The means of development within the economic growth perspective are market-focused and aspire to perfect economic efficiency. The policies and practices of one current version of the perspective are often identified, especially in the developing world, with neo-liberalism and the “Washington Consensus.”<sup>23</sup> The following policy directives

---

<sup>23</sup> John Williamson introduced the phrase “Washington Consensus” in 1990s “to refer to the lowest common denominator of policy advice being addressed by the Washington-based institutions to Latin American countries as of 1989.” But the phrase now refers to various related policies that can be said to be economic growth approach polices; hence the phrase “neo-Washington Consensus” is sometimes used.

(the first nine of which make up the original Washington Consensus) provide good examples of development conceived centrally as the market-centered means of the economic growth:

- Fiscal discipline
- A redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns and the *potential* to improve income distribution, such as primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure
- Tax reform (lower marginal rates and a broadening of the tax base)
- Interest rate liberalization
- A competitive exchange rate
- Trade liberalization; liberalization of inflows of foreign direct investment
- Privatization
- Deregulation (to abolish barriers to entry and exit)
- Secure property rights
- Free capital mobility
- World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements
- Flexible labor markets
- Anti-corruption or integrity within governments.

---

(John Williamson. "What Should the World Bank Think About the Washington Consensus?" World Bank Research Observer. Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Vol. 15, No. 2 (August 2000), pp. 251-264.) For more on neoliberalism and the Washington consensus see Benjamin Friedman, *New York Review of Books*, David Held's "Globalization: The Dangers and The Answers" ([www.openDemocracy.net](http://www.openDemocracy.net)), and, Dani Rodrik. "The Global Governance of Trade as if Development Really Mattered," New York: UNDP, 2001.

These policies (among others) are the means by which the end of development – a strong GNP – is to be achieved. Again, many believe that a growing GNP will eventually result in a declining percentage of people living below the poverty line.

Like the economic growth approach, the capability approach draws on the classical Anglo tradition and recognizes markets and economic growth as valuable. Unlike the economic growth approach, however, the capability approach goes beyond economic growth indicators, markets, and the tradition and emphasizes that these are, at best, some of the means to the end or goal of development processes, namely, expanding the substantive freedoms people enjoy. Amartya Sen's capability approach is not simply an approach to international *economic* development. It is also, and primarily, an approach to *human* development in which economic growth is but one means – sometimes not necessary and by itself never sufficient.

Before elaborating on the means and ends of development within this human-centered perspective, it is helpful to get clear – in a provisional way – on two essential concepts of the capability approach: “capability” and “functioning.”<sup>24</sup> For Sen, human development has to do with human beings and doings. To grasp humans and their activity, Sen proposes, among others, the concepts of “capability” and “functioning.” These concepts correspond respectively to Aristotle's concepts of potential and actual. Within the capability perspective, the various doings and beings a person actually achieves are called “functionings.” Functionings can be elementary, like the basic physical state of being well nourished, or complex, like the social achievement of appearing in public without shame.

---

<sup>24</sup> I introduce other essential concepts of Sen's capability approach, including agency and process freedom, in the following sections and chapters.

The word “capability” refers to the various functionings a person is free to achieve. For example, a person may have the *capability* of being well nourished, that is, she may be free or able to achieve the functioning of being well nourished, if she has, among other things, reliable access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food and a healthy digestive system. Thus, capability is a type of substantive freedom: “the substantive freedom to achieve alternate functioning combinations.”<sup>25</sup>

An individual’s “capability set” represents the real opportunities she has, or the various alternative lifestyles she is free to achieve. A person’s capability set reflects not only *what* she can achieve (for example, civic participation), but also *the extent to which* she can achieve it: from publicly expressing ideas, to voting, to organizing a political movement, to holding office. Moreover, the capability approach takes into account that different people will require different bundles of resources (which may include, but are not limited to, income) to have the same capabilities or achieve the same functionings. “People have disparate physical characteristics connected with disability, illness, age or gender, and these make their needs diverse.”<sup>26</sup> For example a person who suffers from parasites may need more food to be properly nourished than a person of the same size who does not suffer from parasites. “A disabled person may need some prosthesis, an older person more support and help, a pregnant woman more nutritional intake, and so on.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the same capabilities or functionings in two different people may be promoted by diverse and different packages of goods or services. For example, someone

---

<sup>25</sup> Amartya Sen. *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York. 1999. (Here, p. 75.)

<sup>26</sup> Sen, 1999, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

with diabetes may require different foods (than a healthy non-diabetic person) as well as insulin in order to be healthy and well nourished.

The capability approach recognizes the importance of an individual's freedom to exercise her own *agency* as she chooses to achieve certain functionings (and not others) from various real opportunities. We make our own decisions and act as authors of our own lives rather than being coerced or controlled by others or mere pawns of external circumstances.<sup>28</sup> This freedom to choose between opportunities is the significant difference between a person who chooses to fast despite access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food and a healthy digestive system, and the person who has no choice but to starve. Neither person has achieved the functioning of being well nourished, but the first person (and not the second) has the capability of being well nourished.

Thus, the capability approach offers two focal points for the evaluation of individual well-being: (1) capabilities, the opportunities people have, for example, to fast or to be well nourished, and (2) functionings, what people actually achieve, for example, the state of being well nourished. Sen calls these two aspects "well-being freedom" and "well-being achievement" respectively. Sen's approach<sup>29</sup> also recognizes two focal points for individual agency: (1) agency freedom, one's freedom to decide for oneself and to "bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce"<sup>30</sup> and (2) agency achievement, "the realization of goals and values she has reason to pursue,

---

<sup>28</sup> See: David A. Crocker. *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 5.

<sup>29</sup> As I discuss in Chapter Five, Martha Nussbaum rejects Sen's distinction between agency and well-being (on the grounds that she does not think making the distinction "adds any extra clarity." See Martha Nussbaum. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000. (Here p. 14.)

<sup>30</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1992. p. 57. See also: Amartya Sen's *Elements of a Theory of Human Rights* and Crocker, *Ethics of Global Development*, Ch. 5.

whether or not they are connected with one's own well-being."<sup>31</sup> Subsequently, (in Chapters Four and Five,) I analyze and evaluate these normative concepts in a more detailed way. At this juncture it is important to recognize that Sen (1) affirms human well-being and agency as the goal of development and (2) conceives human well-being in relation to certain functionings and the capabilities (freedoms) to so function.

The capability approach rejects the traditional and still dominant idea of the economic growth approach that development is simply or most fundamentally an economic process of efficiently increasing and sustaining a country's GNP growth. Instead the capability approach understands economic growth as at best one of several complementary means to development. Growth does not always advance *human* development. And even when economic growth does contribute to development, growth is insufficient for development as defined within the capability perspective.

Development on this view is, most fundamentally, a process of expanding the real freedom of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value. It follows from this understanding that well-being is not fundamentally assessed in terms of the metric of income or access to material goods as with the economic growth approach. Instead, within the capability approach, well-being is assessed in terms of the various valuable capabilities one has and the functionings one achieves. Income and access to material goods can be important, but if so, they are only important as means to the end of development: the expansion of valued freedoms.

Similarly, poverty is not simply a lack of income, but also, and more fundamentally, a deprivation of capabilities to function in certain basic ways.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56. In the empowerment section of Chapter Two and in following chapters, I discuss the role of agency in Sen's account and Nussbaum's reasons for not recognizing Sen's distinction between agency and well-being. See also: Sen's *Inequality Reexamined*, and *Development as Freedom*. (*esp.* Chapter 8.)

Deprivation of basic capabilities can be reflected in low life expectancy, high infant and child mortality rates, significant undernourishment, low literacy rates, widespread occurrences of disease and infection, and other foreseeable and preventable sufferings. In contrast to the economic growth perspective's assessment of development in terms of GNP growth and sometimes income poverty decline (as a secondary indication), assessments of development within the capability perspective reflect a multidimensional concept of poverty. Such assessments recognize the instrumental importance of economic growth and income poverty, several non-economic means to freedom and obstacles to well-being, and a plurality of dimensions to both capability deprivation and freedom expansion.

There are good reasons to understand poverty in terms of the more complicated but inclusive basic capability and agency deprivation, instead of the relatively narrow but clear cut concept of income. Understanding poverty in terms of deprivation of basic capabilities allows us to recognize aspects of poverty (and well-being and agency) that income measurements cannot capture. Recall the example (mentioned earlier in this chapter) of the person who takes a job that requires working long hours in a copper mine or a factory where she is exposed to hazardous chemicals and consequently develops serious health problems that require expensive medical attention. Despite an increase in gross income, this person may be considerably worse off than before she took the job. She will not only have access to fewer material resources after income is spent on medical treatment, she will also be deprived of basic capabilities including the capability to live a long life, the capability to enjoy bodily health, as well as any capabilities that require good bodily health (for example, reproduction). These and several other

important capabilities are not apparent when income alone is considered. The capability perspective can recognize this person as worse off in light of the plurality of serious deprivations she experiences, while the economic growth perspective would actually see her as better off due to a single metric, namely, her higher income.

As mentioned above, evaluating well-being in terms of capabilities and functionings also allows capability theorists to take into account that different people may require different incomes in order to achieve the same functionings. Sen offers the following example:

Consider...the person with a high metabolic rate, or a large body size, or a parasitic disease that wastes nutrients. He is less able to meet minimal nutritional norms with the same level of income, compared with another person *without* those disadvantages. If he is to be seen as poorer than the second person, despite the fact that they both have the same income, the reason for this lies in his greater capability failure.<sup>32</sup>

The capability approach is able to recognize the first person as worse off than the second because he is less able to meet his minimal nutritional needs. The economic growth approach, however, would hold that the two people are equally well (or ill) off because they have the same income. As Richard Jolly explains: “Neo-liberalism is totally silent about the ends towards which the economic indicators lead. It may address the increase

---

<sup>32</sup> Sen, 1992, p. 111.

in income, but it does not consider what that income actually brings to people's lives and whether they enjoy better living conditions or not."<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the most startling phenomenon that becomes apparent when we look beyond *income* statistics is that of "missing women." Sen estimates that more than 100 million women may be seen as prematurely dead or "missing." These women are "missing" in the sense that – given their biological advantage with respect to longevity – they would be alive if they had been treated in their families and societies more equitably in relation to the men. There is no country in which women are treated as well as men,<sup>34</sup> but women are "missing" mainly in South Asia, West Asia, North Africa, and China. Twenty nine million women are "missing" from China alone.<sup>35</sup> While the relatively dramatic and well-know practices of sex-selective abortion and female infanticide contribute to these deaths, the main culprit, according to Sen, is a the much more subtle and less talked about "comparative neglect of female health and nutrition. . . . There is indeed considerable direct evidence that female children are neglected in terms of health care, hospitalization and even feeding."<sup>36</sup>

The premature deaths of women and girls are not revealed by income statistics. Statistics that capture only country, household, or per capita averages are particularly unhelpful because they do not reflect intra-household distributions that too often reflect gross inequalities as the most basic needs of women, and especially, girls, are consistently neglected. Instead the phenomenon of "missing women" as well as other

---

<sup>33</sup> Richard Jolly. "Human Development and Neoliberalism Compared" in Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and A.K. Shiva Kumar eds. *Readings in Human Development*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2003. (Here p. 108.)

<sup>34</sup> According to the findings of the UNDP's GDI and GEM. HDR 2003

<sup>35</sup> Sen, 1999 p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

forms of inequality, including fatal inequalities that effect groups, must be analyzed by “demographic, medical and social information.”<sup>37</sup> (Sen’s work on the social inequalities women and girls face is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.)

The detection and representation of the realities of poverty and deprivation that cannot be detected by GNP or income statistics alone, including the terrible phenomenon of “missing women,” are among the good reasons to understand poverty in terms of basic capability deprivation rather than income deficits. The multidimensional poverty measurement of the capability approach goes beyond measuring income and GNP. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP’s) operates largely<sup>38</sup> within the capability approach as it focuses on human, rather than economic development. The UNDP’s *Human Development Reports* (HDRs) have introduced a number of indexes that measure human capabilities and functionings.

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures income (or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita adjusted to purchasing power parity (ppp)<sup>39</sup>), *plus* life

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Many UNDP reports, documents, and representatives explicitly refer to Sen’s work and the capability approach. However, the UNDP is a large, complex, and ever-changing organization. It is full of individuals with their own research and opinions about development, and many-sided internal debates (for example the 2006 discussion of the UNPD’s Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM) found at: <http://hdr.undp.org/nhdr/>). I do not wish to argue that the UNDP works entirely within the capability approach. My goal is more modest: I simply wish to provide “real world” examples of capability measurements and the influence of the capability approach on development practice.

<sup>39</sup> Due to dissatisfaction with GNP’s inability to represent factors of distribution, character, or quality of economic growth, among other things, the UNDP (and others) opted to use GNP per capital adjusted for purchasing power parity or ppp, in an attempt to represent “real income” or what a person can actually buy with her income. The Oxford Dictionary of Economics offers the following definition of ppp: The theory that exchange rates between currencies are determined in the long run by the amount of goods and services that each can buy. In the absence of transport costs and tariffs, if the price of tradable goods were lower in one country than another, traders could gain by buying goods in the cheaper country and selling in the dearer: relative price levels thus determine the equilibrium exchange rate. Not all goods are tradable, and even for traders transport costs and tariffs mean that prices need not be equal, but the same forces of arbitrage limit their differences, and thus their deviations of exchange from ppp. The HDI in current *Human Development Reports* uses GDP per capita adjusted for ppp. For more on the construction and

expectancy, school enrolment, and literacy (weighted 1/3, 1/3, 1/6, and 1/6, respectively). The Human Poverty Index (HPI), in order to address the absolute deprivations of the least well off, includes measurements of the percentage of people who lack sustainable access to safe drinking water, and the percentage of children under five who are underweight for their age. The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) represents the same indicators as the HDI, but captures inequalities in achievements between women and men. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) measures gender inequality in economic and political participation and decision making by tracking “the percentages of women in parliament, among legislators, senior officials and managers and among professionals and technical workers – and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence.”<sup>40</sup>

These indices represent not only what functionings people achieve, but also the extent to which they achieve them. The relatively rich information provided by these indices provides a more accurate assessment of human well-being and poverty than income only assessments like GNP growth or the percentage of populations living below the income poverty line. As Sen explains: “To have inadequate income is not a matter of having an income below an externally fixed poverty line, but to have an income below what is adequate for generating the specified levels of capabilities for the person in question.”<sup>41</sup> Critics argue that the multidimensional poverty indexes are too complicated

---

evolution of the HDI and other human development indexes, see: Mahbub ul Haq “The Birth of Human Development Index” and Sudhir Anand and Amartya Sen “Human Development Index: Methodology and Measurement” and Selim Jahan “Evolution of the Human Development Index” all of which can be found in Section 2 of Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A.K. Shiva Kumar eds. *Readings in Human Development*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2003. (pp. 127 – 163.)

<sup>40</sup> UNDP HDR 2003 (Here p. 61.)

<sup>41</sup> Sen, 1992, p. 111.

and that the information they represent is vaguer than that provided by a simple indicator like GNP. Defenders of capability-centered, multidimensional poverty measures often respond by reminding their critics that, as Sen says, it is better to be vaguely right, than precisely wrong.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth reiterating that the capability approach does not deny the importance of economic growth, nor that of income-based statistics. The former may be a means to valuable freedoms, and the latter is one important type of development indicator. Indeed, as Sen observes, the “deprivation of capabilities can have close links with the lowness of income, which connects in both directions: (1) low income can be a major reason for illiteracy and ill health as well as hunger and undernourishment, and that (2) conversely, better education and health help in the earning of higher incomes.”<sup>43</sup> Yet, Sen goes on to remind us that it is “precisely because income deprivations and capability deprivations often have considerable correlational linkages, [that] it is important to avoid being mesmerized into thinking that taking note of the former would somehow tell us enough about the latter.”<sup>44</sup>

In other words, we must not make the mistake of thinking that monitoring income, which is at best a means to development, is enough to understand the ends of development, *that is*, the real freedoms people enjoy. “The connections are not that tight and the departures are often more important.”<sup>45</sup> Some women in some countries may be resource rich, in the sense that they have an opulent lifestyle in many ways – plenty of

---

<sup>42</sup> See Jolly, 2003 p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 19 -20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

food, fine clothing, and access to many material goods. Yet, these same women may lack the freedom to dress as they like, work in the public sphere, or to learn to drive a car. Others may be, like Mother Theresa, income-poor but rich in freedom and (achieve many) functionings.

Consider also the data from Morocco and Vietnam. Morocco has a GDP of 3,600 USD per capital, about 14.3 per cent of its people live on less than two dollars a day, with less than 2 per cent with incomes lower than one dollar a day, and its HDI is 0.606 (on a scale of 0 – 1). In contrast, Vietnam’s GDP is considerably lower at just over 2,000 USD per capita, with 63.7 per cent – more than three of every five – of its people living on less than two dollars a day, and 17.7 per cent (almost one of every five) have incomes less than one dollar a day. Yet, at 0.688, Vietnam’s HDI reflects a better quality of life than that of Morocco. For whatever reasons, people in Vietnam live longer (which suggests better health), and are much more likely to attend school and to be literate than people in Morocco, despite the fact that Moroccans have on average a significantly higher income.<sup>46</sup> According to the key indicators of the economic growth perspective the country’s relatively high GDP and low percentages of people earning incomes below the poverty line Morocco is much more developed than Vietnam. However, the more inclusive assessment of the capability perspective’s human development index suggests that the people of Morocco may actually be in worse shape than those living in Vietnam.

---

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP)’s Human Development Report (HDR): 2003 p. 60, 239, 241.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter introduces the capability approach to development as a relatively new alternative to the traditional and still dominant economic growth development approach. A comparison of the two approaches reveals a few key similarities and several fundamental differences between them. Both the economic growth perspective and the capability perspective recognize economic growth and income distribution as valuable to the development process. One major difference between the two perspective is that while the economic growth approach focuses exclusively on economic growth and increasing income as the goal of development, the capability perspective understands economic growth and income as one sometimes necessary, but never sufficient means to development as a process of expanding various freedoms. Moreover, as we have seen, there are good reasons, including a richer assessment of well being of individuals and the detection of more than 100 million “missing women,” to hold that the capability approach offers a more accurate, albeit, more complicated and difficult to way to assess understanding of poverty. These basic differences of the two approaches are summarized on Table One below.

In light of this general evaluation, I submit that the richer, more accurate, understanding of poverty and development offered by the capability approach is superior to the relatively clear cut and ineffective concepts of the economic perspective. In Chapter Two, I continue to compare and evaluate the two approaches. As I do so, it becomes increasingly clear that the human-centered perspective of the capability approach offers a theoretically and practically superior concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide.

**Table One: The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach**

	<b>Economic Growth Approach</b>	<b>Capability Approach</b>
<b>Primary End of Development</b>	Economic development: Generate and sustain an increase in GNP	Human Development: Expand freedoms, that is, capabilities, that people have reason to value
<b>Means of Development</b>	Economic efficiency, market-focused policy directives, and privatization (e.g., Washington Consensus)	Promote and protect instrumental freedoms, including, but not limited to economic growth and other economic facilities, political freedoms, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective securities <sup>47</sup>
<b>Poverty</b>	National: Low GNP; negative GNP growth  Individual: person under an income- poverty line (one or two US dollars a day)	National: Low scores on HDI and HPI  Individual: deprivation of basic capabilities <sup>48</sup>
<b>Well Being</b>	Economic or material well-being; sufficient income and access to material goods	Well-being freedoms (capabilities) and achievements (functionings)
<b>Key Indicators of Development Success</b>	Economic - GNP Growth, Percentage below poverty line	Multidimensional - HDI, HPI, GDI, GEM.

<sup>47</sup> I discuss each of these general types of instrumental freedoms in the Chapter Two. Except for economic growth, these types for freedoms are also intrinsically good.

<sup>48</sup> The capability approach as developed by Amartya Sen is focused on the level of the individual, but some who operate within the capability perspective have extended the approach to the national level.

	<b>Economic Growth Approach</b>	<b>Capability Approach</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	Clear cut, easy to determine standards for development	Rich assessment of deprivation and well being/agency; detection of marginalized people, including “missing women”
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Fails to represent various forms of deprivation that affect peoples’ lives.	More difficult to assess data; standards of development are relatively vague.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Economic Growth Approach and the Capability Approach**

#### **Compared Part II: A Closer Look**

*[I]n judging economic development it is not adequate to look only at the growth of GNP or some other indicators of overall economic expansion. We have to look at the impact of democracy and political freedoms on the lives and capabilities of the citizens.*

*Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, 1999*

*Citizen participation can also build consensus and support of difficult reforms needed to create a positive investment climate and induce growth. In addition, the empowerment agenda supports development effectiveness by promoting growth patterns that are pro-poor.*

*The World Bank, Empowerment and Poverty Reduction, 2002*

## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I introduced the traditionally dominant economic growth perspective and compared it with the relatively new alternative capability perspective. I explained how the approaches differ in their understandings of the primary ends and means of development, as well as the concepts of poverty and well-being. In this chapter, I continue to compare and evaluate the two perspectives. I explain how fundamental differences are sometimes masked and other times revealed at the level of policy, projects, and interventions.

I address how those working within each perspective often work towards significantly different ends, while claiming to promote the same goods, including, health care, education, democracy, and other civic rights and freedoms. Special attention is paid to the role of empowerment within each approach. I find that although both approaches agree that empowerment is necessary part of good development, this relatively superficial agreement conceals deep disagreements about what empowerment is and why it is important to development. I conclude that the capability perspective offers a more comprehensive, and therefore, a theoretically and practically superior, concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide.

### **1. Health, Education, Democracy, and Freedom for All: But Not in the Same Way, or for the Same Reasons**

Although both the economic growth approach and the capability approach recognize (1) that income can have an effect on health and education and (2) that health and education can have an effect on income, each approach focuses on a different direction of this correlation. The capability approach emphasizes higher incomes as a *means* to the end of

enhanced capabilities, such as better education and health. In contrast, the economic growth approach promotes better education and health but solely as a means to the *end* of higher income. This difference in valuational focus is a fundamental difference between the approaches that often goes unnoticed at the level of policy and projects because not only organizations that reflect the economic growth perspective (for example, parts of the World Bank), but also organizations that reflect the capability perspective (including the UNDP), currently make investment in primary health and education a priority.<sup>49</sup>

Recall from Chapter One that the primary policy directives of the most recent versions of the economic growth perspective listed in the Washington Consensus (see Chapter One, p. 22) require the redirection of public expenditure priorities towards primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure, and that the stated purpose of such redirection is to generate “both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution.” (Washington Consensus) The policy directive is concerned with the effects that health care and education have on people as human *capital*, that is, as economic resources. It is not directly concerned with how being healthy and well educated affects the lives of the people as human *beings* who are ends within themselves. As Sen writes:

---

<sup>49</sup> Although many of the policies and projects of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program do reflect the economic growth approach and the capability approach, respectively, for reasons explained in Chapter One, note 21, I do not wish to claim that either organization operates entirely in one perspective or the other. Both institutions are large, complex, and ever-changing organization. Some recent work within the Bank even suggests a departure (at least in some areas) from the economic growth perspective and towards the capability perspective. See for example, the World Bank’s *2006 World Development Report: Equity and Development*, the back cover of which reads: “The Report advocates taking explicit account of equity in determining development priorities: public action should aim to expand the opportunities of those who, in the absence of policy interventions, have the least resources, voice, and capabilities.” That said, the World Bank currently – and certainly traditionally – operates largely within the economic growth perspective.

At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be said the literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities. The perspective of human capability focuses, on the other hand, on the ability—the substantive freedom—of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have.<sup>50</sup>

When investment in health and education is seen as investment in human capital, which is as no more than an investment in an economic system designed to increase GNP, investments in health and education are only made when, and to the extent that, such investments are deemed economically efficient. That is, when such investments will bring a good rate of return. In contrast, when health and education are seen as intrinsically valuable as well as instrumentally valuable capabilities, it is understood that they should be provided both because they expand the valuable freedoms enjoyed by human beings, and because they sometimes contribute to other good things, like greater income. Whether or not greater income or other economic consequences ensue, however, investments in health and education are always a priority – even in cases where GNP would be lower. (Although in a particular situation a case might be made that they should be secondary to another valuable freedom, for example, food security.) Thus, while the economic growth approach and the capability approach both encourage investment in basic health care and education, they do so (and might cease to do so) for fundamentally different reasons and with different priorities.

---

<sup>50</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York. 1999. (Here, p. 293.) See also: pp. 143-45 and 292-97.

Democratic governance is also valued and promoted by the current (but not necessarily the traditional) version of the economic growth approach as well as the capability approach. Free and fair democratic elections as well as basic political and civil rights are currently a priority for both approaches. However, the economic growth approach has been slow to recognize that good governance, including democratic governance, may play a valuable role in promoting economic growth. The approach still tends to favor a minimal state, which is typically expected to contribute efficiently to economic growth. It also requires only a relatively “thin” democracy. (Moreover, even the requirement for thin democracy may result more from political pressure from First World democracies rather than from an authentic evolution of the perspective, which may be just as likely to endorse economically efficient autocratic regimes, such as China). In contrast, the capability approach emphasizes the importance of some key state functions, including democratic functions, as both intrinsically good, because they enable people to express their agency, and instrumentally good, because they tend to promote human well-being better than do alternative governance structures.<sup>51</sup>

Several of the policy directives associated with the economic growth perspective (such as privatization, deregulation, and free capital mobility,) seek to ensure a minimal or small government with relatively limited citizen participation or re-distribution of wealth. This system is guided by general principles of economic efficiency. It rewards market participation and seeks to maximize economic freedom, while strictly limiting any taxation of the rich designed to meet the needs of the poor.

---

<sup>51</sup> See Sen, 1999 Ch. 6, and Crocker, David A. *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 9.

The economic growth perspective has recently come to recognize that some redistribution of wealth, what it calls “equity,” is necessary to promote and sustain economic growth. Hence, it employs investments in human capital and infrastructure in order to attract investments (both foreign and domestic), and holds that we can and should design some redistribution policies for the sake of economic growth and increased efficiency. However, even in this recent evolution of the economic growth perspective, economic growth trumps equity. Equity-enhancing measures should be abandoned when they no longer result in greater growth. As the World Bank’s *2006 World Development Report: Equity and Development* explains:

[W]hile such equity-enhancing redistributions (of power, or access to government spending and markets) can often be efficiency-increasing, possible tradeoffs need to be assessed in the design of policy. At some point higher tax rates to finance spending on more schools for the poorest will create so much disincentive to effort or investment (depending on how the taxes are raised), that one should stop raising them.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the economic growth perspective may support civil and political rights, including freedom of speech and a more equitable redistribution of political (and economic) power. Of course, these freedoms are not promoted as intrinsically important, but only if and when they contribute to economic growth: “The central argument here is that unequal power leads to the formation of institutions that perpetuate inequalities in power, status, and wealth—and that typically are also bad for the investment, innovation, and risk-

---

<sup>52</sup> World Bank’s *2006 World Development Report: Equity and Development*. p. 10.

taking that underpin long-term growth.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the economic growth approach favors a government that provides services and institutions that work to generate greater equality in power, status, and wealth *only* to the extent that it is economically efficient and promotes long-term growth. That is, only to the extent that *equity is a means to GNP growth* and efficient economic expansion.

In contrast, Sen rejects the idea that good governance, democracy, and political freedoms are simply a means to economic growth or development. Rather, within the capability perspective they are valued as sources of important freedoms independent of the fact that they are also likely to promote economic growth. Such dependency puts too many people at risk. As Sen puts it in one of this chapter’s epigraphs, “[I]n judging economic development it is not adequate to look only at the growth of GNP or some indicators of overall economic expansion. We have to look also at the impact of democracy and political freedoms on the lives and capabilities of the citizens.”<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to the – at best – weakly distributive government of the economic growth approach, the capability approach allows for, indeed sometimes requires, the state’s or civil society’s provision of several services that facilitate the expansion of certain capabilities, or freedoms of all people even though doing so may entail a relatively large government, considerable redistribution of wealth, and in some cases, less growth.<sup>55</sup> Within the capability approach, the expansion of freedom is considered both the primary end and the principal means of development. These two roles of freedom in development can be called the “constitutive role” and the “instrumental role”

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> See: Sen. 1999, pp. 38 – 39.

respectively. “The constitutive role of freedom relates to the importance of substantive freedom in enriching human life.”<sup>56</sup> When we consider people’s lives as better because they have a certain freedom (or worse due to lacking a certain freedom), for example, the freedom to be well nourished, to drink clean water, to live to adulthood, and so on, we are considering the constitutive aspect of freedom.

“The instrumental role of freedom concerns the way different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general, and thus to promoting development.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, instrumental freedoms are the enabling capabilities, or background conditions, which contribute to our general capacity to live as we freely choose to live. Understanding the instrumental aspect of freedom allows us to recognize that many freedoms are interrelated and that promoting freedoms of one type (for example, education) can help in promoting and/or protecting other types of freedoms (for example, employment). Sen has identified (1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees, and (5) protective security as some of the categories of instrumental (as well as substantive) freedoms that the policies and programs of the capability approach seek to ensure that states and communities promote and protect.

Societies, through both governments and civil society associations, are responsible for promoting and protecting *political freedoms*. Promoting and protecting such freedoms entails not only by having free and fair democratic elections, but also by

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

ensuring “political entitlements associated with democracies in the broadest sense.”<sup>58</sup>

Such political entitlements include a multiparty system, freedom of speech – including a free press, and freedom to participate in other mediums of exchange (including, parades, peaceful protests, town hall meetings, and the like) that facilitate engagement in critical political dialogue, including the criticism of government leaders. In addition, government and civil society institutions should be in place to facilitate the continuous exchange of ideas, or democratic deliberation about what sort of capabilities we should value and seek to promote at the state level.

*Economic facilities* are the freedoms that individuals have to participate in economic consumption, production, or exchange. The capability perspective recognizes not only that markets should be open to all, but also that gross economic inequalities are often the root of inequalities of other types of power, such as political influence. Jolly captures some of the ways in which institutions of governance can promote the sort of economic facilities encouraged by the human development view of the capability perspective:

The human development view recognizes many areas where state action is vital: in strengthening the human capabilities of all the human population; in ensuring a fair distribution of opportunities through a fair distribution of income; in creating active policies to ensure markets work with equity as well as efficiency, which includes monitoring market outcomes and allowing interventions where necessary, to offset extreme inequalities of market power; and in encouraging the formation of local

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

institutions that provide opportunities for participation and empowerment in a whole range of activities and services.<sup>59</sup>

*Social opportunities*, such as basic health care and primary education, are another general kind of instrumental (and substantive) freedom. People's lives are enriched due to good health and trained mental capacities. Health care and education are also instrumentally valuable to development as they allow for more effective political and economic participation. Healthy people who are literate and numerate are qualified for a wide variety of jobs at better wages. They attract outside investments, and they are better equipped to participate in more advanced market activities, such as managing a business or participating in micro-credit programs. They are also able to read government documents and newspaper articles and to communicate in writing about political activities.

Political and economic interactions require a certain amount of trust. People need to trust that the goods they exchange are properly represented, that the leaders they elect are using state funds as pledged and claimed, and that contracts will be serviced and paid as agreed. *Transparency guarantees* provide the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of disclosure. States can provide such guarantees by requiring a certain level of openness and clarity in economic transactions, governments, and contracts, and by penalizing violations of such requirements. These guarantees promote the public trust necessary for healthy political and economic interactions and have an obvious role in protecting people from the harms of fraud, corruption, financial irresponsibility, and other forms of deceitful dealings.

---

<sup>59</sup> Jolly, Richard. "Human Development and Neoliberalism Compared" in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A.K. Shiva Kumar eds. *Readings in Human Development*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2003. (Here p. 109.)

Within the capability approach, what Sen calls “*protective security*” involves not only protecting citizens against harms that result from the direct actions of others such as theft, rape, assault, and fraud, but also against the deprivation of basic capabilities that can result from physical or economic circumstances. As Sen explains:

*Protective security* is needed to provide a social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery, and in some cases even starving to death. The domain of protective security includes *fixed* institutional arrangements such as unemployment benefits and statutory income supplements to the indigent as well as ad hoc arrangements such as famine relief or emergency public employment to generate income for destitutes.<sup>60</sup>

The freedom to avoid death and starvation is not only intrinsically valuable but is also is clearly instrumental to enjoying other valuable freedoms.

Both the economic growth approach and the capability approach require states and civil society to promote and protect many of the same political and civil freedoms, access to markets, transparency guarantees, and security. However, the capability approach requires the state to promote these freedoms even if doing so requires a relatively large government, considerable redistribution of wealth, including taxation of the rich, and a slower (or less economically efficient) rate of GNP growth. As Jolly rightly remarks, “it is not so much that the neo-liberal approach ignores all of these [freedoms], but it generally accords them lower importance than the goal of economic

---

<sup>60</sup> Sen 1999, p. 40. Emphasis original.

efficiency.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, the economic growth approach promotes and protects many of the political and civil freedoms discussed above to the extent, but only to the extent, that doing so maximizes – or at least does not negatively effect – economic growth. GNP growth (often with the expectation or hope of reducing poverty) remains the primary end of development within the economic growth approach.

It must be underscored that within the human-centered capability perspective, the political and civil freedoms we have been considering as instrumental freedoms, are not merely instruments or means of development. They are also among the valuable ends of development. For these various instrumental freedoms, including political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security not only enrich our lives, but also and provide an answer to the question “What is development?.” The fact that they are instrumentally valuable does not in any way diminish their value as ends of development. As Sen observes:

Within the narrower views of development (in terms of, say, GNP growth or industrialization) it is often asked whether the freedom of political participation and dissent is or is not ‘conducive to development.’ In light of the foundational view of development as freedom, this question would seem to be defectively formulated, since it misses the crucial understanding that *political participation and dissent are constitutive parts of development itself*. Even a very rich person who is prevented from speaking freely, or from participating in public debates and decisions, is deprived of something that she has reason to value.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Jolly, p. 109.

<sup>62</sup> Sen, 1999, pp. 36 – 37. Emphasis mine.

Because the capability perspective understands development as the expansion of valuable capabilities, the freedom to speak or participate is a part of good development, whether such freedom results in optimal economic efficiency, or not.

When it comes to promoting and protecting the political and civil freedoms discussed above, policies that stem from recent positions within the economic growth approach as well as more essentially from the capability approach emphasize anti-discrimination measures to ensure the inclusion of women, minorities, and the disabled. However, we see the same pattern. The economic growth approach's inclusion of such marginalized peoples is contingent on such inclusion's enhancing economic efficiency by utilizing previously untapped human resources. The capability approach, in contrast, calls for more protection to marginalized people through emphasizing inclusion in order to expand justly the capability-sets of all, especially the previously excluded – even when doing so does not result in economic growth.

Although both approaches support international trade and encourage economic aid from more developed countries, the policies and priorities of each approach are also different at the international level of development. The economic growth approach calls for free trade without barriers among nations. It also calls for more developed countries to provide economic aid and investment to bolster the economies of less developed countries in accordance with directives from outside experts. One World Bank document describes the economic growth approach stance at work in traditional World Bank approach, that is, the “external expert stance” as follows:

Usually, these externally positioned sponsors and designers are substantive experts in the subject matter they are

investigating. *They* determine what the project will look like. They view other stakeholders mainly as sources of information and opinions. Their “expert role” includes collecting information and opinions from the other stakeholders, making sense out of what they collect, and converting all of it into a development strategy or project.<sup>63</sup>

The capability approach focuses on *fair* trade, which emphasizes sustainable wages for all workers of the global market. It calls for MDCs to provide international support (including economic aid) for national actions democratically adopted by LDCs with the aim of expanding the capabilities the people of the LDC value.

Thus, the policies and projects that stem from the economic growth perspective and the capability perspective often work towards similar short term goals such as promoting basic health, democratic governance, and anti-discrimination. However, they sometimes do so in different ways and for different reasons. They also accept different sorts of trade-offs as they aim at fundamentally different long term goals that correspond to their fundamentally different understandings of development. Table Two summarizes some of the similarities and differences between the institutional means of development recognized by the economic growth approach and the capability approach.

---

<sup>63</sup> The World Bank Participation Sourcebook. (Here, p. 4.) (Available on line at: <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sbhome.htm>.) The authors of the sourcebook add that: “The external expert stance is not a World Bank innovation but an inherent and deeply embedded part of our understanding of how to produce results and the role one plays in producing them.”

**Table Two: Means and Ends**

	<b>Economic Growth Approach</b>	<b>Capability Approach</b>
<b>Organizations that <i>tend to</i> Operate within Approach</b>	World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF)	United Nation’s Development Program (UNDP)
<b>Political Freedoms</b>	Democratic elections; minimal state; promotion and protection of basic political and civil freedoms and some basic human rights  Emphasis is on good governance for economic efficiency	Democratic elections; inclusive and deep democracy; important state functions and institutions that promote and protect not only basic political and civil freedoms, all basic freedoms and human rights
<b>Economic Facilities</b>	Promotion of economic consumption, production, and exchange; open markets; limited market interventions as means to economic growth	Promotion of economic consumption, production, and exchange; open markets; market interventions when necessary to offset inequalities of income and power  Economic activity as one intrinsically good freedom as well as a means to other intrinsic and instrumental freedoms
<b>Social Opportunities</b>	Important investments in human capital; invest in primary health care, education, and nutrition, but only when there is a good rate of return	Important to improving human lives, not only as means to other opportunities, but also as ends within themselves; (almost) always invest in primary health care, education, and nutrition (unless a democratic decision to avoid economic catastrophe)

	<b>Economic Growth Approach</b>	<b>Capability Approach</b>
<b>Transparency Guarantees</b>	Openness about economic transactions, governments, and contracts (as means to reduce corruption and promote growth)	Openness and clarity from economic transactions, governments, and contracts (as intrinsically valuable as well as means to other freedoms) sometimes even when the result is less growth
<b>Protective Security</b>	Protection from harm; social safety nets where affordable and contributory to economic growth	Stronger protection from harm through social safety nets even when (within democratically decided limits) the result is less aggregative economic growth or prosperity
<b>Inclusion of Marginalized Groups</b>	Previously untapped resources of human capital as a factor in economic growth	Expanding the freedoms of all, especially previously marginalized human beings, as one of the ends of development
<b>International</b>	Market and expert decisions for free trade international aid as means of promoting economic growth	National and local decisions for Fair Trade, international support for national self-determination of strategies to expand capabilities

## **2. The Concept and Role of Empowerment**

International development theorists and practitioners of both the (current version of the) economic growth approach and the capability approach agree that empowerment – the focus of my project – is a necessary part of good development. However, as with many of the issues discussed above, each perspective has a different understanding of what empowerment is (and is not), what it means to promote empowerment within

development, and why doing so is part of good development. In this section, I provide a brief account of the nature and role of empowerment within each approach. (I provide a more detailed account of empowerment within the capability approach in Chapters Four and Five.) I argue that the human-centered perspective of the capability approach offers a more comprehensive, and therefore, a theoretically and practically superior, concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide.<sup>64</sup>

Those who work within the economic growth perspective active throughout much of the world today claim that empowerment is a key part of good development. That is, that empowerment is one of the key ingredients of a formula that will result in efficient GNP growth. However, as with other extra-market concepts (including, education, health care, democracy, and so forth), the approach has been slow to adopt an adequate concept of empowerment or recognize the complex value of empowerment in good development. Recall that within the economic growth perspective “good development” is efficient economic growth (GNP) with the expectation that the result will be relatively rapid decreases in poverty; that is, fewer people earning wages below the poverty line. In this context, empowerment is largely, if not exclusively, economic employment, productivity, and other forms of *market* participation. As such, empowerment is a valuable part of development to the extent that productive employment and other economic means promotes growth or increases economic efficiency. In other words, being economically empowered by having a productive job is valuable only *as a means* to efficient economic growth.

---

<sup>64</sup> Note that my current project is *not* to provide an account of the ideal concept of empowerment. Rather, it is to investigate some of the concepts of empowerment that are currently at work in development.

The power to participate in market activities, earn a living wage, secure a loan, produce and sell goods, purchase goods, and so on, are of great importance on this approach. Projects and policies that promote and protect these economic powers – particularly among those who were previously excluded (including, women, lower castes, the disabled, and others) from full economic participation – are often touted as empowerment projects. An individual may be considered empowered to the extent that she can make market-related decisions and control her economic status. For example, individuals who make decisions about the sort of work they do, the sort of wage they earn, and the sort of goods they buy – not only in amount, but also variety, are more empowered than those who cannot work, or have no choice but to work in poor conditions for subsistence wages, and have little access to the goods they need or want. Thus, it seems that any development intervention that aims to increase employment or wages, or to expand market opportunities, can be broadly understood as an empowerment intervention from within the economic growth perspective. It is worth noting that the vast majority of these empowerment interventions are planned and executed by development experts, whether foreign or national.

Although the traditional “external expert stance” mentioned above remains the prevailing commitment and practice within the economic growth perspective (and the World Bank), some within the perspective (and *some* within the World Bank) encourage the adoption of an alternative “participatory stance” in development projects, or interventions. The participatory stance assumes that high levels of participation are linked to high levels of empowerment. Empowerment, in turn, is important in so far as it is a means to broader and more stable markets and long term growth. This view assumes

that people are more economically productive when they are empowered to make decisions or have other “ownership” investments in a project.

It is important to note that on this view “participation” and “empowerment” still refer to market participation and economic empowerment. Involving poor stakeholders as decision makers and other participants in development interventions is merely a means to the end of greater economic gains. Thus the new and alternative “participatory stance” is an additional way to promote economic growth (in the same vein as recognizing endogenous factors). It is not a dissent from, or abandonment of, the economic growth perspective, which remains grounded in an understanding of development as economic growth. In contrast, a move to value and promote participation and/or empowerment as an end of good development independent of any economic consequences of doing so, would be a departure from the economic growth perspective.

According to the World Bank’s *Participation Sourcebook*, the “participation stance” occurs in development interventions when “the sponsors and designers take a stance that places them inside the local social system being addressed; that is, they demonstrate a willingness to work *collaboratively* with the other key stakeholders<sup>65</sup> in carrying out the steps required to prepare a project for World Bank financing.”<sup>66</sup> The *Sourcebook* rightly recognizes that fostering participation of the poor involves “a lot

---

<sup>65</sup> The Participation Sourcebook defines stakeholders as: “*Borrowers*, that is, elected officials, line agency staff, local government officials, and so on. Governments representing borrower member countries are the Bank’s most significant partners in that they are shareholders as well as clients and are responsible for devising and implementing public policies and programs; *indirectly affected groups*, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), private sector organizations, and so forth with an interest in outcomes; and *the Bank*, that is, Bank management, staff, and shareholders.” (p. 6)

<sup>66</sup> *Participation Sourcebook*, p. 3.

more than finding the right technique. It requires strengthening the organizational and financial capacities of the poor so that they can act for themselves.”<sup>67</sup>

The sourcebook offers the concept of “a continuum along which the poor are progressively empowered... On one end of this continuum, the poor are viewed as beneficiaries—recipients of services, resources, and development interventions. In this context, community organizing, training, and one-way flows of resources through grant mechanisms are often appropriate.”<sup>68</sup> As people become empowered “their voices begin to be heard, they become ‘clients’ who are capable of demanding and paying for goods and services from government and private sector agencies... We reach the far end of the continuum when these clients ultimately become the owners and managers of their assets and activities. This stage ranks highest in terms of the intensity of participation involved.”<sup>69</sup>

The most empowered on this account do not simply receive whatever goods and services donors decide to provide *through* one way distribution. Rather, they actively participate in and influence the results of the decision making processes concerning their economic assets and activities. As owners and managers of economic assets and activities, individuals and groups exercise their power to make decisions for themselves or with other stakeholders (including, but not limited to outside development professionals) about what products to buy, what products to produce, what methods of productions to use, and more. These decisions both influence and respond to local markets, and in this way work to ensure that the market reflects the interests of the

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

stakeholders. Supporters of the participation stance within the economic growth perspective believe that the participation of empowered stakeholders in development interventions and other economic projects will ultimately result in strong markets and sustainable economic growth.

The authors of the *Sourcebook* also recognize that empowerment requires: “building sustainable, market-based financial systems; decentralizing authority and resources; and strengthening local institutions” as well as creating an “enabling policy environment that allows all stakeholders—especially poor and disadvantaged ones—to . . . influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.”<sup>70</sup> An environment in which poor and disadvantaged stakeholders are able to influence and control policy, is an environment in which the poor and disadvantaged have access to basic education, health care, and civic participation. Thus, interventions that promote and protect education, good health, and civic participation, may also be considered empowerment projects. It is important to keep in mind, however, that – maintaining the pattern identified earlier – these projects are only considered valuable parts of good development to the extent to which they ultimately promote GNP growth, reduce economic poverty, or enhance economic efficiency; which may be considerable. It is in this way that the economic growth approach understands empowerment: as an economic concept that plays a valuable role *as a means* to good economic development, that is, a(n sustainable) increase in GNP.

The capability approach has a more complex conception of empowerment, one that goes beyond the market and emphasizes individual and group agency (via deliberation) in all spheres of life. Moreover, the capability perspective recognizes that

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

such empowerment is not only as a means to good development but is also as an important end of good development. In this section I provide only a general explanation of the role of empowerment within the capability approach in order to make clear how it differs fundamentally from the role of empowerment within the economic growth approach. In Chapters Four and Five, I provide a more detailed account of empowerment within the capability approach, including an evaluation of theoretical similarities and differences found in economist Amartya Sen's and philosopher Martha Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach.

As we have seen, within the capability perspective "good development" is a process of expanding the set(s) of valuable substantive freedoms, or capabilities, people enjoy. Within this approach empowerment, in a general sense, can be understood as the process of expansion of the valuable substantive freedoms people enjoy. In this way, there is a sense in which *all* of the development projects and interventions promoted from within the capability perspective can be understood as empowerment projects that seek to empower people to achieve a lifestyle that they have reason to value. Thus unlike the limited concept and instrumental role that empowerment plays within the economic growth perspective, empowerment is a very central concept with an extensive role within the capability perspective.

Moreover, in this very general sense, the process of good development *is* the process of empowerment. If a person has the *capability* to be well-nourished, read, vote, or buy and sell goods, then she is *empowered* to be well-nourished, read, vote, or buy and sell goods. Empowerment on this view is not simply tied to the market, but can be found in every sphere of human life – including, and for some especially, the private spheres.

By focusing on what people are free to do and be, the capability approach is able to recognize the most empowered people not just as owners and managers of assets and economic activities, but as owners and managers of their own lives; not only in the market, but also in the polis, the academy, the family, and in every other sphere of life. It is in this way that the role of empowerment – as both a process and a result – is much more comprehensive within the capability approach than with in the economic growth approach.

Sen uses the concept of agency to represent such ownership and management of one's own life.<sup>71</sup> As mentioned above, on Sen's account agency has both a freedom aspect, agency freedom, and an achievement aspect, agency achievement. A person's *agency achievement* is her "success in the pursuit of the totality of her considered goals and objectives."<sup>72</sup> These goals can include objectives that enhance one's own well-being, for example, one might seek to be well-nourished or to own a sports car. However, agency goals are not restricted to making one's own life better, and in this way may be distinct from what Sen calls "well-being achievement" (which I discuss in detail in Chapter Four).

Sen recognizes that human beings are not psychological egoists. We often have interests in achieving goals that go beyond benefiting ourselves. A parent may want to (that is, have the agency objective of) seeing her children's lives go well. In many cases, a parent's well-being is enhanced by the fact that her children's well-being is enhanced.

---

<sup>71</sup> As mentioned above (note 18), Martha Nussbaum does not use Sen's agency/well-being distinction. However, as I discuss in Chapter Five, Nussbaum often (especially in her work in 2000 and after) uses the term "agency" in a way that is compatible with Sen's use and argues that people should be recognized as "sources of agency and worth in their own right, with their own plans to make and their own lives to live...deserving of all necessary support for their equal opportunity to be such agents." (Nussbaum. 2000. p. 58)

<sup>72</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 56.

It is important to note, however, that our personal well-being is conceptually separate from the well-being of others. A parent may also act to enhance the well-being of her children in a way that diminishes her own well-being. In this case, despite being slightly offset by the psychological benefits of seeing her children do well, the parent's overall well-being is diminished, but her agency is enhanced. It is not only with respect to their children that agents act in ways that diminish their own well-being in order to pursue other agency objectives. One may incur great personal costs to herself as she works towards the greater good of her country, or the environment, or even the demise of her enemies.

On Sen's account, agency objectives are goals that a person has her *own reason* to pursue; they are not (simply) the goals of someone else.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, agency objectives are not based on a "whim or caprice that a person happens to have,"<sup>74</sup> nor are they coerced by outside forces (be they people or natural disasters), but are autonomously decided. According to Sen, an agent is a reasonable individual "who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criterion as well."<sup>75</sup>

*Agency freedom* is the freedom individuals have to realize the objectives they value and pursue. To have more agency freedom is to have "more *opportunity* to achieve

---

<sup>73</sup> Sen's use of the term "agent" is not to be confused with a use of the same term to denote a person acting for and accountable to someone else, namely, a principal, as it is sometimes employed within economics and game theory. See: Sen, *Development as Freedom*. p. 19. This is not to say that people cannot have common or shared goals. As discussed in later chapters of this work, people can and often do work as collective agents to achieve common goals.

<sup>74</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1992. (Here, p. 56, n. 1).

<sup>75</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 19.

those things that we value, and have reason to value.”<sup>76</sup> Sen distinguishes between this *opportunity aspect of freedom*, which is “concerned primarily with our ability to achieve” and the *process aspect of freedom* which is concerned with “the processes through which that achievement comes about.”<sup>77</sup>

In valuing process freedom, the capability perspective is recognizing that development theories and projects should work not only to create valuable opportunities, but also to ensure that the opportunities arrive through an agency-expressing and just process. For example, development interventions might seek the opportunity for members of a historically oppressed group to own their own land. The intervention should not, however, do so by *forcing* the members of the historically oppressed group to relocate together to an area that they did not choose, for example assigned reservation. Note that an individual or group’s process freedom can be violated even if the oppressed group happens to find their new location desirable. It is the lack of choice, or expression of agency in the matter that is significant.<sup>78</sup>

The important concept of agency implies empowering public sphere policies and institutions that express and support agency (individual and group autonomy) and direct valuable projects. Such projects may include the expansion of market access, as well as popularly decided and just land reform, to name a few. Within the capability approach, the concept of agency also facilitates the incredibly important empowerment of

---

<sup>76</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Rationality and Freedom*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2002. p. 585.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Although the current work of the economic growth approach includes some good governance measures and some protection of human rights, it does not focus on matters of process freedom. Instead, those working within the perspective are likely to insist that their mission is a value-neutral one restricted to the economic endeavor of raising GNP and that internal political projects including the details of a country’s land reform scheme are beyond the scope of the approach.

individuals as decision makers with some control within the private or informal contexts of their daily lives. This is an area that results in the critical deprivation of many men, women, and children, including the women who make up the millions of “missing women” (introduced in Chapter One).

In a deeply patriarchal or gender biased society, a woman with access to essential resources like food may not have the capacity to be well nourished due, for example, to a cultural norm that leaves her with no choice (agency) but to give the majority of the household’s food to her husband or other male relatives.<sup>79</sup> Or, perhaps in some cases, she herself believes that giving her husband the majority of the household’s food is normal, proper, and not to be scrutinized or questioned. Simply providing such a woman with official legal or even protected physical access to additional food may do very little to allow her to express her agency or to alter *her* actual opportunity freedom or capability set, as long as she lacks the psychological and social power to autonomously reject the norm that dictates her husband is more important and deserves the majority of her food. (Of course, improving legal and/or physical access to food may be one valuable or even necessary step towards expanding her options.)

As mentioned above, even a “wealthy” woman, who enjoys an opulent life by most standards, may lack agency as well as important basic capabilities. Consider, for example, a woman who is forced to marry a person of someone else’s choosing, and by no coincidence suffers from physical abuse, sexual abuse, and forced pregnancy, because according to her cultural beliefs to refuse any of these is to offend her community, her

---

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed account of how such a norm influences the lives of women in parts of India see: Rajni Palriwala. “Beyond Myths: The Social and Political Dynamics of Gender.” In Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian. Eds. *Institutions, Relations, and Outcomes: Framework and Case Studies for Gender Aware Planning*. London: Zed Books. 1999. (pp. 49 – 79. especially pp. 64 – 67.)

ancestors, or God. Such a woman lacks authorship or control of her life and the important capability that capability philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls “bodily integrity.”<sup>80</sup> Mere formal access to divorce or a court system that perpetrates spousal abuse will not benefit a woman who believes she is unworthy of choice or well-being, or fears not only offending God in heaven, but also provoking the treatment of “wrongdoers” in her earthly community. The capability approach recognizes that the women in these situations need more than a greater income or supported access to markets alone.

The capability perspective recognizes that expanding a person’s capability set, and enhancing a person’s agency often requires more than income. The concept of individual agency is central to Sen’s capability approach. Although often inescapably linked to income, public resources, and institutions (including education and employment), the agency-focused perspective allows us to go beyond (but not without) these basic resources to advocate that individuals and communities themselves should remove—or have an important role in removing—unfreedoms by altering institutionalized social attitudes and cultural practices. (I consider issues of institutionalized social values and cultural norms in greater detail in Chapter Six.)

Recall that a woman empowered as an agent is a woman who herself decides and “acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well.”<sup>81</sup> Such a woman is better equipped to recognize and give voice to her

---

<sup>80</sup> For Nussbaum, bodily integrity requires: “Being able to move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction. (Nussbaum, 2000 p. 78.) For Nussbaum’s complete list of “Central Human Functional Capabilities” see p. 156 of this essay.

<sup>81</sup> Sen. 1999, p. 19.

needs and to question informal institutional factors such as current social values and cultural practices that limit freedom. She is not simply dependent on the design of government institutions or even development interventions. As Sen writes:

Indeed, the agency of women can never be adequately free if traditionally discriminatory values remain unexamined and unscrutinized. While values may be culturally influenced...it is possible to overcome the barriers of inequality imposed by the tradition through greater freedom to question, doubt, and – if convinced – reject. An adequate realization of women’s agency relates not only to the freedom to act but also to the freedom to question and reassess.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the fact that Nussbaum does not make use of Sen’s agency/well-being distinction in her version of the capability approach, she agrees with Sen about the value of examining traditional discriminatory values as she embraces the concept of *practical reason*: “Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”<sup>83</sup> This concept of practical reason (among other aspects of Nussbaum’s account discussed in Chapter Five,) makes explicit Nussbaum’s agreement that the capability approach requires that individuals recognize themselves as (and actually be) people in control of their own lives, people Sen would call agents. For Nussbaum:

---

<sup>82</sup> Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen. *India: Development and Participation*. Oxford University Press: 1996, 2000. (p. 274.)

<sup>83</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78 – 79.

[T]he notion of choice and practical reason... is a normative notion, emphasizing the critical activity of reason in a way that does not reflect the actual use of reason in many lives... It also entails that there is something wrong with not seeing oneself in a certain way, as a bearer of rights and a citizen whose dignity and worth are equal to that of others.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, within the capability perspective simply having formal legal rights and access to, or even control over, a variety of market centered assets and activities is not enough. The capability approach not only requires that an individual receive the income and institutional support necessary to achieve basic functionings associated with the economic sphere. It also requires that she actively recognizes herself as a self-determining or autonomous being, a bearer of rights, worthy of an equal share of economic and other, cultural and social opportunities and resources, as she plans her own life. Within the capability approach women and men empowered as agents are not simply passive recipients of resources, or instruments for increasing GNP growth. Instead they are active critics and shapers of formal institutional policies as well as informal institutional cultural practices and social values.

A woman who actively recognizes her worth as equal to that of others is empowered to challenge cultural norms that, for example, require her to give the majority of the household's food to the men in her household despite her own malnourished state, or unquestionably defer to their decisions. A woman who sees herself as a bearer of rights and dignity is empowered to challenge, for example, violations of her bodily

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 112 – 13.

integrity, no matter how accepted or even valued such violations are in her society. A woman who is empowered to plan her own life can make autonomous decisions for herself, for example whether and who to marry. She can participate in many of the decision making processes within various spheres of life (including the market) and levels of society. I discuss these points in some depth in later chapters (especially Chapter Six).

The economic growth approach and the capability approach agree that empowerment is a valuable part of good development. However, upon examination of the concept and role of empowerment within each approach, it becomes clear that the ideal of empowerment of the capability perspective is more comprehensive than the relatively limited and thin, market-centered concept found within the economic growth perspective (as summarized on Table Three below). I submit that this comprehensive quality of the concept and role of empowerment within the capability approach is theoretically and practically superior to that found within the economic growth approach.

The concept of empowerment in within the capability approach is theoretically superior because it facilitates the understanding of individuals as human beings, and not simple as human capital, or resources for economic growth. Likewise, this understanding of empowerment is practically superior in that it allows for a more complete treatment of empowerment in development interventions, by going beyond the market to promote and protect empowerment within other relevant spheres of life, for example, the household. Moreover, given that empowerment within the economic growth approach can never be more than a mere means to the end of GNP growth (any move to value empowerment as an intrinsically valuable end of development would be a departure from the perspective)

the economic growth approach cannot provide a more comprehensive account of empowerment.

**Table Three: Empowerment**

<b>Dimensions of Empowerment</b>	<b>Economic Growth Approach</b>	<b>Capability Approach</b>
<b>Meaning</b>	Expansion of power to control one's own economic assets and activities and to influence the market	Expansion of power to deliberate critically, make decisions, plan one's own life, and have an impact on various spheres of life
<b>Role</b>	A means to greater/more efficient economic growth	A process that is both instrumental and constitutive of development
<b>Where</b>	Primarily within the economic, and secondarily (if at all) related public spheres of life	In every sphere of life, including the social, economic, civic, cultural, and familiar
<b>Who</b>	One who actively participates in the decision making process concerning their and other's (passive recipients) economic assets and activities	One who actively recognizes her worth as equal to that of others and is able to be an author of her own life by autonomously accepting, modifying, challenging or rejecting economic, political, social, and cultural norms
<b>How</b>	Participation is often passive and always limited to planning and instituting economic development interventions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Expressing and enhancing agency through education, deliberation, critical scrutiny, and decision making</li> <li>2) Facilitating opportunities to achieve one's individual and group objectives</li> </ol>

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter provides a closer look at and comparison of the policies and practices of the capability approach to development as a relatively new alternative to the traditional, and still dominant economic growth development perspective. The comparison reveals key differences in the policies of the two approaches, including differences in the way each perspective understands the ends of good development, and the roles that democracy, education, and empowerment play in good development. It is clear that although both the economic growth approach and the capability approach agree that human empowerment is a necessary part of good development, this agreement masks deep disagreements about what empowerment is and what role it plays within good development. Furthermore, in light of the above analysis, I submit that the capability perspective offers a more comprehensive, and therefore, theoretically and practically superior – concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Can Pogge be Justified? A Response to Thomas Pogge's**

#### **'Can the Capability Approach be Justified?'**

*[T]here are internal capabilities: that is developed states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions.*

Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 2000

#### **Introduction**

The first two chapters of this essay offer a comparison of the traditionally dominant economic growth approach to development, and the relatively new capability approach. I conclude that the relatively comprehensive capability approach is philosophically and practically superior to the economic growth approach. In this chapter, I consider Thomas Pogge's representation of the capability approach as he compares the approach to yet another perspective on development he calls "Rawlsian resourcism." I argue that Pogge's assessment of the capability approach fails to appreciate both the depth of the approach in general and the role of empowerment within the approach in particular.

In his essay “Can the Capability Approach be Justified?”<sup>85</sup> Thomas Pogge observes that the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum has come to play a central role in political philosophy and in normative economics. Pogge asserts that the popularity of the capability approach among both academics and policy makers comes at the expense of competing resourcist and welfarist approaches. With this in mind, Pogge sets out to examine how the capability approach might be justified as superior to what he calls its “Rawlsian resourcist competition.” He concludes that the capability approach cannot be justified as superior to the resourcist approach. In light of this conclusion, he suggests that it is not the capability approach, but resourcism, that deserves our attention as political philosophers and normative economists. I do not here explain or assess Rawlsian resourcism. Nor do I address Pogge’s comparison of the two approaches. Instead I focus on Pogge’s claim that the capability approach cannot be justified in receiving the attention of scholars and practitioners.

I believe that Pogge is justified in examining the capability approach. Indeed, he is to be applauded for critically engaging the approach. However, I do not believe that the evaluation of the capability approach that Pogge provides is justified. In the present chapter, I argue that Pogge’s essay fails to present a full and accurate account of the capability approach. I attempt to make clear some of the most serious limitations and distortions in Pogge’s representation of the capability approach including his misrepresentation of capabilities as merely instrumental, and his failure to account for individual empowerment, and in turn, the rich valuation processes that are part and parcel

---

<sup>85</sup> Thomas W. Pogge. “Can the Capability Approach be Justified?” in Martha Nussbaum and Chad Flanders eds.: *Global Inequalities*, special issue 30:2 (Fall 2002, appeared February 2004) of *Philosophical Topics*, 167-228. In my essay all page references refer to the electronic posting of Pogge’s paper (<http://aran.univ-pau.fr/ee/page3.html>).

of the capability approach that both Sen and Nussbaum promote. I conclude that Pogge's representation of the approach is so flawed that his essay concerns not the capability approach, but a *mis*representation of the approach that neither Sen nor Nussbaum could endorse. Consequently, Pogge's conclusion that the capability approach cannot be justified is, at best, irrelevant to a healthy discussion of how the capability approach relates to other approaches within development.

I want to be very clear that I am not suggesting that Pogge's work in general, or even in this paper in particular, have nothing to contribute to the discussion. On the contrary, I myself am one of many who owe a great academic debt to Thomas Pogge. Moreover, my purpose here is *not* to vindicate the capability approach as superior to the resourcism Pogge favors. Rather, it is the more modest goal of clearing away potential obstacles to a healthy discussion of how the capability approach – properly understood – relates to other approaches to international development including Rawlsian resourcism. I believe that such a discussion is essential to the progress of international development theories, and in turn, to the practice of international development.

### **1. Pogge's (Mis)Representation of the Capability Approach**

Pogge's flawed representation of the capability approach seems to stem from his efforts to isolate differences between the capability approach and the Rawlsian resourcism he favors. Pogge sees isolating such differences as a necessary step in the process of determining "*which approach can deliver the most plausible public criterion of social justice.*"<sup>86</sup> In the first section of his paper Pogge equates "the debate about

---

<sup>86</sup> Pogge, p. 1. Emphasis original.

criteria of social justice” with an arguably more narrow debate about “how institutional schemes are to be assessed and reformed in the name of justice.”<sup>87,88</sup> Once this move is made the “key question” for Pogge becomes: “Should alternative feasible institutional schemes be assessed in terms of ‘participants’ access to valuable resources or in terms of their participant’s capabilities, that is, access to valuable functionings?”<sup>89</sup> In answering this question Pogge asks that we “confine ourselves” to what he calls “the central disagreement between the two approaches,” which he explains as follows:

Resourcists believe that individual shares should be defined as bundles of goods or resources needed by human beings in general, without reference to the natural diversity among them. These goods might include certain rights and liberties, powers and prerogatives, income and wealth, as well as access to education, health care, employment, and public goods – with different lists and different weights specified by different resourcist views. Adherents of the capability approach hold, by contrast, that individual shares should be defined so as to take account of “personal characteristics that govern the conversion of primary goods into the person’s ability to promote her ends.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, an

---

<sup>87</sup> Pogge, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> In his paper, Pogge’s use of the phrase “institutional schemes” is limited to what I call “formal institutions” in Chapter Six of this essay. For the sake of clarity, in this chapter I adopt Pogge’s use of “institutional schemes” to represent institutionalized rules or patterns of typically official and public sphere, institutions, including the government. I also use the phrase “extra-institutional” instead of “informal institutions” to represent the rules and patterns of the typically unofficial and primarily private or social-cultural systems that influence the way we live, for example, the family, the church, the tribe, and so forth. I discuss some “extra-institutional” matters of justice and the fact that the capability approach, properly understood, can account for them in Section 4 of this chapter.

<sup>89</sup> Pogge p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Pogge’s footnote 76 is found at this point in his text. It reads:

Sen: *Development as Freedom*, 74. This formulation is defective by suggesting that the capability approach features criteria of social justice that take account of the specific ends that different persons are

equalitarian capability criterion holds that, under a just institutional order, persons with mental or physical frailties or disabilities would receive more resources than others, enabling them to reach the same level of capabilities, the same level of opportunities to promote human ends, insofar as this is reasonably possible.<sup>91</sup>

Presenting the capability approach in this way limits the approach to a simple call for an institutional order that distributes resources in a way that reflects each individual's ability to convert such resources into capabilities. At first blush, this description in itself is not obviously distorted. However, careful reading of Pogge's paper reveals that the description is at the root of several problematic positions woven throughout the essay. In what follows I attempt to make clear the limitations and distortions of Pogge's representation of the capability approach by untangling some of the problematic positions it generates.

## **2. The Intrinsic Value of Capabilities and Functionings**

Pogge's limited description of the capability approach as a simple call for an institutional order that distributes resources (albeit in such a way that reflects each

---

pursuing. This is not the case. Capabilities are defined without regard to such ends. One person does not count as having lesser capabilities than another merely because the former chooses to pursue more ambitious ends. What matters for capability theorists is each person's ability to promote *typical* or *standard human ends* — and not: each person's ability to promote his or her own particular ends.

However, as discussed in Section 2 of this chapter, Pogge is mistaken. The capability approach *is* concerned with a person's ability to promote his or her own particular ends over other ends, albeit, among standard human ends. The capability approach recognizes the importance of not just the doings and beings one actually achieves, but also the opportunities that one has, and yet chooses not to pursue, that is, one's capability set (introduced in Chapter One).

<sup>91</sup> Pogge, pp. 33 – 34.

individual's ability to convert such resources into capabilities), is linked to his problematic understanding of capabilities and functionings. Pogge fails to recognize that capabilities and (some) functionings have intrinsic value. Pogge correctly understands that "resources are of merely instrumental significance, [and] are important only insofar as they give persons opportunities to pursue their goals."<sup>92</sup> However, Pogge reveals his misunderstanding of capabilities, and in turn the capability approach, as he attempts to assign an equivalent, merely instrumental, value to capabilities. He argues that: "Like rights and access to money, so the abilities to be well nourished and to move about are of mostly instrumental importance."<sup>93</sup>

Pogge is right that many capabilities, including those he mentions, do have significant instrumental value (for example, the ability to move about is instrumental in the task of getting a glass of water from the other room). However, unlike resources, capabilities are not of *mere* instrumental significance. Capabilities are a type of freedom, and as such they are *intrinsically* valuable. According to Sen: "Capability is...the substantive freedom to achieve alternate functioning combinations ([that is, combinations of the various things a person may value doing or being] or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)."<sup>94</sup>

A person with the capacity to be well-nourished enjoys the freedom to choose between being well-nourished and not being well-nourished (for example, by fasting). In contrast, a person with resources, even sophisticated resources like "access to money" or "access to food" may or may not be free to convert those resources to meet her actual

---

<sup>92</sup> Pogge. p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> Pogge. p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York. 1999. (Here, p. 75.)

needs, in this case, being well-nourished. A person can have access to food, but lack the capacity to be well-nourished due to a medical condition, for example, she may suffer from a parasitic disease. As explained in Chapter One, an affluent person with plenty of food and a healthy digestive system who chooses to fast may have the same functioning achievement in terms of eating or nourishment as a destitute person who is forced to starve. However, the first person has a different “capability set” than the second. The first person can *choose* to eat and to be well nourished in a way that the second person cannot.<sup>95</sup>

Of course, as an advocate for the resourcist may point out, without access to valuable resources like food one cannot have the capability of being well nourished. This is true. In this way resources are sometimes necessary, but they are never sufficient for capabilities and in turn functionings. That is, capabilities will sometimes depend on access to external (and merely instrumental) goods, but they will always require something internal, for example, a proper digestive system (or psychological state of empowerment). As I discuss in more detail in Chapters Four and Five, capabilities are actual intrinsically valuable opportunities for active doing and beings, as such they account for all that is necessary – external and internal – to achieve the relevant functionings. In other words: capabilities are both necessary and sufficient for achieving functionings.<sup>96</sup> A person who has the capability to be well nourished is, by definition, a person who can *choose* to be well-nourished.

---

<sup>95</sup> Sen, 1999, p. 75.

<sup>96</sup> Although capabilities, or real opportunities, are necessary and sufficient for functionings, or realized achievements, they do not necessitate functionings. A person will have several capabilities (for example, being nourished) in his capability set that he chooses not to realize (for example, by fasting).

Pogge's limited description of the capability approach fails to capture fully this important point. It problematically holds that the distribution of resources is often both necessary and sufficient for achieving capabilities and functionings. Pogge seems to believe that a resourcist position that requires not just the institutional distribution of primary goods, but the more sophisticated "access to primary goods," can somehow account for all that is necessary to achieve functionings. However, even the cleverest of resourcists, one that can account for institutional distribution of the most sophisticated resources Pogge identifies, for example, "access to the social bases for self respect," cannot fully account for capabilities, including what Nussbaum calls the capability for *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*. As one of the ten capabilities Nussbaum considers central to human functioning, this capability is concerned with an individual's essential capacity "to imagine, think, and reason...in a 'truly human' way."<sup>97</sup> Such capabilities rely on internal powers and dispositions that can be cultivated and facilitated by external resources – for example, education or proper nutrition – but can never be provided by them.

Pogge's failure to recognize the intrinsic value of capabilities leads him to a deeply flawed understanding of the capability approach. He demonstrates this in his treatment of a criticism made by Sen and originally directed at a version of resourcism.<sup>98</sup> Sen's original criticism faults resourcism for its use of strictly instrumental resources. Because Pogge wrongly assigns the same instrumental role to capabilities, he also

---

<sup>97</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. 2000. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Here. p. 78.) See Chapter Five of my project for a complete list of Nussbaum's capabilities.

<sup>98</sup> For Sen's original criticism see Pogge p. 34, Sen, Amartya. 1992. *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (p. 19 n. 20).

wrongly believes that “Sen’s criticism of resourcism [can] be turned against himself.”<sup>99</sup> Pogge attempts to turn Sen’s own argument against him as he substitutes “capabilities” for “resources” and paraphrases Sen’s criticism as: “Equality in the space of capabilities is seen as important because they are instrumental in giving people equitable opportunity to pursue their respective goals and objectives. This distance introduces some internal tension in Sen’s theory, since the derivative importance of capabilities depends on their role in allowing persons to fulfill their ends.”<sup>100</sup>

Pogge fails to realize that this criticism is confusing, if not nonsensical, when capabilities are properly understood as freedom or “real opportunities” to achieve “the various things a person may value doing or being.”<sup>101</sup> It becomes increasingly obvious that Pogge has misunderstood, and therefore does not accurately represent, the capability approach as he writes: “If Sen’s argument were sound, it would show that what matters for social justice is not equity in the space of capabilities (access to functionings) but equity in the space of opportunities to fulfill one’s particular goals.” This statement demonstrates clearly that Pogge does not understand capabilities and functionings. After all, *capabilities are opportunities to fulfill one’s particular goals* (that is, the freedom to achieve “various lifestyles” that one has reason to value). When Pogge misrepresents capabilities and functioning in this way, he critically misrepresents the capability approach.

---

<sup>99</sup> Pogge, p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> Pogge, p. 35.

<sup>101</sup> Sen. 1999, p. 75.

### 3. Not by the Distribution of Resources Alone

Pogge oversimplifies the capability approach when he portrays it as a simple call for an institutional order that distributes resources. However, Pogge does not commit himself to the overly simple and false view that when any individual is given resource  $x$  (for example, access to food), she will necessarily have the capability for functioning  $y$  (in this case, being well nourished). Rather, Pogge acknowledges that on the capability approach, the ability to convert access to resources (food) into realized functionings (being well-nourished) varies among individuals, such that when given access to equal shares of resources some people will be better suited to meet their needs than others. Much<sup>102</sup> of the variation among individual ability to convert resources into functionings results from what Sen calls “personal heterogeneities.” As mention in previous chapters, according to Sen:

People have disparate physical characteristics connected with disability, illness, age or gender, and these make their needs diverse. For example, an ill person may need more income to fight her illness—income that a person without such an illness would not need....A disabled person may need some prosthesis, an older person more support and help, a pregnant woman more nutritional intake, and so on.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Both Sen and Pogge discuss other reasons for variation in the ability to convert resources including, climate, environment, intra-family distribution – which (as I discuss in Chapter Six) is often related to gender differences, and in this way is linked to “personal heterogeneities.”

<sup>103</sup> Sen 1999, p. 70.

Thus, the capability approach holds that some individuals may need more resources to achieve certain basic functionings than others. Moreover, it holds that just institutions will work to ensure that all individuals can achieve a certain level of capability even if it means (to a reasonable extent) providing some individuals with more resources than others. For example, because access to a certain amount of food may allow those without parasites to be nourished, but not those who suffer from parasites, the capability approach may require that those with parasites (but not those without them) receive the additional resources required to become well nourished, for example, treatment for parasites or more food. Pogge correctly understands that personal heterogeneities, and in turn, an individual's diverse capacities to convert resources into valuable functionings, play an important role within the capability approach, and thus avoids saddling the capability approach with a "one-size fits all" distributional system.

Unfortunately, the distributional system Pogge does attribute to the capability approach is still deeply flawed. This is in part because Pogge commits himself to the problematic position that the only way the capability approach can hope to enhance capabilities – regardless of a particular individual's situation – is through the distribution of various quantities and qualities of resources. Thus, according to Pogge, the capability theorist, like the resourcist, is concerned *only* with institutional distribution of resources. This is a grave error.

The capability approach does hold that institutions should provide individuals with the resources they need in order to achieve a certain level of functioning, and that due to disparate physical characteristics some individuals will need and should be provided with more resources than others. However, "institutions should distribute more

resources” is not the capability approach’s only response to situations in which an individual is impeded from acquiring basic capabilities. I have already argued that although resources do play an important role in the capability approach, due to their instrumental nature, resources can never be sufficient for ensuring capabilities. I will now argue that “institutions should distribute more resources” is not the capability approach’s only response to deprivation. To suggest otherwise – as Pogge does – is to misrepresent the approach.

While the capability approach holds that resource distribution alone is not sufficient for achieving a basic level of functioning regardless of one’s gender, the case is most clear when considering some of the extra-institutional obstacles faced by women and girls. The capability approach recognizes that a woman’s ability to achieve valuable functionings is greatly diminished in a culturally sexist society in which, despite formal access to legal rights and resources, she is considered – even by herself – to be a second class citizen. This is true for a number of complex reasons. These reasons include not only “institutional” factors like access to resources and unequal treatment from institutions, but also “extra-institutional” factors like cultural practices, values and norms that result in relatively low bargaining power in both the private and the public sphere, and in turn a low sense of self-worth for women. Consider the story of Vasanti, a woman who felt trapped in an abusive marriage, which Nussbaum shares:

Like many women, she seems to have thought that abuse was painful and bad, but still a part of women’s lot in life, just something women have to put up with as part of being women dependent on men, and entailed by having left her own family to move into her husband’s home. The idea that it was a violation of rights, of law, of justice, and that

*she herself* has rights that are being violated by her husband's conduct – these ideas she did not have at the time, and many women all over the world don't have them now.<sup>104</sup>

Sen has also provided good reasons to believe that many women are conditioned to expect less from life than men in similar circumstances. Many women have made mental adjustments as a result of social influences that underplay their needs relative to the needs of different members of the family. A survey of widows and widowers, carried out by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Singur near Calcutta, in 1944, one year after the Bengal Famine of 1943, illustrates this phenomenon. The survey included questions on the perception of one's own health, in addition to medical examination by doctors. The results were as follows:

In answer to the question as to whether or not they were 'ill' or in 'indifferent' health, 48.5 per cent of the widowers (men, that is) confided to being thus afflicted, while the corresponding proportion of widows was merely 2.5 per cent. The contrast is even more interesting when we look at the response to the question as to whether one was in 'indifferent' health, leaving out the category of being 'ill' for which some clear-cut medical criteria do exist. 45.6 per cent of the widowers confessed to having the perception of being in indifferent health. In contrast, the proportion of the widows who had that perception was—it is reported—exactly zero!<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. pp. 112 – 13.

<sup>105</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford University Press. 1999. (Here, p. 53.) See also his Chapter Two: Adaptive Preference and Women's Options. (pp. 111 - 66.)

The results of this survey reveal that many women are unaccustomed, if not unable, to consider their own needs as important. Thus, even when granted formal access to rights, or a certain distribution of resources, too many women do not feel that they are worthy of taking advantage of them.

As discussed in Chapter Two, in a patriarchal society, a woman who has formal access to basic resources like food may not have the capacity to be well nourished due to some formal or extra-institutional factor. For example, some cultural norm – that she herself may subscribe to as normal and proper – may require her to tolerate physical or sexual abuse within marriage, or to give the majority of the household’s food to her husband or other male relatives. Providing such a woman with legal access to bodily protection (police) or divorce from an abusive spouse, or legal or even physical access to additional food may do very little to alter *her* capability set (the set of freedoms she actually enjoys). As long as she lacks the psychological and/or social power to reject the norms that dictate that her husband can do what he wants with her body, or that he is more important and therefore more deserving of the majority of the food, she will lack the capabilities of bodily integrity and the capability to be well-nourished. Likewise, a relatively “wealthy” woman who enjoys an opulent life by most standards may not have the capabilities necessary to live what capability theorist would consider a life of human dignity due to restrictive gender-biased norms.

Formal access to greater shares of formal institutional schemes will not benefit women who lack genuine access due to social or cultural norms, including norms that she herself has internalized. The capability approach recognizes that the women in these

situations need more than a greater share of institutional distributed resources.

Consequently, the capability approach holds that resources (including income) are neither the only nor the best remedy for all situations.

The capability approach, properly understood, recognizes that expanding a person's capability set often requires more than institutional distributions of resources and that people need not be mere passive recipients of institutional resource distributions. Again, as discussed in Chapter Two, the concept of individual agency is central to Sen's capability approach. Recall that, although capabilities are unavoidably linked to resources and institutions, agency goes beyond these basic resources to remove unfreedoms by working to alter the sort of extra-institutional attitudes and cultural practices that result in gender inequalities, and in turn the low estimation of (self) worth of women. Women empowered as agents are not simply passive recipients of the benefits of institutional distribution schemes. Rather they are empowered to question extra institutional factors, such as current social values and cultural practices, that limit freedom and to act to bring about changes in their own lives and their cultures. As Sen explains:

In terms of the medieval distinction between the 'patient' and the 'agent,' this freedom-centered understanding of economics and the process of development is very much an agent-oriented view. With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of cunning development programs. There is instead a strong rationale for recognizing the positive role

of free and sustainable agency—and even of constructive impatience.<sup>106</sup>

As I explain more fully in Chapter Five, although she rejects Sen’s agency well-being/distinction, Nussbaum agrees with Sen that individuals must be able to actively “shape their own destiny.” One of her ten central capabilities is practical reason, which calls for “being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Nussbaum makes it clear that capabilities represent opportunities that individuals actively choose when they achieve functionings. She sees this understanding of individuals as active choosers (or agents) – as opposed to passive recipients of resources – as an essential part of the capability approach upon which she and Sen agree:

When we think of health, for example, we should distinguish between the capability or opportunity to be healthy and the actual healthy functioning: a society might make the first available and also give individuals the freedom not to choose the relevant functioning. But I am not sure that any extra clarity is added by using a well-being/agency distinction here: healthy functioning is itself a way of being active, not just a passive state of satisfaction....Sen would surely agree with this.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Sen, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78 – 79. See Chapter Five of my project for a complete list of Nussbaum’s capabilities.

<sup>108</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 14.

Thus, for Nussbaum (as for Sen) simply having rights and access to resources is not enough. The capability approach, properly understood, requires not only that the individual receive the resources necessary to achieve a basic level of functioning, but also that she actively recognize herself as a bearer of rights, worthy of an equal share of resources, and thereby empowered – not simply to receive resources – but to *choose* a lifestyle she values. Such empowerment is an essential aspect of the capability approach. Pogge fails to recognize this when he limits the approach to a simple call for the distribution of resources.

#### **4. “The Relevant Difference”**

It is not entirely clear why Pogge fails to even mention the essential role of individual empowerment either in terms of Sen’s agency, or Nussbaum’s robust role of active choice in capabilities, or even her essential capability of practical reason. He acknowledges that the capability approach recognizes the many complex ways in which various personal heterogeneities, including gender, can influence an individual’s capability set (real opportunities) and in turn her well being. Moreover, he clearly recognizes not only that extra-institutional factors (for example, culturally sexist values and practices,) influence the well-being of individuals, but also that accounting for such factors is important to Sen and Nussbaum: “Offensive correlations need not manifest inherent injustice of an institutional order. They may instead be caused by prevalent cultural practices and attitudes, and are often so caused as Sen and Nussbaum have shown so effectively.”<sup>109</sup> He even refers specifically to “the very great contributions Sen

---

<sup>109</sup> Pogge, p. 11.

and Nussbaum have made toward spreading awareness of the economic injustices inflicted specifically upon women and girls.”<sup>110</sup>

However, oddly enough, Pogge never connects either Sen’s or Nussbaum’s work on gender empowerment to his representation of the capability approach. Instead he misrepresents the approach by restricting its scope to a too narrow evaluation of alternative institutional resources distribution schemes. That is, he fails to recognize that empowerment issues related to gender relations and other social relations found within formal institutional and extra-institutional social systems are part and parcel of the capability approach. What is worse, he incorrectly charges that “the capability approach may even weaken the feminist cause by suggesting – falsely – that women’s terrible and disproportionate suffering in most of this world is due to their being insufficiently compensated for their inferior natural endowments.”<sup>111</sup>

I believe that it is Pogge’s misunderstanding of the capability approach that leads him to find the resourcism offers a superior response to the fact that women suffer more than men. According to Pogge:

Women’s suffering in the world as it is does not result from social institutions being insufficiently sensitive to the special needs arising from their different natural constitution. Rather, it overwhelmingly results from institutional schemes and cultural practices being far *too* sensitive to their biological difference by making sex the basis for all kinds of *social* (legal and cultural) exclusions and disadvantages. Women and girls have a powerful

---

<sup>110</sup> Pogge, p. 24.

<sup>111</sup> Pogge, p. 24.

justice claim to the removal of these barriers, to *equal* treatment (in a resourcist sense). If these barriers were removed, if our social institutions assured women of equal and equally effective civil and political rights, of equal opportunities, of equal pay for equal work, women could thrive fully even without any special breaks and considerations.<sup>112</sup>

The upshot of Pogge's consideration of situations relating to gender differences seems to be that if institutions are just, which for Pogge seems to require providing equal treatment "in a resourcist sense" (which is most probably equal resource distributions) to men and women, then extra-institutional factors such as cultural attitudes and practices will simply dissolve on their own. Pogge does not explain how simply adjusting institutions will allow women to thrive or any of the challenges cultural attitudes and practices may pose either to institutional adjustments or to women's thriving. Presumably, Pogge holds that the official recognition of a woman's equal worth will lead to a cultural recognition of her worth not only in the public sphere, but also in the private sphere, and even in her own mind.

Pogge's position is clearly at odds with the capability approach, which holds that official institutional recognition is only one important part of the empowerment of women.<sup>113</sup> I do not, however, discuss this at length in this chapter. My present task is

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> It may be worth noting that there is good reason for women to prefer a system in which treatment is fair, but not necessarily equal in Pogge's "resourcist sense" (which seems to hold that the best way to treat men and women equally is to treat all females like males). Such a fair system would be able to account for genuine and relevant biological differences through special considerations like maternity leave and the real dangers of rape and domestic violence women face, without limiting female access to, for example, education, or property ownership. Moreover, the system Pogge seems to favor runs the risk of eliminating

not to settle any disagreements between the two approaches, but to demonstrate how Pogge has misrepresented the capability approach. I do, however, discuss in Chapter Six, the capability approach's ability to address issues of social power as they relate to empowerment. For our present purposes it suffices to say that with regard to issues related to gender differences and other personal heterogeneities Pogge's position is that the institutional schemes required by the resourcist are "no less able to address most of the important deprivations and inequalities that so disfigure our world."<sup>114</sup>

Pogge considers both the capability approach and the resourcist approach capable of accounting for the vast majority of deprivations that result from what Sen calls "personal heterogeneities." For this reason he considers the vast majority of such personal heterogeneities irrelevant when deciding which approach is superior. Rather, the significant issue for Pogge's evaluation is the issue he claims the two approaches disagree about: how to account for the remaining "pure" personal heterogeneities, or as he rephrases it: "*how institutional schemes are to respond to natural human diversity*, with the reminder that such natural human diversity may arise from any combination of ordinary genetic variations, self-caused factors, and differential luck."<sup>115</sup>

## **5. Natural Human Diversities**

To sum up, it seems that we can arrive at Pogge's discussion of natural human diversity in three steps: He (1) erroneously limits the capability approach, like the resource

---

not only harmful cultural practices but also rich cultural practices, that, upon reflection, cultures have good reason to value. By empowering individuals and cultures to make these decisions for themselves, the capability approach does not run this risk.

<sup>114</sup> Pogge, p. 33.

<sup>115</sup> Pogge, p. 33. Emphasis original.

approach, to be a (mere) system for deciding how institutions should distribute resources. He then (2) claims that there is a great deal of agreement, albeit for different reasons, among the capability approach and the resource approach about how the vast majority of individuals should be treated. That is, Pogge claims the two approaches agree on who should get what shares of resources, even if they disagree about why they should get them. Finally, in light of the vast agreement Pogge finds in (2), he (3) claims that the relevant difference between the two approaches is simply a matter of how each approach looks to distribute resources in view of the conversion rates that stem from what Pogge calls *natural human diversity*. As Pogge puts it, the significant differences between the two approaches boil down to this: “*Capability theorists assert, while resourcists deny, that a public criterion of social justice [that is, just institutional schemes] should take account of the individual rates at which persons with diverse physical and mental constitutions can convert resources into valuable functionings.*”<sup>116</sup> Thus, according to Pogge, the “intended role” of the capability approach is the “compensatory fine-tuning of the distribution of resources so as to take account of persons’ vertically diverse capacities to convert resources into valuable functionings.”<sup>117</sup>

As mentioned above, Pogge is correct that the capability approach holds both that resource distribution can and does influence the functionings individuals enjoy, and that resource distribution should reflect individual citizens’ diverse capacities to convert resources into valuable functionings. However, he is wrong to suggest that resource distribution is the *only* way to influence the functionings individuals achieve. In making such a suggestion, he fails to account for the role of active empowerment, which is an

---

<sup>116</sup> Pogge, p. 2. Emphasis original.

<sup>117</sup> Pogge, p. 59.

essential aspect of the capability approach. Moreover, I submit that the role of what Pogge calls natural human diversity within the capability approach is confused and serves only to further misrepresent the approach.

The capability approach both for Sen (through his requirement that individuals have equal access to “basic capabilities”<sup>118</sup>), and for Nussbaum (through her list of central capabilities for human functionings), requires that individuals are equally entitled to a certain threshold, or level of capability.<sup>119</sup> However, in his consideration of natural human diversity, Pogge confuses the limited set of diverse human needs and abilities that are relevant to an individual’s ability to achieve a certain level of basic capability that either Sen or Nussbaum would require, with the very large set of physical and mental differences that occur between human beings – no matter how irrelevant the difference may be to a person’s ability to achieve a reasonable threshold of basic or central functionings. This mistake leads Pogge to make the bizarre and misguided claim that the capability approach requires not only the vertical ranking of each and every physical and mental feature – from suffering from a severe inborn disability to having freckles – but also the vertical ranking of each and every individual person in a society based on the features they possess.

Pogge incorrectly holds that the capability theorist uses a very messy system which requires the listing and ranking all of the capabilities that a community is to value.

According to Pogge: “Using a list of capabilities in this way involves grading all of the

---

<sup>118</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, basic capability can be defined as “the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels.” (Sen, *Inequality*, p. 46. n. 19.)

<sup>119</sup> Pogge describe accounts that employ thresholds, like the capability approach (properly understood), as a *sufficientarian*, “which assess any institutional order by the extent to which its treatment of any of its participants avoidably falls below some threshold (however defined). On such a view, an institutional order could be perfectly just even while it generates vast inequalities above the threshold.” (Pogge, p. 8.)

citizens for their natural aptitudes towards each of the capabilities on the list, determining their specific deficits, and ensuring that these deficits are duly neutralized through suitable compensatory benefits.”<sup>120</sup> Pogge erroneously asserts that capability theorist insists on understanding *all* natural human diversity as vertical.<sup>121</sup> According to Pogge, the capability theorist ranks all sorts of variations between human beings, for example being blind, having green eyes, being tall, being quadriplegic, being bald, having a good singing voice, being intelligent, and so on, as better or worse properties.

Pogge claims that capability approach affirms certain institutional orders that give greater shares to some people, but not to others based on their rankings of these diverse attributes. In so doing, the approach (as Pogge represents it) is claiming that the natural endowments of some are and “should be characterized as deficient and inferior, and those persons naturally disfavored and worse endowed – not just in this or that respect, but overall – not just in the eyes of this or that observer, but in the eyes of the shared public criterion of social justice.”<sup>122</sup> As Pogge (mis)understands it, the capability approach ranks each and every citizen as better and worse off according to the capabilities they have by virtue of natural diversity, and then designs or fine-tunes an institutional order that distributes goods in an attempt to even the playing field – not just between the severely deprived and those free to live a life they have reason to value, or to achieve human flourishing, but between the hairy and the bald, the blue and brown eyed, the short and the tall, and so forth.

---

<sup>120</sup> Pogge, p. 59.

<sup>121</sup> See *Pogge*. pp. 52 – 57.

<sup>122</sup> Pogge, p. 54.

Pogge is wrong to suggest that (1) the capability approach requires the vertical ranking and evaluation of each and every element of natural human diversity, (2) the approach requires the vertical ranking of all individuals in terms of their natural human diversity, and (3) it is the job of the capability theorist to strictly dictate what capabilities a community will value. Given the sufficientarian nature of the capability approach, and some key aspects of the valuation processes Sen and Nussbaum require (discussed presently), the vertical ranking system Pogge describes is simply not a valuation process that either scholar could accept. I believe that Pogge's misrepresentation of valuation within the capability approach is closely linked to both his restricting of the capability approach to a simple call for the distribution of resources, and to his failure to represent Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of individual empowerment.

Contrary to Pogge's suggestion, the capability approach does not recognize citizens as merely dependent on an institutional order that not only provides resources, but also dictates what capabilities individuals should value. Rather, (as quoted above,) Sen's capability approach holds that: "With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs. There is a strong rationale for recognizing the positive role of free and sustainable agency."<sup>123</sup> On this view, individual agents choose to value and work to achieve certain functionings over others. Individual agents within communities and not (simply) outside capability theorists establish a shared criteria of social justice and determine the value of various freedoms and unfreedoms that reflect their cultural context through "public discussion

---

<sup>123</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 11.

and a democratic understanding and acceptance” within their communities.<sup>124</sup>

Empowered as agents, stakeholders question, assess, and reform the institutional order in the name of justice. The role of agency in the process of valuation (the process of choosing and working to achieve the functionings one has reason value) is an essential aspect of Sen’s version of the capability approach.

Nussbaum also requires that citizens have an active role in determining what freedoms they value both as individuals and as a community. Nussbaum’s version of the capability approach promotes a list of ten essential capabilities including several capabilities that protect and promote empowerment. Consider for example: *practical reason*: the ability to “form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life” and *control over one’s political environment*: “being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life.”<sup>125</sup>

Nussbaum’s list is essential to her version of the capability approach in that “a life that lacks one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life.”<sup>126</sup> Yet, (as I explore in detail in Chapter Five) the capabilities that appear on the list are deliberately general “to leave room for plural specification.”<sup>127</sup>

Nussbaum’s version of the capability approach takes a serious step towards defining a criterion of social justice in prescribing a list of ten general capabilities and in holding that this list should be constitutionally enshrined. However, Nussbaum does not

---

<sup>124</sup> Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. *India: Development and Participation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford University Press. 2002. (Here, p. 79.)

<sup>125</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. *Sex and Social Justice*. Oxford University Press. 1999. (Here, pp. 41- 42.)

<sup>126</sup> Nussbaum, 1999. p. 42.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* For the Nussbaum’s complete list of capabilities see Chapter Five.

prescribe a *specific* public criterion of social justice that can be manifested in a *particular* institutional order. Rather, she relies on individual citizen participation to establish institutional schemes that reflect their community values both in specifying the capabilities required by her list and in moving beyond the list (once all have at least the listed capabilities). As she writes:

[P]art of the idea of the list is its multiple realizability: its members can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances... The threshold level of each of the central capabilities will need more precise determination, as citizens work toward a consensus for political purposes. This can be envisioned as taking place within each constitutional tradition, as it evolves through interpretation and deliberation.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, as I examine in some detail in subsequent chapters, there appears to be some disagreement between Sen and Nussbaum about the details of the valuation process within the capability approach.<sup>129</sup> Sen holds that no specific list of capabilities should be required for constitutions, but that valuation is a process undertaken by individual agents who democratically decide what capabilities should be valued as part of a basic threshold within their communities. Nussbaum holds that some form of a list of basic capabilities should be constitutionally enshrined to ensure that everyone meets a minimum threshold of capability, but that citizens should exercise their practical reason and control over their political environment to interpret and deliberate the concrete specifications and precise

---

<sup>128</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 77.

<sup>129</sup> I discuss the apparent and substantial differences between Sen and Nussbaum in Chapters Four and Five.

capability thresholds of any list. It is important to note that both Nussbaum and Sen agree that the capability approach considers individuals as more than passive recipients of the benefits and requires individual participation in the process of valuation of capabilities and establishing a full fledged criterion of social justice.

Pogge's failure to account for the essential aspects of individual empowerment, or agency, and in turn, the capability approach's valuation process is very problematic. I have already discussed one reason that Pogge might not account for valuation and the essential aspects of agency or practical reason, namely, his understanding of the capability approach as a mere institutional resource distributor. However, Pogge might also claim that he chooses not to consider the valuation processes in Sen and Nussbaum in an effort to leave aside "internal diversities" found within the capability approach.<sup>130</sup> But avoiding the internal debate between Sen and Nussbaum about the role of empowerment in the valuation of capabilities by ignoring the valuation process altogether, is like keeping the bath water clean by leaving out the baby.

The valuation process, including the enhancement of empowerment-related capabilities, is essential to the capability approach. In failing to represent any valuation process Pogge fails to represent adequately the capability approach. Moreover, it seems Pogge is led to misrepresent the approach by inserting his own messy vertical ranking method of valuation. In focusing on institutional distributions of resources and neglecting the role of agency, Pogge overlooks an additional means of enhancing capabilities and removing unfreedoms. He also fails to recognize that communities themselves, and not (simply) outside capability theorists, work to establish specific public criteria of social justice.

---

<sup>130</sup> Pogge, p. 17.

Pogge fails to recognize that the capability approach is *deliberately* open when it comes to determining the value of capabilities in order to allow for the participation of individual agents in the valuation process.

Unlike the capability approach Pogge describes, the capability approach properly understood, does not provide (and would not accept) the type of specific top down vertical-ranking public criterion of social justice that Pogge depicts. A proper understanding of (both Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of) the capability approach recognizes that it is not up to the capability theorist but to individual communities to produce a specific public criterion of social justice. The valuation system that Pogge describes is so misrepresentative of the capability approach that neither Sen nor Nussbaum could endorse a view that claimed it.

## **Conclusion**

I have shown that Pogge (1) fails to fully represent the role of capabilities as intrinsically valuable opportunities, (2) fails to acknowledge the role of individual empowerment as he wrongly limits the capability approach to a mere resource distribution system, and (3) misrepresents the capability approach in attributing a vertical ranking of all properties of natural human diversity. In light of these failures, I conclude that Pogge's representation of the approach is so deeply flawed that his essay concerns not the capability approach, but a mere misrepresentation of the approach that neither Sen nor Nussbaum could endorse. Consequently, I claim Pogge's conclusion that the capability approach cannot be justified, is – at best – irrelevant to a healthy discussion of how the capability approach relates to other approaches within development.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Empowerment Concepts in Sen's Version of the Capability Approach**

*Understanding the agency role is thus central to recognizing people as responsible persons: not only are we well or ill, but also we act or refuse to act, and we can choose to act one way rather than another.*

Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999.

#### **Introduction**

In Chapters One and Two, I argued that the capability approach to international development in general, and its concept of empowerment in particular, are superior to that of the traditionally and still dominant economic growth approach. In Chapter Three, I argued that Thomas Pogge's failure to recognize the important role that empowerment plays within the capability approach leads him to misrepresent the approach, and in turn to the unjustified conclusion that the Rawlsian resourceist approach is superior to the capability approach. In the present chapter and in Chapter Five, I consider the role of empowerment within the capability approach in greater detail.

Pioneer capability theorists Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum both recognize empowerment as an important aspect of ethically-based human development, even if they do not explicitly use the term or subject it to critical analysis.<sup>131</sup> They seem to disagree, however, about how empowerment should be represented within the capability approach. Both Sen and Nussbaum use various, often technical, concepts to connote human empowerment (including agency, choice, practical reason, opportunity, freedom, and many others).

Two concepts that connote empowerment, “agency” and “freedom,” play prominent roles in much of Sen’s recent work on the capability approach.<sup>132</sup> These concepts, which I first introduced in Chapter One, are shaped by two cross-cutting distinctions central to his approach: (1) the distinction between agency and well-being, and (2) the distinction between freedom and achievement. Although Nussbaum recognizes that “the concepts introduced by these distinctions are important,” she does not endorse the distinctions. Instead, she claims that “all the important distinctions can be captured as aspects of the capability/function distinction.”<sup>133</sup> This claim has led some scholars to question whether or not Nussbaum’s version of the capability approach can

---

<sup>131</sup> In 2005 (at a workshop in Cortona, Italy) I had the opportunity to ask Amartya Sen about the fact that the term “empowerment” does not appear in the index of many of his major works (including: *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York. 1999; *Inequality Reexamined*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1992; *Rationality and Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2002). The term “empowerment” does appear (with numerous entries) in the index of *India: Development and Participation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford University Press. 2002, which he co-authored with Jean Drèze), interestingly, “empowerment” does not always appear in the text noted within the index. Sen explained that although he (and Drèze) may not have often used the term “empowerment,” he believes the concept of empowerment is and always has been at work in his approach to development. The term “empowerment” is also absent from the index of Martha C. Nussbaum’s major works on this topic (including: *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2000; *Sex and Social Justice*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1999, and *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, and Species Membership*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA. 2006.)

<sup>132</sup> See: Sen. 1992, and 1999.

<sup>133</sup> See: Nussbaum, 2000. (Here p. 14).

properly account for human empowerment, and, in some cases, to conclude that her approach is significantly flawed by comparison to Sen's account.<sup>134</sup>

In this chapter I analyze some of the fundamental concepts and structure of Sen's version of the capability approach. I identify and explain the influence of this deep structure on the role of empowerment and related concepts in his account. I begin by presenting and critically engaging Sen's key distinctions and the empowerment concepts found within his account. I consider several agency related concepts that appear in Sen's account and observe that although most of the concepts allow for helpful distinctions, one of them (namely, realized agency success,) is problematically broad. I conclude with the observation that Sen's version of the capability approach can be helpfully understood as offering two fundamental and very useful conceptions of empowerment: (1) agency and (2) capability-set expansion.

In Chapter Five, I continue my consideration of the role of empowerment with the capability approach as I introduce and examine the role of empowerment in Nussbaum's version of the capability approach. I make comparisons with Sen's approach as presented in this chapter when appropriate. I engage the debate about whether or not Nussbaum's version of the capability approach can properly account for human empowerment and the related claim that her view may be flawed by comparison to Sen's account. I conclude that various valuable empowerment concepts – especially the concepts of agency and capability set expansion – play a robust role in both Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach. I further suggest that many – *but not all* – of the differences in

---

<sup>134</sup> See: David A. Crocker. *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapters 5 and 6. See also Robeyns's mention of the different concepts of agency in Sen and Nussbaum in Ingrid Robeyns. "The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey." In *Journal of Human Development*. Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2005. Routledge. (pp. 93 – 114. Here, p. 105.)

the representation of empowerment on the two versions are more a matter of style than of substance.

### 1. Sen’s Key Distinctions and Concepts

There are two cross-cutting distinctions at the heart of Amartya Sen’s capability approach: (1) agency and well-being, and (2) freedom and achievement. Table Four helps to illustrate the basic relationship between these distinctions and the important concepts they involve.

**Table Four: Sen’s Distinctions: *Agency and Well-Being and Freedom and Achievement***<sup>135</sup>

	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Well-Being</b>
<b>Achievement</b>	<i>Agency Achievement</i> - the realization of goals and values a person chooses and has reason to pursue.	<i>Well-Being Achievement (Functionings)</i> - the quality of the life an individual is living based on the interrelated beings and doings she realizes.
<b>Freedom</b>	<i>Agency Freedom</i> – the freedom to choose and bring about the achievements one has reason to value.	<i>Well-Being Freedom (Capabilities)</i> - the freedom to achieve the beings and doings that are constitutive of one’s well-being.

<sup>135</sup> My Table Four is adapted from David A. Crocker’s “Figure 1.” See: Crocker. 2008.

Sen distinguishes between two dimensions of each person that he understands to be related but irreducible: “the agency aspect” and “the well-being aspect.”<sup>136</sup> Each of these dimensions calls for respect (sometimes in the form of aid and/or protection) from institutions and individuals. Sen also distinguishes between the achievement dimension and the freedom dimension of both agency and well-being. Thus, the two cross-cutting distinctions of agency and well-being, and achievement and freedom, provide four important concepts: (1) agency achievement, (2) well-being achievement, (3) agency freedom, and (4) well-being freedom.

As discussed in previous chapters, a person’s agency achievement is “the realization of goals and values she has reason to pursue.”<sup>137</sup> Well-being achievement, often called “functioning,” refers to the quality (wellness) or “personal advantage,” or “personal well-fare,” of the life an individual is currently living, where her life is understood in terms of achieved beings and doings. Of course, if one is poor or oppressed, her well-being achievement will reflect ill-being. In Sen’s more technical writings on the capability approach, a person’s well-being achievement is sometimes described as the vector of her interrelated beings and doings.<sup>138</sup>

Agency freedom, also discussed in previous chapters, is “one’s freedom to bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce.”<sup>139</sup> Although agency freedom is concerned with the freedom of the individual, Sen recognizes that this freedom is “inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic

---

<sup>136</sup> Sen. 1992. p. 56.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

opportunities that are available to us.”<sup>140</sup> Well-being freedom, often called “capability,” is the freedom to achieve the beings and doings (or alternate lifestyles) that are constitutive of one’s personal well-being, that is, one’s “personal advantage.”<sup>141</sup> In what follows, I provide a deeper analysis of agency freedom and agency achievement than that found in earlier chapters, and introduce and discuss the concepts of well-being freedom and well-being achievement and their relationship to empowerment.

## 2. Agency Freedom and Agency Achievements

As explained in Chapter Two, a person’s *agency achievement* is her “success in the pursuit of the totality of her considered goals and objectives”<sup>142</sup> whatever they may be: including being well-nourished, owning a sports car, having her children’s lives go well, protecting the environment, or even the demise of her enemies. The achievement of these goals may enhance or even diminish one’s own well-being. However, the goals must be ones that an individual autonomously chooses to pursue, and not simply the goals of others – even if others happen to have the same goal. As discussed in Chapter Two, the capability approach is concerned with an individual’s empowerment in the form of agency in all the public and private spheres of life, and not only the economic sphere or other public spheres.

On Sen’s account, “agency success” occurs when agency objectives are achieved. Sen distinguishes between (1) *Realized Agency Success*, and (2) *Instrumental Agency Success*. Realized agency success occurs whenever a person’s objectives are realized

---

<sup>140</sup> Sen, 1999. pp. xi – xii.

<sup>141</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 57.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

whether or not she plays any role whatsoever in their achievement. Instrumental agency success, by contrast, is obtained only when an individual plays some role in bringing about the realization of her agency objectives.<sup>143</sup>

Suppose, for example, that my agency objectives include an end to violence in country *A* as well as an end to the unrelated violence in country *B*, and that I am involved in the peace process for country *A*, but not for country *B*. Suppose further, that violence in both country *A* and in country *B* does end. On Sen's account, realized agency success has occurred with regard to my agency objectives for *both A* and *B*. When determining my realized agency success, it does not matter to Sen whether or not I played any role in bringing about the achievements. Instrumental agency success, on the other hand, has occurred only with regard to Country *A*, where I was involved in purposively bringing about an end to the violence. Instrumental agency success is a subset of realized agency success.<sup>144</sup> This distinction allows Sen to recognize formally the important difference between having one's objectives realized and participating in the realization of one's own objectives.<sup>145</sup>

Instrumental agency success is clearly a measure of one's success *as an agent*. Sen is right to recognize this concept of empowerment as a form of agency achievement. However, Sen also seems to recognize *all* instances of realized agency success as agency achievement.<sup>146</sup> I think this is a mistake. I believe that instrumental agency success

---

<sup>143</sup> See: Crocker (2008) Chapter 5 for a criticism of this distinction and his alternative of direct and indirect agency both of which involve effort and action on the part of the agent.

<sup>144</sup> As illustrated on Figure One: Sen's Agency Concepts at the end of this chapter (p. 121).

<sup>145</sup> For more on this distinction see Sen, 1992 p. 58.

<sup>146</sup> I am not aware of a place where Sen explicitly claims that all realized agency success is agency achievement. However, the terminology ("agency success") and his general treatment of the concept

reflects agency. I also believe, however, that outcomes of processes in which an individual is not a purposive causal factor *in any way* are *not* measures of her success *as an agent*, and should *not* be considered *agency* achievements or considered instances of realized agency success.<sup>147</sup>

In contrast, Sen's account suggests, for example, that if my agency objectives include having chocolate cake for dessert and by *pure coincidence* you bake a chocolate cake for my dessert, then the conditions for what Sen calls my "realized agency success" are met. On this account, the conditions for *my* realized agency success are met even if I am not in any way involved with achieving the objective. For example, if you baked the cake, not by coincidence, but to please someone else, or by some mistake (suppose you wanted to make carrot cake, but used the wrong cake mix). Even if you make the cake in hopes of frustrating my agency objectives, if for example, you believe I am dieting and want to avoid desserts, or that I am allergic to chocolate, Sen would consider this an instance of my "realized agency success."

It is difficult to understand why Sen suggests that this event should be considered a measure of my *agency* success or achievement and not simply my well-being or some other sort of achievement. It is, after all, the achievement of my goal, but by someone else's agency. The event in no way reflects any power I have. Nevertheless, the chocolate cake situations described above clearly meet Sen's standard for my realized

---

(1992, pp. 56 – 66) suggests that he considers all instances of realized agency success to be agency achievements.

<sup>147</sup> Figure One, found at the end of this chapter (p. 121), may be useful in illustrating this point. Instrumental agency success and effective agency success (discussed below) are subsets of rational agency success that reflect agency. The spotted area represents what Sen calls "realized agency success" that does not reflect agency.

agency success: my agency objective was achieved “irrespective of the part I manage to personally play in bringing about the achievement.”<sup>148</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter Two, *agency freedom* is the freedom individuals have to choose and realize the objectives they value and pursue. To have more agency freedom is to have “more *opportunity* to achieve those things that we value, and have reason to value.”<sup>149</sup> Sen distinguishes between this *opportunity aspect of freedom*, which is “concerned primarily with our ability to achieve” and the *process aspect of freedom* which is concerned primarily with “the processes through which that achievement comes about.”<sup>150</sup>

Control freedom, the ability to achieve objectives by making influential decisions and directly controlling the levers of change, is the most robust form of opportunity freedom. Control over resources is significantly different from having access to resources.<sup>151</sup> A woman who lives in a nice house and is given plenty to eat and a lot of nice clothes to wear may not be free to choose how to dress, or to invite others to her home for a meal. Furthermore, she may even be denied access to these resources upon the death of her husband. Such a woman has (at least limited) access to resources, but not control over them.

This is not to suggest, however, that more freedom to control directly the objects and events in our lives is always better. For example, I am free to access the resources of

---

<sup>148</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 58.

<sup>149</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Rationality and Freedom*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2002. (Here. p. 585).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> For more on the distinction between access and control see: March, Candida, Ines Smyth, and Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay. *A Guide to Gender Analysis Frameworks*. Oxfam GB. Sen’s work is certainly compatible with this valuable distinction, but I am not aware of any place in which he emphasizes it.

the international postal system, which I use to send letters across the globe. I do not, however, have or want direct control over the international postal system. My life would not be better off if I had countless decisions to make about how my letters are collected, routed, and delivered, or who will carry each of my letters, and how the mail carriers should be accommodated and compensated. Sen rightly recognizes that such an increase in my options would not enhance my agency.

Expanding my trivial options (for example, by giving me the option of deciding whether my letter will leave Washington DC via. Dulles International Airport, Baltimore-Washington International Airport, or Ronald Reagan International Airport), as opposed to opportunities that we have reason to value, “may be the result of misspecifying freedom by overlooking *the loss of [the] option* of leading a peaceful and unbothered life.”<sup>152</sup> I am able to meet more of my agency objectives (including enhancing my well-being) because the international postal service, and not I, decides how to coordinate the many details involved in transporting my letter from Washington, DC to Kampala, Uganda.

Thus, while control freedom is a valuable empowerment concept that (like instrumental agency success) can be used to identify and discuss a robust level of participation, more control, especially over trivial matters, is not necessarily empowering, but can diminish both our agency freedom and our well-being. This example captures what David Crocker calls indirect agency. Even though I do not control most of the links in the complex causal chain that takes my letter from Washington, DC to Kampala, Uganda the successful delivery of my letter is still the result of *some* action on my part (I address and post the letter) and also realizes my intention and is thereby an expression of

---

<sup>152</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 63. (Emphasis original.)

my agency. Yet, it is not as direct an exercise of agency as personally hand delivering the letter.<sup>153</sup>

Not only would it be a mistake to think that expanding the scope of our direct control always expands the set of freedoms we value, it would also be a mistake to think that our freedom to achieve our agency objectives is limited to what we can control directly. Sen uses the concept of “effective freedom” to explain how opportunity freedom extends beyond what we ourselves can control directly:

Many freedoms take the form of our ability to get what we value and want, without the levers of control being *directly* operated by us. The controls are exercised in line with what we value and want (i.e., in line with our ‘counterfactual decisions’—what we *would* choose), and in this sense gives us more power and more freedom to lead the lives that we would choose to lead.<sup>154</sup>

Sen claims that effective freedom is closely related to his concept of realized agency success. I submit that there are some significant differences between the two concepts. Like Sen’s realized agency success, effective freedom extends beyond the limits of our direct participation, and is said to be enhanced whether or not we play a controlling role in realizing our desired outcomes. My effective freedom does not depend on *any* action from me beyond my having, and in some cases expressing, the goal. However, unlike realized agency success, effective agency achievements cannot be a matter of pure coincidence or error; some elements of process are also important. Effective freedom requires not only that (1) our objectives are achieved, but also that those who operate the

---

<sup>153</sup> See Crocker (2008) Chapter 5.

<sup>154</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 64. (Emphasis original.)

levels of control do so (2) in line with what we would have chosen, and (3) *because* it is what we would have chosen.<sup>155</sup> Honoring the wishes of a person expressed in his will after his death captures the spirit of Sen's effective freedom as a meaningful empowerment concept. When we honor an individual's will, we take actions (for example, bury him in the family plot, scatter his ashes in the river by the bridge, provide for cousin Margaret's education, let brother Oscar know how he really felt about him, and so forth), precisely because the actions are willed by the deceased – that is, because they are in line with what he would have wanted.

Consider the chocolate cake example discussed above. My effective agency freedom is enhanced if and only if you made chocolate cake *because* you knew it is what I would have chosen if the choice were mine to make and my having the intention is a reason for your action. As Sen puts it: "As long as the levers of control are systematically exercised in line with *what I would choose* and *for that exact reason*, my 'effective freedom' is uncompromised, though my 'freedom of control' may be limited or absent."<sup>156</sup> If you give me chocolate cake by chance or mistake, but not *because* I would have chosen it or actually intend to have it, my effective freedom is not enhanced despite the fact that my objective is achieved. For Sen, such cases of coincidence or mistake are cases of realized agency success, but *not* effective freedom enhancement. In such a case, my well-being might or might not be enhanced by eating the cake, but that is a separate (though not entirely unrelated) issue.

---

<sup>155</sup> Effective agency is akin to what Crocker calls indirect agency in *Ethics and Global Development* (2008). See especially, Chapter 5.

<sup>156</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 64 - 65. (Emphasis original.)

If you believe that I would chose tiramisu over chocolate cake (when I would in fact have chosen the cake), and for this reason prepare tiramisu, then my agency objective or intention is not realized (that is, there is no realized agency success) and my agency is not enhanced (there is no effective freedom).<sup>157</sup> This is true even if I enjoy having the tiramisu as much as, or even more than, I would have enjoyed having the cake. In a case where I wanted chocolate cake, but enjoyed the tiramisu, my well-being is enhanced, but *not* my agency.

If you attempt to make chocolate cake because you know I would choose it, but fail (for example, the cake burns), then my agency objective is not achieved. Yet, I submit that my agency does seem to be enhanced by your attempt to bring about my actual (not hypothetical) goal – or better, intention – on my behalf, if my intention is a reason for your action. It is not clear what Sen would say about this. Perhaps he would say that my goal of your working on my behalf is achieved, but not my goal of getting cake. Sen’s position on theses issues is summarized below in Table Five.

---

<sup>157</sup> See: Sen, 1992. p. 67. n.14.

**Table Five: Sen’s Realized Agency Success vs. Effective Freedom**

	<b>Realized Agency Success</b>	<b>Effective Freedom</b>
You give me cake, <i>because</i> I want it.	Yes	Yes
I want cake, and you give me cake, but not <i>because</i> I want it.	Yes	No
I want cake, but don’t get it.	No	No
You work to provide cake, because I want it, but fail.	No	Perhaps, but only to the extent that my goal of your working on my behalf is realized

To consider an example in a public policy context, suppose we want peace in Country B but are not in a position to choose or do anything to bring an end to the violence there. If our representative works to establish peace in Country B, *because* she believes that it is what we want, then our agency freedom is enhanced by her actions and the resulting achievements that we value, and have reason to value. This is so even if do not (or even cannot) play any role in the peace process ourselves. This holds true whether we have acted to inform her of our desire for peace directly, or if she anticipates our desire without any direct action from us, for example, based on our expressed desire in a similar situation, or from general polls in which we did not personally participate. Again, *the*

*process* is important here. If someone works for peace, not because we would choose it, but *only* because she thinks a petroleum company in which she has a financial interest will make more money if there is peace, then our effective freedom is not enhanced. She is not representing *our* actual interests or will.

Thus far, I have discussed several interrelated empowerment concepts of Sen's account in terms of their relationship with agency objectives. I provide Table Six as a way of a summary of these concepts. The table lists the concepts and their corresponding attainment using the peace example. The concepts are ordered as I believe they increasingly relate to more and more robust empowerment. Control freedom, the ability to achieve these objectives by directly controlling the levers of change, is the most robust of these concepts, followed by instrumental agency success, and then achievement realized by means of effective freedom.

At the bottom of the table I list Sen's "realized agency success," which Sen describes as a measure of my agency "irrespective of the part I manage to personally play in bringing about the achievement."<sup>158</sup> I have argued that some forms of realized agency success are too weak to qualify as a type of agency, and, in turn, a concept of empowerment. Indeed, I submit that Sen should not consider the satisfaction of an individual's objectives which occur irrespective of *any* role of the individual an exercise of that individual's agency. Such achievements may enhance the individual's well being, and may even be considered realizations of the individual's agency objectives, but are not exercises of the individual's agency. Nevertheless, I include realized agency success on my table because the purpose of the table is to represent Sen's account of agency concepts as he actually provides it, not as I wish he would.

---

<sup>158</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 58.

**Table Six: Sen’s Agency Concepts**

<b>Agency Concept</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Control Freedom</b>	I want peace in country A. I personally negotiate a cease-fire and ensure that it takes place.
<b>Instrumental Agency Success</b>	I want peace in country A. I play some role in securing peace. For example, I start a campaign for peace, actively lobby politicians to work for peace, and so forth.
<b>Effective Freedom</b>	I want peace in country A and because my representatives are aware that (I and others like me) want peace, a peace pact is negotiated and implemented. (Note: My will does not have to be the <i>only</i> motivating factor for peace, but it must be one of the motivating factors).
<b>Realized Agency Success</b>	I want peace in country A. Peace takes hold in country A irrespective of any role I have in bringing about peace.

Up to this point I have focused on presenting and critically engaging the concepts Sen uses to address different ways in which agents can and do decide on and realize their objectives, that is, forms of agency achievements and agency freedom. However, Sen’s account is concerned not only with what agents are free to realize (either through their direct control or through agency enhancing representatives, including institutions), but also with limitations and violations of agency freedom. As Crocker explains: “I might be

an agent, but due to external coercion or internal compulsion at present I am not now free to choose or to achieve what I choose.”<sup>159</sup>

Moreover, Sen makes it clear that his account holds that if a person is forced to perform an action that she would have performed voluntarily, she might get what she wants and thereby achieve her objective (that is, realize the desired functioning), but she is *not* acting as an agent due to a “violation of the process aspect of [her] freedom, since an action is being forced on her (even though it is an action she would have chosen freely).”<sup>160</sup> For example, suppose I want Candidate X to be president and I planned to vote for her on Election Day. Suppose further that on Election Day, I am confronted by armed Candidate X enthusiasts at the polls who force me to vote for Candidate X. In this case my objective is successfully realized (I achieve the functioning of voting for Candidate X), but my agency is compromised. The realization of the agency objective is disqualified as an agency achievement due to violations of the process aspect of freedom.<sup>161</sup>

My well-being may be enhanced despite the violation of my agency, if for example, voting for Candidate X really meant a lot to me. But, it is likely that any enhancement of my well-being will be offset (I am still glad I voted for Candidate X, but wish it did not happen this way) or even entirely outweighed (I wanted to vote for

---

<sup>159</sup> Crocker, 2008. Chapter 5.

<sup>160</sup> Amartya Sen. “Human Rights and Capabilities” in *Journal of Human Development*. Vol. 6, No. 2, July 2005. Routledge. (pp. 151 – 166) (Here, p. 153). See also Amartya Sen, “Elements of a Theory of Human Rights,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 32 (2004): 315-56.

<sup>161</sup> I am not aware of any place in which Sen addresses the issue directly, but his work on process freedom supports this claim. It is worth noting that the case discussed above is significantly different from a case of a subspecies of what he calls realized agency success in which an individual wants Candidate A to win the election and Candidate A does win, but the relevant individual plays no role whatsoever in electing Candidate A, not because of coercion or an unfair institutional process, but, for example, because she is not a member of the relevant community and is therefore not entitled to participate in the election.

Candidate X, but not like this), by the violations of my process freedom. Or, to change my example from my voting for Candidate X to her winning the election: I may really want Candidate X to win the election, but I would rather her lose in a fair election, than win because of the unfair pressure exerted by armed enthusiasts.

Violations of process freedom are not simply occasional events (like those brought about by armed zealots on Election Day), but can be products of oppressive social arrangements and a part of daily life. Sen's capability approach calls on those who design and implement public policies and development projects to work towards promoting, protecting, and restoring both agency freedom and well-being capabilities, or freedoms. As Sen explains:

Social arrangements, involving many institutions (the state, the market, the legal system, political parties, the media, public interest groups, and public discussion forums, among others) are investigated in terms of their contribution to enhancing and guaranteeing the substantive freedoms of individuals, seen as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of dispensed benefits.<sup>162</sup>

Thus, Sen's view has a robust role for empowerment in the form of agency as it calls individuals to be empowered agents of change throughout the development process.

### **3. Well-Being Freedom and Achievements**

In addition to promoting empowerment in the form of agency, Sen's version of the capability approach advocates that "institutional arrangements and development policies and practices be evaluated and constructed in relation to the norm of human well-

---

<sup>162</sup> Sen, 1999. pp. xii – xiii.

being.”<sup>163</sup> As we have seen, well-being and agency are distinct, but closely related concepts on Sen’s account. My well-being may be enhanced or diminished as a result of my agency freedom and achievements, which can extend beyond my direct control.

For Sen, a person’s well-being may be influenced or affected by other-regarding concerns and by events that she cares about, even if they do not affect her directly. For example, my well-being may be enhanced by knowing that my sister’s surgery went well even though it otherwise changes nothing about my own life, or by learning that a peace agreement has been reached in a distant country, even if I have never been there and do not know anyone who has. My well-being is enhanced because these events contribute to my happiness, even though they do not change my personal circumstances or advantage in other ways.

The concept of “standard of living” is narrower than that of well-being on Sen’s account. It relates only to aspects of one’s own personal advantage and does not reflect satisfaction, caused by the success of my other-regarding aims. As Crocker suggests, the nature and relations of Sen’s concepts of agency, well-being, and standard of living can be helpfully represented in terms of three concentric circles:

The largest (agency) circle represents a person’s autonomous choice of action or, more generally, of a way of life. Among choices that the person might make are those that enhance or diminish his own well-being (as well as those that concern others or impersonal causes). Still narrower are those choices that affect one’s standard of living—those aspects of his well-being such as nutrition or

---

<sup>163</sup> Crocker, 2008. Ch. 5.

physical health that derive from his own being rather his response to the well or ill-being of others.<sup>164</sup>

Crocker quickly, and correctly, adds that for far too many people in the world, well-being and living standards are not matters of their own control or agency. I submit that this is true, not only for the economically, politically, or socially impoverished, but also for the ill, the grief stricken, and many (if not all) other people to varying extents. Of course, as discussed in Chapter Three, Sen is concerned with those whose lack of basic capabilities results in an impoverished well-being or standard of living, not those whose ability to own a yacht or win an Olympic medal is beyond their control.

Thus, Sen's concept of well-being is related to empowerment in that well-being can be limited by the power one has to make choices. For example, choosing to eat enough nutritious food to be healthy can have a tremendous effect on one's standard of living, but not everyone is free (or empowered) to choose to do so. (Even fewer have the power to control the monetary and social resources that may be required to have access to a top surgeon for their sister's surgery.) Well-being is also related to empowerment in that achieving a certain standard of living is empowering. Individuals who are healthy and/or have other personal advantages have a greater power to make choices, act, and make an impact on the world. For example, a well-fed and otherwise healthy individual is much more likely to be capable of – that is empowered to achieve – successful employment or political participation, than is someone who is weak from malnourishment or illness.

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Like his concept of agency, Sen's concept of well-being has an achievement dimension and a freedom dimension. A person's *well-being achievement* can be understood as a set of interrelated beings and doings, or functionings. Again, as I cited in Chapter One, Sen explains:

The relevant functionings can vary from such elementary things as being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality, etc., to more complex achievements such as being happy, having self-respect, taking part in the life of the community, and so on. The claim is that functionings are constitutive of a person's being, and an evaluation of well-being has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements.<sup>165</sup>

A person's *well-being freedom* is her *capability* to achieve various combinations of functionings represented in her *capability set*: the set of "all the alternative combinations of functionings a person can choose to have."<sup>166</sup> In other words, one's capability set represents the various alternative realities or lifestyles that person is free, or empowered to achieve, that is, the opportunities she has. The capability approach recognizes this freedom to choose from various options a very important aspect of well-being. According to Sen:

A properly described social state need not merely be described in terms of who did what, but can also be seen as telling us what options each person had. Thus seen, the preference or valuation over different social states can

---

<sup>165</sup> Sen, 1992. p. 39.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

include assessment of the opportunities enjoyed by different persons...The rejection of alternatives that were available but not chosen are a part of ‘what happened’ and thus a part of the appropriately described social state.<sup>167</sup>

Recall Sen’s often cited and powerful comparison between person A, who chooses to fast (over the available option of eating), and person B, who has no choice but to starve, to convey the significance of capabilities for well-being. Both A and B may have realized the same functioning of malnourishment. But A chooses not to eat, even though she has the resources and is free to do so, and for this reason is said to be better off (that is, to have a better standard of living) than B.

It is in this way that available, but un-chosen alternatives (reflected in a person’s capability freedom) are an important part of “what happened,” of one’s wellness of being. For the same reasons, a person’s capability set (including un-chosen options) reflects an individual’s freedom, or power, to engage the world and make significant decisions about what she will be and do in her life. In other words, a person’s capability set can reflect the level of empowerment she is experiencing. The more valuable capabilities she has, the more empowered she is. Similarly, if a person lacks certain basic capabilities she may be recognized as poor, oppressed, or disempowered.

Thus, Sen’s capability approach offers an understanding of the process of empowerment as the process of expanding an individual’s well-being freedom, or set of *valuable* capabilities. Of course, for the same reasons provided in my account of control freedom (above), the addition of trivial capabilities or choices will not be considered to

---

<sup>167</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 593.

be empowering in any rich sense. This understanding of empowerment may be less obvious, than the (arguably distinct, but related<sup>168</sup>) role of empowerment as agency which is often emphasized in discussions of empowerment within Sen's account. Indeed, although many people cite the acquisition of individual capabilities (for example, literacy, public sphere employment, or political participation) as empowering, I believe I am the first to make explicit that within the capability approach, this process of expanding of an individual's set of valuable capabilities can be helpfully understood as an *empowerment* process. Nevertheless, (as I continue to argue in Chapter Five,) I believe that the understanding of empowerment as capability-set expansion is an extremely important feature of the capability approach in general and of Sen's version of the approach in particular.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sen's version of the capability approach offers two valuable and central roles for empowerment: (1) agency, and (2) capability-set expansion. Agency empowerment is grounded in Sen's concept of agency freedom (the freedom individuals have to choose and realize the objectives they value and pursue) which has both an opportunity aspect – our ability to achieve, and a process aspect – the process of that achievement. Other things being equal, the more valuable and valued functionings that we are able to achieve, the more empowered we are. However, if we achieve a functioning that we value, but are forced to do so, our process freedom is violated, our agency is frustrated, and our achievement is not a reflection of empowerment.

---

<sup>168</sup> As explained in the following chapter, Nussbaum may not recognize the distinction.

Our capability sets reflect the opportunities we have to realize objectives we value. Expanding one's capability set to include more valuable and valued capabilities is an empowerment process. Again, other things being equal, the more valuable capabilities we have, the more power we have to decide about and achieve valuable functionings. If we lack certain basic capabilities we may be considered impoverished, oppressed or disempowered. It is noteworthy that both the process and the status of individual empowerment can be accounted for within the freedom aspect of both sides of Sen's agency/well-being distinction.

**Figure One: Sen's Agency Concepts**



## **Chapter Five**

### **Empowerment Concepts of Nussbaum's Version of the Capability Approach**

*A bifurcation between political values and broader social values is also required by some of the more specific precepts that lie at the heart of the capabilities approach, such as freedom of association, the free choice of occupation, freedom of religion, and freedom of travel.*

Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*. 2006.

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I begin a detailed examination of the concepts and role of empowerment within the capability approach by identifying and engaging several aspects of the fundamental concepts and structure found in Amartya Sen's version of the capability approach. I discussed how the distinctions between agency and well-being and between capabilities and functionings give shape to key concepts of Sen's account. I submit that the two central concepts of agency and capability-set expansion can be

helpfully understood as the fundamental empowerment concepts of Sen's version of the approach.

In this chapter I continue my examination of the concepts and role of empowerment in the capability perspective by considering Martha Nussbaum's version of the capability approach. I compare and contrast the concepts and role of empowerment of Nussbaum's version with those of Sen's version. Particular attention is paid to the debate over whether or not Nussbaum's version of the capability approach can properly account for human empowerment without making use of Sen's well-being/agency distinction, and the related charge that her approach is significantly flawed by comparison to Sen's account.<sup>169</sup> It quickly becomes apparent that the debate over empowerment is closely linked to a debate over the differences in the capability-valuation process – that is the process used to determine which capabilities individuals and communities should value – in each version of the approach. As mentioned in previous chapters, Nussbaum advocates the use of a list of ten “central human functional capabilities” as a key part of her valuation process.<sup>170</sup>

I conclude that although Nussbaum's version does not make use of Sen's well-being/agency distinction, and does propose a list of central capabilities to be used in the capability valuation process, her approach nevertheless has a strong role for empowerment. Moreover, as within Sen's account, the role of empowerment within Nussbaum's version of the approach can be helpfully represented both in the form of

---

<sup>169</sup> See, David A. Crocker. *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapters 5 and 6. See also Robeyns's mention of the different concepts of agency in Sen and Nussbaum in Ingrid Robeyns. “The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey.” In *Journal of Human Development*. Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2005. Routledge. (pp. 93 – 114. Here, p. 105.)

<sup>170</sup> See the end of this chapter (p. 156) for the most recent version of Nussbaum's list of central human functional capabilities.

agency and especially as the process of expanding the set of valuable capabilities an individual enjoys. It is important to be clear that I am not here arguing that Nussbaum's account is superior (or inferior) to Sen's account. Rather, I am making the more modest – but not uncontroversial – claim that (contrary to scholarly critiques) empowerment (including concepts of individual and group agency) plays a strong – and not so very different – role in both Nussbaum's and Sen's versions of the capability approach. Moreover, I suggest that many – *but not all* – of the differences of the role of empowerment between Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach are more a matter of style than of substance.

### **1. Nussbaum and Sen; Capabilities and Functionings; Agency and Well-Being**

Nussbaum accepts Sen's distinction between capabilities and functionings but not his distinction between agency and well-being. Although she agrees with Sen that “the concepts introduced by these distinctions are important” she claims that “all the important distinctions can be captured as aspects of the capability/function distinction.”<sup>171</sup> Before discussing why Nussbaum does not embrace Sen's distinctions, or how her version of the capability approach might shape her own capabilities/function distinction, it is important to be clear about what Nussbaum is *not* claiming.

Nussbaum is not claiming that the empowerment concept Sen calls “agency” is misguided or an unimportant part of the capability approach. Indeed, (as I explain in greater detail below) several of Nussbaum's central capabilities, including “bodily health,” “bodily integrity,” “sense, imagination, thought,” “practical reason,” “affiliation”

---

<sup>171</sup> Martha Nussbaum. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2000. (Here, p. 14.)

and “control” deal directly with an individual’s abilities to reflect on one’s own life and make choices about how to live, both at the level of the individual and the group or community level.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, Nussbaum increasingly uses the term “agency” in a way that is compatible with Sen’s use and argues that people should be recognized as “sources of agency and worthy in their own right, with their own plans to make and their own lives to live...deserving of all necessary support for their equal opportunity to be such agents.”<sup>173</sup> Hence, it is not agency as a concept that Nussbaum is reluctant to accept and systematically use; rather it is Sen’s well-being/agency distinction.

Nussbaum provides two related reasons for avoiding Sen’s distinction: (1) she is “not sure that any extra clarity is added by using a well-being/agency distinction” or “that any important philosophical distinctions are blurred by sticking to a simpler set of distinctions”<sup>174</sup> and (2) she “fears that the Utilitarian associations of the idea of ‘well-being’ may cause some readers to suppose that [Sen] is imagining a way of enjoying well-being that does not involve active doing and being.”<sup>175</sup> I consider (2) presently and return to (1) below.

The “Utilitarian associations” that Nussbaum fears refer to utilitarian approaches to development that seek to maximize utility. The approaches Nussbaum is concerned with typically rely on subjective reports of individual welfare. On such accounts the term “well-being” is used interchangeably with “welfare” and both terms are used to represent a *passive* state of preference satisfaction. As Nussbaum explains: “[B]y focusing on the

---

<sup>172</sup> See the complete list of Nussbaum’s Central Capabilities on page 156 of this essay.

<sup>173</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 58.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

state of satisfaction, Utilitarianism shows a deficient regard for agency. Contentment is not the only thing that matters in a human life, active striving matters too.”<sup>176</sup>

Nussbaum contends that some people (especially those familiar with utilitarianism) may conflate Sen’s relatively objective concept of well-being, which reflects freedoms and achievements of *actively* being and doing, with the more traditional utilitarian concept of “well-being” which is passive, and problematically subjective.<sup>177</sup> She argues that we can steer clear of this confusion by avoiding Sen’s well-being/agency distinction, which may suggest to some that all the action is on the agency side of the dichotomy. It is worth underscoring that Nussbaum’s refuses to adopt Sen’s agency/well-being distinction not because she does not value agency as a central empowerment concept within the capability approach, but because she is concerned that adopting the distinction may result in some confusing the approach with a view that has a “deficient regard for agency.”

I believe that Nussbaum is correct in thinking that some, especially those familiar with the *passive* utilitarian concepts of welfare and well-being, might initially find Sen’s use of “well-being” confusing or even misleading. I am not convinced, however, that this initial confusion of some requires avoiding the Sen’s use of the well-being/agency distinction. Many academic fields, including economics and philosophy, are loaded with technical jargon, and Sen’s technical use of well-being is not the only concept that calls

---

<sup>176</sup> Martha Nussbaum. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, and Species Membership*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA. 2006. (Here, p. 73.)

<sup>177</sup> Sen and Nussbaum both argue convincingly that such utilitarian approaches to development are inferior to the capability approach because they rely on interpersonal comparisons of mental states and reported welfare. There is evidence that such reports are misleading. As the discussion of widows vs widowers who survived the Bengalese famine discussed in Chapter Three shows, many women suffer from “self-adaptive preference,” that is they condition themselves to be expect less, and therefore report a higher level of utility, than men in the same circumstances. See: Nussbaum 2000. pp. 111 – 161, Sen, Amartya. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford University Press. 1999. (Especially, p. 53.)

for continual attention to redefinition. For example, Aristotelian scholars must continually remind readers that “eudaimonia” is not “happiness” as we generally understand the concept, and utilitarian economists must stress that their use of “utility” extends beyond simple hedonic pleasure. I submit that it is not obvious that any initial confusion that might result from Sen’s use of the term “well-being” would be damaging enough to the success of the approach to condemn the use of Sen’s well-being/agency distinction. This is true even if using the distinction may require that Sen and other sympathetic capability theorists must continually explain or even stress the sometimes active role of “well-being” within the capability approach.

It is possible that the benefits of using Sen’s agency/well-being distinction may outweigh the costs of some initial confusion for some people, and any efforts to make clear that “well-being” need not be passive within the capability approach. But Nussbaum does not seem to recognize any benefits of using Sen’s agency/well-being distinction. As mentioned above, she does not think any clarity is added by using the distinction or that “any important philosophical distinctions are blurred by sticking to a simpler set of distinctions.”<sup>178</sup> Indeed, Nussbaum claims that all the important concepts and distinctions represented in Sen’s account “can be captured as aspects of the capability/function distinction.”<sup>179</sup>

As I read Nussbaum,<sup>180</sup> she holds that what Sen calls “agency freedom” can be represented entirely within the category of capability. For Nussbaum, if an individual has

---

<sup>178</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 14.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> See Nussbaum 2000, Chapter 1, especially pp. 86 – 96.

the capability to do activity X – that is, the freedom to choose and achieve the functioning X – then she is capable of acting *as an agent* with regard to X.<sup>181</sup> In other words, agency is a central part of the concept of capability, for capability for X represents both one’s freedom to choose and to achieve X. Similarly, Sen’s “agency achievements” can be accounted for as a subset of functionings: those functionings an individual autonomously chooses and freely achieves.<sup>182</sup> In this way, both the freedom and the achievement aspect of Sen’s concept of agency can be represented by the capability/functioning distinction.

Recall that if one has the option, that is, the capability, to be well-nourished, then she can decide as an agent whether to achieve the functioning being well-nourished (by eating) or not (by fasting). Because she is able to *choose* to fast or to eat, the functioning she achieves will be what Sen calls an agency achievement. The starving person lacks the capability, that is, *the ability to choose* to be well-nourished. (She also lacks the capability to fast, that is, the ability to choose not to be well-nourished.) Because she has no choice but to starve, the functioning she achieves – starving – does not reflect her agency, but rather her impoverished capability set. If my interpretation is correct, then Nussbaum believes that we would do well to replace Table Four (on p. 100 of Chapter Four) which represented Sen’s distinctions of Agency and Well-Being, and Freedom and Achievement with Table Seven (below) which represents only the distinction between capability and functioning.

---

<sup>181</sup> I am here concerned with what Nussbaum calls “combined capabilities.” See. Nussbaum 2000, pp. 84 – 85.

<sup>182</sup> In contrast Crocker proposes that agency achievement is a kind of achievement distinguishable from functionings; which, for Crocker, are all strictly well-being achievements.

**Table Seven: Nussbaum’s Capability/Functioning Distinction**

<b>Capability</b>	<b>Functioning</b>
<b>Freedom to achieve</b> - opportunities to make choices and decisions about and realize goals and objectives including, but not limited to personal well-being.	<b>Achievements</b> - realized goals and objectives, including, but not limited to personal well-being and passive achievements (for example, digesting food.)

## 2. The List

David Crocker proposes an additional reason for Nussbaum’s reluctance to make use of Sen’s distinction between agency and well-being. He claims that “there are reasons inherent in Nussbaum’s capabilities approach that require that she reject Sen’s normative duality of agency and well-being in favor of an integrated and complex norm of human functioning composed of both functionings and capabilities.”<sup>183</sup> Crocker is suggesting that Nussbaum cannot accept Sen’s distinction because of deep structural and normative differences between Sen and Nussbaum’s accounts. This claim is one part of a larger argument in which Crocker contends that “although Sen and Nussbaum share many commitments and principles with respect to their foundational concepts, there are fundamental, important and growing differences between them.”<sup>184</sup>

Crocker (correctly) describes Sen as holding that persons as individual and collective agents “should decide their own actions rather than having them decided by

---

<sup>183</sup> Crocker. 2008, Ch. 5.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

others or by impersonal events.”<sup>185</sup> The emphasis in this position, according to Crocker, is on the contrast between “a person or group deciding for itself and being the ‘recipient’ of someone else’s decision (even if it coincides with what the person herself would decide).”<sup>186</sup> Sen leaves it to the agents involved in the relevant community to determine what capabilities to value, and how to understand and weight them in relation to local beliefs and circumstances through a process of democratic deliberation the details of which are also determined by the community. It is assumed that this valuation process in which the details of process and outcome are completely left to the relevant community is an empowering exercise of agency.<sup>187</sup> Crocker contrasts this account of Sen’s position with the following description of Nussbaum’s account:

Nussbaum gives priority to a vision of truly human functioning and capabilities—of which practical reason is one such. This vision, the result of philosophical argument, is to be enshrined in a nation’s constitution and should function to protect but also constrain individual and collective exercise of practical reason. Nussbaum restricts the scope of practical agency to that of specifying the norms the philosopher sets forth and the constitution entrenches...The basic choice that Nussbaum leaves to individuals and communities is how to specify and

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> I discuss this process in greater detail in my article: Keleher, Lori. “Does Sen’s Capabilities Approach to International Development Imply a Form of Deliberative Democracy that is Bad for Women?” in *Parceling the Globe: Philosophical Exploration in Globalization, Global Behavior, and Peace*. Poe, Danielle and Eddy Suffrant eds. 2006. Note: my views on how to interpret Nussbaum’s use of a list have changed since I wrote this article.

implement the ideal of human flourishing that she offers as the moral basis for constitutional principles.<sup>188</sup>

Crocker is correct that Nussbaum puts forth a set of central capabilities that reflect a philosophical account of what is universally or truly human, and that she argues that basic political principles underpinning these capabilities should be guaranteed by constitutions. It is not fair, however, to suggest that Nussbaum “restricts the scope of practical agency to that of specifying the norms the philosopher sets forth and the constitution entrenches.” Or that she leaves individuals and communities with only the basic choice of “how to specify and implement the ideal of human flourishing that she offers.” In claiming that Nussbaum constrains individual and collective agency, Crocker is suggesting that her account has an impoverished role of agency, and in turn empowerment (at least in comparison to Sen’s account).<sup>189</sup>

I believe that the scope of both individual and group agency within Nussbaum’s version of the capability approach is more robust than Crocker may recognize. I believe that within Nussbaum’s version, agency extends beyond “specifying the norms the philosopher sets forth and the constitution entrenches” and offers individuals and communities much more than the basic choice of “how to specify and implement the ideal of human flourishing that she offers.” Indeed, I submit that (as with Sen’s version) empowerment in the form of both agency and capability-set expansion play a robust role

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> In Chapter 5 of his *Ethics of Global Development* Crocker argues that “Nussbaum’s concepts of practical reason and control are less robust and less defensible than Sen’s ideal of agency.” For reasons I will not directly address here, but should be apparent in this section, I believe that in limiting his comparison with Sen’s ideal of agency to only two of Nussbaum’s listed capabilities, as opposed to considering her account as a whole (including her use of the concept capability), Crocker has failed to fully appreciate the role of empowerment as agency on Nussbaum’s account, and consequently mis-framed the debate.

within Nussbaum's version of the capability approach. Moreover, I propose that many of the differences in the representation of empowerment within Nussbaum and Sen's account are more (but not necessarily entirely) a matter of style than substance.

Nussbaum's version of the capability approach proposes an "open-ended and humble" list of central capabilities that "can always be contested and remade."<sup>190</sup> Nussbaum's list is not a "fixed forever" list as some scholars suggest.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, the current list and its role within Nussbaum's version of the capability approach is itself a product of revision. Nussbaum claims that the current list "represents the results of years of cross-cultural discussion, and comparisons between earlier and later versions will show that the input of *other voices* has shaped its content in many ways."<sup>192</sup> However, critics are quick to point out that the significant revisions of Nussbaum's list (not to be confused with specifications of the list's items discussed below) have all been made by Nussbaum herself, albeit in and through philosophical dialogue with others. Moreover, revisions have not been made through political deliberation by the individual communities or the people of nations who Nussbaum proposes enshrine her list in their constitution. This criticism has both a practical and a theoretical dimension.

In response to the practical dimension – that is, who has *actually* shaped the content of the list that appears throughout Nussbaum's work – one might simply say that in Nussbaum's published writings, it is to be expected that we get a list that Nussbaum herself has revised (albeit in light of her discussions with others, including, for example,

---

<sup>190</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 77.

<sup>191</sup> See, for example, Crocker's citing of Sen in: Chapter 6 of 2008.

<sup>192</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 76. (Emphasis mine.)

poor women in India).<sup>193</sup> But (as I discuss in greater detail in my response to the theoretical aspect of the criticism) Nussbaum gives us several reasons to believe that she would happily count other – and different – versions of the list being used by projects, communities, or constitutions at work in the world, not as a rejection of her current version of the list, but as a level of some success for her overall view.

Although I am not aware of any nation that has actually enshrined Nussbaum's list of central capabilities in their constitution, Nussbaum points proudly to the constitutions of several nations that embody, at least to some extent, the spirit of her list.<sup>194</sup> “Indeed it is by design that the capabilities list starts from an intuitive idea, that of human dignity, that is already basic to the constitutional framing in many of the nations of the world (prominently including India, Germany, and South Africa).”<sup>195</sup> I take Nussbaum's reference to the constitutions of such culturally diverse countries as a sign of her willingness to see the idea of human dignity that grounds her list used in various ways, including, but not limited to, its use in these constitutions, which she had no part in writing.

In response to the theoretical dimension of the objection, I submit that it does not follow from the fact that the philosopher is the only one who *has* revised the list that she

---

<sup>193</sup>See Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78, n. 82.

<sup>194</sup> Moreover, some development practitioners (including Peter Davis of Development Alternatives Inc.) make use of (versions of) Nussbaum's list when implementing projects in Africa and other parts of the world. Of course, this is not the same thing as communities adopting and changing the list for themselves.

<sup>195</sup> Nussbaum, 2006, p. 155. It is interesting to note that on this same page of the relatively recent publication (2006), Nussbaum seems to suggest that is not necessarily asking that constitutions enshrine her list as she writes: “*One way* of thinking about the capabilities list is to think of it embodied in a list of constitutional guarantees.” (Emphasis mine.)

is the only one that *can, or is permitted to*, revise the list.<sup>196</sup> Nussbaum tells us that “we should view any given version of the list as a proposal put forward in a Socratic fashion, to be tested against the most secure of our intuitions as we attempt to arrive at a type of reflective equilibrium for political purposes.”<sup>197</sup> Moreover, it is clear that Nussbaum believes the list can and should reflect “a wide range of religious and other views about human life.”<sup>198</sup> She explains that: “a concern for cultural variety (both within a nation and across nations) has been a prominent part of [Nussbaum’s] version of the approach. This concern is internal to the capabilities list itself.”<sup>199</sup>

It is with this concern in mind that Nussbaum explains her consideration of “the list as open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking, in the way that any society’s account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (or deletion).”<sup>200</sup> Thus, Nussbaum clearly holds that it is always possible for items to be both added to and taken away from her version of the list. She adds that: “This open-endedness is even more important when we extend the approach to the international community, because we are more likely to hear in such debates good

---

<sup>196</sup> It is true, as Crocker charges in his Chapter 6, that Nussbaum has left a lot of work to be done in explaining *exactly* how the list is to be modified by communities. But I believe that the same charge can be made of Sen’s relatively under-defined account of valuation through democratic deliberation. Both scholars have done so much work towards developing the capability approach, but there remains much work to be done, if not by Sen and Nussbaum themselves, then by the many scholars that seek to advance the view.

<sup>197</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 77.

<sup>198</sup> Nussbaum, 2006. p. 296.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 78.

ideas that we did not hear before, or criticisms of our own ways of life that we had previously not taken seriously.”<sup>201</sup>

I believe these passages show that Nussbaum understands her list (or at least the ideal of the sort of list she is proposing) not merely as a product of philosophical reflection on her part, but as a consensus which has emerged as the product of a global exchange of ideas in an on-going debate about what is required for life with dignity. Understood in this way, any version of the list is more like a snapshot of an ongoing revision process that can be used as a proposal, or a starting point for further debate by various members of national and global political communities as constitutions are written and amended, than a fixed forever list carved in stone to be handed down from the philosophers on high.

Critics tempted to argue that the international consensus Nussbaum is concerned with generating is the product of deliberating elites, like philosophers, are reminded that Nussbaum’s “current version of the list reflects changes made as a result of [her] discussions with people in India.”<sup>202</sup> It is a safe assumption that these people include the poor, and often marginalized, women featured throughout her book (specifically, *Women and Human Development* (2000)). Again, I suggest that the fact that Nussbaum herself made the final decisions about exactly what is included in her current version of the list reflects that the list is found in *her* book.

In fairness to critics in general, and particularly those who share Crocker’s belief that Nussbaum’s list is a fixed list, it is clear that Nussbaum does not see her list as just

---

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>202</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 78.

one example of many extremely diverse, or even conflicting, but equally acceptable lists. Nussbaum emphasizes that her list can accommodate, indeed, is designed to protect, pluralism,<sup>203</sup> but rejects the idea that the concept of human dignity – in which her list is grounded – is culturally or morally relative. Nussbaum’s list of capabilities is an attempt to capture the central political requirements for a life of dignity implicit in “an overlapping consensus among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good.”<sup>204</sup> For Nussbaum, the items on the list currently do, and always must, reflect a deep and universally shared understanding of human dignity – a concept that should be informed by international debate and reflect a common ground found among a wide range of views.<sup>205</sup>

It follows from Nussbaum’s understanding of universally shared values that any newly proposed items that fail to garner an “overlapping consensus” when debated by the international community may be judged as unsuitable for the list. Likewise, there are some items on the list that Nussbaum considers to be “more fixed than others.” As she explains:

For example, it would be astonishing if the right to bodily integrity were to be removed from the list; that seems to be a fixed point on our judgments of goodness. On the other hand, one might debate what role is played by literacy in

---

<sup>203</sup> See: Nussbaum, 2006, especially: pp. 78 – 80, and pp. 295 – 306. Martha Nussbaum. “Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice.” *Feminist Economics* vol. 9 (July/November): pp. 33-59. 2003.

<sup>204</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 70.

<sup>205</sup> Nussbaum. 2006. p. 296.

human functioning, and what role is played by our relationship to other species and the world of nature.<sup>206</sup>

It is important be clear that even with regard to the “more fixed” items on the list, Nussbaum says that it would be “astonishing” but *not* a violation of the process she proposes for generating a list, if they were removed from the list.<sup>207</sup> As the above cited texts show, there is ample room for deliberation and debate about revision in the form of the addition and deletion of the items on the list itself – and not just in the specification and implementation of the ideal of human flourishing represented in Nussbaum’s own list. I must confess however, that I would share in Nussbaum’s astonishment at any community (especially the global community) that chooses not to include some specification of the right to bodily integrity, which includes “being able to move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence...”<sup>208</sup> on their list of valuable capabilities.

Not only is there some room for deliberation about the items on the list itself, but I believe that the scope of individual and group agency in implementing the list is wider than Crocker may have recognized. The list is intended to shape public policy decisions of communities, but *not* the basic choices of individuals and cultural communities,

---

<sup>206</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 77.

<sup>207</sup> It is important to be clear that Nussbaum does not permit the addition and subtraction of items on the list of central functionings based on the global consensus because she holds the relativist position that what is right is determined by the global consensus, because what is right just is a matter of global consensus. Rather, Nussbaum holds that there are certain universal (albeit, pluralistic,) normative truths about what is required for a life with dignity, and that the best way to discover these truths is through on-going cross-cultural deliberations.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

beyond respecting each other as sources of agency, and in a manner consistent with human dignity. As Nussbaum writes: “[I]t is important to be respectful of the many ways citizens choose to live, provided that those do not cause harm to others in areas touched upon by the central capabilities.”<sup>209</sup>

Nussbaum holds that those who design public policy, including – but not limited to – constitutions, should seek to provide, protect, and restore a basic social minimum of central substantive freedoms: “the structure of social and political institutions should be chosen, at least in part, with a view to promoting at least a threshold of these human capabilities.”<sup>210</sup> She also holds that the items on the list are irreducible separate components and that there are “limits on the trade-offs that it will be reasonable to make.”<sup>211</sup> In other words, those making public policy should seek to provide, protect, and restore *all* the capabilities on the list. Each and every item must be accounted for at some level and in some way. We cannot, for example, make up for a failure to protect bodily integrity by providing the means for more of another item on the list, say (a longer) life, or vice versa. As Nussbaum puts it: “[I]n some form all the items of the list are held to be part of a minimum account of social justice: a society that does not guarantee these to all its citizens, at some appropriate threshold level, falls short of being a fully just society.”<sup>212</sup>

Nussbaum adds that the list is not “an exhaustive account of political justice; there may be other important political values, closely connected with justice, that it does not

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. p. 296.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. p. 81.

<sup>212</sup> Nussbaum, 2006, p. 75.

include.”<sup>213</sup> In other words, as discussed above, Nussbaum would support the identification and addition of capabilities representing such important values as distinct non-tradable items of the list. As I argue below, when properly understood, I do not think that this requirement of including all the items on the list without trade-offs prevents Nussbaum from having a strong account of individual or group agency. In what follows, I first discuss the implementation of the list and its consequences at the national or political level, and then consider the significance of this use of the list for individuals and groups at the local or cultural community level.

Nussbaum does not attempt to strictly dictate how nations, states, or similar politically identifiable communities<sup>214</sup> are to understand or to weigh the capabilities on the list as they construct their constitutions. Instead she says they “can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances,” and that the “threshold level of each of the central capabilities will need more precise determination, as citizens work toward a consensus for political purposes... through interpretation and deliberation.”<sup>215</sup> Thus, while political communities should not fail to protect bodily integrity altogether, they may for some reason at some time decide by consensus, generated through deliberation, to exercise their agency as they limit, for example, the bodily mobility aspect of bodily integrity (for example by instating a curfew restricting

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>214</sup> I do not engage the issue of what makes a nation or political community here, but it is sufficient to say that what I believe Nussbaum has in mind at this level is the level of public policy usually in state governments, but powerful tribal councils, and other community policy makers may also qualify here.

<sup>215</sup> Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77.

mobility after a certain time, or even all together for a period of time<sup>216</sup>) in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances.

In every community, the thresholds for some capabilities may be set in accordance with the availability of limited resources. Sadly, some, especially poor communities, may sometimes fall short of meeting their own (democratically determined) ideals. They may fail, for example, to achieve the standards or thresholds they set for themselves in some important areas, or to provide every item on their list, or both. In such cases, governments and/or community policy makers (influenced by politically active citizens) must make tough choices about what core needs can and should be promoted and protected in light of their specific resources and values.

Nussbaum offers that such tough choices can be made using a cost benefit analysis that recognizes the weightings communities assign to the items on the list and the fact that each and every item on their list is distinctly valuable.<sup>217</sup> She insists, however, that circumstances in which citizens are pushed below the threshold of basic functioning for any item are “tragic” and suggests that such tragedies signal that the country must continue to work towards offering citizens all that is required for human dignity, or a life of human flourishing.<sup>218</sup> This observation on Nussbaum’s part does not restrict the agency of communities in choosing how to live their lives by somehow forcing them to achieve a standard in each of the ten areas that *she* (Nussbaum) has

---

<sup>216</sup> For example, Pueblo Indians in parts of the state of New Mexico in the US have agreed to limit the mobility of some tribal and all non-tribal members living within their villages during particular feast days in order to preserve the integrity of sacred ceremonies. Non-tribal members must either leave the village, or board up the windows and doors of their homes and remain inside at all times during the ceremonies, which can last for several days.

<sup>217</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 81.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

chosen. Rather, it laments the fact that individuals and communities do not have the necessary social and material resources to achieve the thresholds *they* themselves have set for the items on the list *they* have shaped in accordance with the values of *their* community.

Nussbaum's critics may still argue that there is a sense in which a political community's list is not truly its own because it must be based on – that is not violate – the items on *the list* of minimum requirements for a universal understanding of human dignity according to the consensus generated by global debate. This is true. According to Nussbaum, a community's list must protect the human dignity of all individuals.

As I understand Nussbaum's proposed use of a list, a community may participate in global deliberations, and in this way contribute to the universal conception of human dignity, and in turn the list (including by adding or removing items). They may also include any additional capabilities that emerge in their own deliberations as valuable to the protection and promotion of human dignity to their community's list (so long as they do not violate the dignity of individuals in ways protected by the global list). Finally, they may further significantly shape their list as they decide (through democratic deliberation as a community) how to interpret, weight, provide, promote, and protect the capabilities on the list in accordance with their own customs, values, and beliefs. They may not, however, develop a list of their own which violates or fails to protect the freedoms recognized by the global community as a whole, as the minimum requirements for human dignity (which have been developed as a result of – or perhaps in spite of – their particular country's contributions to the debate).

Critics are correct that Nussbaum's view limits the range of acceptable political policies a country or other political community may adopt. For example, the Taliban's ideas of what is required for human dignity (especially with regard to the treatment of women) have failed to garner a global consensus,<sup>219</sup> and would not be acceptable, according to Nussbaum's view. However, I do not believe that requiring communities to include – in some form – a global consensus of the minimum requirements for human dignity severely restricts the practical agency of policy makers. There remains plenty of room for deliberation, cultural identity, and even moral pluralism in Nussbaum's process. Thus, although Nussbaum's proposed use of a list can, in some cases, prevent a political community from adopting a list that is truly their own, there remains plenty of opportunities to exercise practical agency both in debating the foundations or items of the list at the level of the global community level and for shaping and implementing the list at the political community level.

Nussbaum makes it very clear that she is not claiming that each individual – or cultural (or otherwise non-political) community of self identified individuals with shared ideals (for example, Amish, Orthodox Jews, or Jehovah Witnesses as they exist within the United States) – should be *required* to achieve any level or threshold of any of the functionings her list identifies as central to a fully human life. Her goal is to enhance

---

<sup>219</sup> While in power from 1996 – 2001 the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, was recognized by only three states: the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Of course, as explained in note 39 above, Nussbaum does not oppose the Taliban's treatment of women *because* it fails to garner global support. Rather she understands the lack of global support of the Taliban's treatment of women as a reflection of the Taliban's violation of universal normative principles of human dignity. Again, for Nussbaum, such universal principles are likely to be recognized, if not discovered, through a global deliberation about what is required for a life of human dignity.

what Sen calls “opportunity freedom” by creating “spaces for choice rather than dragooning people into a desired total mode of functioning.”<sup>220</sup> As she explains:

The claim that is made by the use of a single list, then, is not that there is a single type of flourishing for the human being, but, rather, that these capabilities can be agreed by reasonable citizens to be important prerequisites of reasonable conceptions of human flourishing, in connection with the person as a political animal, both needy and dignified; and thus these are good bases for an idea of basic political entitlements in a just society.<sup>221</sup>

It is important to note that for Nussbaum: “The conception of the person as a political animal includes an idea related to the contractarian idea of ‘freedom’:<sup>222</sup> the person is imagined as having a deep interest in choice, including the choice of a way of life and the political principles that govern it.”<sup>223</sup> Accordingly, it is in order to promote the freedom and choice, or agency of persons, that Nussbaum requires governments to work to provide citizens with the *option* or capability to decide for themselves, whether or not to achieve certain valuable functions. As she explains:

[F]or political purposes it is appropriate that we shoot for capabilities, and those alone. *Citizens must be free to determine their own course after that.* The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a

---

<sup>220</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 56.

<sup>221</sup> Nussbaum, 2006, p. 182.

<sup>222</sup> Nussbaum adds that the capability approach “offers a conception of freedom that is subtly different from that of the contract tradition: it stresses the animal and material underpinnings of human freedom, and it also recognizes a wider range of types of beings who can be free.” (Nussbaum, 2006. p. 88.)

<sup>223</sup> Nussbaum, 2006. p. 88.

great difference between fasting and starving, and it is this difference I want to capture.<sup>224</sup>

Choice is good in part because of the fact of reasonable pluralism: other fellow citizens make different choices, and respecting them includes respecting the space within which those choices are made. The citizen in question may also believe that choice is good *for them*: to be a nonvoter in a country that has no elections expresses nothing much about human values; to pursue nonreligion in a state that persecutes religion expresses nothing much about the values of the religious person. If we place the accent firmly on capability rather than functioning, it is not an implausible to ascribe to them the thought that a dignified life for a human being requires these *capabilities*—which include of course, the right not to use them.<sup>225</sup>

For Nussbaum, the decision not to achieve a certain functioning, for example, political participation, can be made by an individual agent or a group or community of agents, for example, the decidedly non-political and consequently non-voting Amish who (as individuals or groups) choose to live in the United States which has universal voting rights, or Jehovah Witnesses who (as individuals or groups) may refuse emergency blood transfusions, but choose to live where such emergency medical care is universally provided. Nussbaum adds that:

Just as a person who chooses to ruin his health and not avail himself of any reasonable health care may yet

---

<sup>224</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 87. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>225</sup> Nussbaum, 2006, p. 184 – 185. (Emphasis original.)

consistently support public health care as an essential minimum condition of a decent human life, so too, these people might consistently support choice in this area, even though they also believe that they themselves can rightly make only one (negative) choice.<sup>226</sup>

Thus, use of Nussbaum's list does not force individuals or cultural communities to achieve every functioning on the list. In contrast, it asserts that citizens should have the capability, that is, *the freedom to choose as autonomous agents* which functionings to achieve, and which to pass up, as they live their lives in accordance with their own conception of the good (and without harming others).<sup>227</sup> In this way, Nussbaum, like Sen (as discussed in Chapter Four, see especially, p. 118), believes that the capabilities an individual chooses *not* to realize (that is, the *un*-chosen capabilities in the individual's capability set) are an important reflection of the freedom an individual enjoys. The options an individual has, but chooses not to pursue reflect an individual's level of empowerment, and in this way, are an important part of well-being.

Moreover, Nussbaum's version of the capability approach can be understood as seeking to empower individuals by ensuring that their capability sets includes – as a minimum – certain critically valuable capabilities; especially, those capabilities that are minimum requirements for human dignity identified by the global community. As a careful look at the items on the list reveals, being empowered in this way means being empowered to seek to expand one's own capability set to include capabilities not

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>227</sup> I find Nussbaum's position on this very similar to Sen's position as he writes: "[T]he denial of opportunities of basic education to a child, or of essential health care to the ill, is a failure of social responsibility, but the exact utilization of the educational attainments or of health achievements cannot but be a matter for the person herself to determine." (Sen. 1999. p. 288.)

specified by the list, but determined to be valuable by the individual (or community).

Thus, the important understanding of empowerment as capability-set expansion found in Sen's version of the capability approach also plays a robust role on Nussbaum's version of the approach.

Indeed, I submit that Nussbaum's choice not to use Sen's distinction between well-being and agency, in favor of "sticking to a simpler set of distinctions,"<sup>228</sup> results in more emphasis on capability-set expansion than on Sen's account. This is because both what would qualify as an expansion of agency freedom, and what would qualify as an expansion of well-being freedom on Sen's account, would simply be considered an expansion of one's capability set on Nussbaum's account. It follows that both Sen and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach can accommodate the same sort of empowerment of individuals (and groups) but choose to represent it differently.

In addition to the relatively implicit inclusion of agency as a necessary part of capability, a closer look at the capabilities Nussbaum names in the current version of her list reveals that she explicitly stresses a strong role for empowerment in the form of both individual and group agency. Nussbaum's inclusion of "affiliation" in her list of basic human functionings makes it clear that, like Sen's use of the concepts of well-being and agency, and of freedom and achievement, her use of the concepts of capabilities and functionings extends beyond the individual agent. Affiliation entails "being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship." Nussbaum adds that "Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that

---

<sup>228</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p. 14.

constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.”<sup>229</sup> On Nussbaum’s account, an individual who is capable of affiliation is capable of (1) having (what Sen calls) agency objectives that extend beyond one’s own personal advantage, for example, wanting the lives of her children to go well, and (2) working with others towards the achievement of shared (yet autonomously chosen) goals.

Several other capabilities on Nussbaum’s list also stand out as empowerment concepts for individuals, groups, or both. (For Nussbaum’s complete list, see p. 156 below.) Among the most significant agency concepts in Nussbaum’s view is her capability of practical reason, which together with affiliation has a “special importance” for “characteristically human thought and planning about one’s own life... [through] complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings.”<sup>230</sup> Practical reason involves “the ability to form a conception of the good life and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”<sup>231</sup>

Some of the other capabilities on Nussbaum’s list that explicitly address empowerment concepts that Sen would call agency include:

(1) Control over one’s environment – or the ability to “participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right to political participation, protections of free speech and association.”<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> Nussbaum, 2000. p.79.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. p. 80.

(2) Senses, Imagination, and Thought, which includes: “Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one’s *own* choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one’s own way.”<sup>233</sup>

(3) Bodily Health, including reproductive health, which Nussbaum explains by citing the 1994 Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as saying that: “Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have ... the capability to reproduce and *the freedom to decide* if when, and how often to do so.”<sup>234</sup>

I do not cite each of the items on her list here, but instead trust that this sampling of explicit use of language that calls for and supports what Sen calls agency is enough to make it clear that items on Nussbaum’s list allows for, indeed encourages a robust role of empowerment as agency. (Again, the complete list of Nussbaum’s “Central Human Functional Capabilities” is provided below on p. 156.) To add this language to the results of my above argument, I submit that when one understands Nussbaum’s list as open-ended, revisable, multi-realizable, and focused on individual capabilities (or freedoms), it is clear that her account of practical agency extends well beyond “specifying the norms

---

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

the philosopher sets forth and the constitution entrenches” and offers individuals and communities much more than the basic choice of “how to specify and implement the ideal of human flourishing that she offers.”

Thus, the differences between Sen and Nussbaum with regard to agency do not seem to be as significant as Crocker suggests. When compared to Sen’s valuation process, which is left open to the democratic deliberations of the relevant community, Nussbaum’s proposed use of a list does provide a different and relatively structured process for determining which capabilities a political community should value. However, Nussbaum, like Sen, ultimately holds that communities themselves should determine which political capabilities they should promote and protect, and that individuals and groups of agents should choose, or decide about, their own actions. Moreover, Nussbaum can (and does) account not only for agency (as an essential aspect of capability), but also for some of Sen’s other key concepts, including: agency freedom (as an aspect of capability), agency achievement (as a subset of functionings), well-being freedom (as capability), well-being achievement (as functionings). For his part, Sen has recently made it clear that he “has nothing against the listing of capabilities” as long as they are not “fixed forever lists” and that he sees “Nussbaum’s powerful use of a given list of capabilities for some minimal rights against deprivation as being extremely useful.”<sup>235</sup> Thus, there is a great deal of common ground between Sen and Nussbaum on the role of empowerment within the capability approach.

So why does Nussbaum avoid Sen’s distinctions? I propose that Nussbaum does not embrace Sen’s agency/well-being distinction not because of the substance of the

---

<sup>235</sup> Sen, Amartya. “Human Rights and Capabilities” in *Journal of Human Development*. Vol. 6, No. 2, July 2005. Routledge. (pp. 151 – 166) (Here, p. 159 – 60.)

concepts it identifies – after all, agency and capability set-expansion are central to both Nussbaum’s and Sen’s versions of the capability approach – but largely as a matter of style. As discussed above, Nussbaum believes that the important concepts of Sen’s account are adequately represented in her version of the capability approach, but with a set of distinctions she sees as simpler and less confusing: namely the distinction between capabilities and functionings.

As explained above, it is not obvious that we would do well to follow Nussbaum in rejecting Sen’s agency/well-being distinction. The fact that even attentive capability scholars (including Crocker) are confused about the role of agency (in particular, and in turn, empowerment in general,) on Nussbaum’s account suggests that Sen may be right to emphasize his distinction. It seems that just as those who choose to use Sen’s distinction may need to make clear that well-being is not a passive utilitarian concept, those who elect to follow Nussbaum in choosing not to use the distinction may have to emphasize that agency and autonomous choice are part and parcel of capabilities. I will not attempt to settle the matter of whether or not we should either use or avoid Sen’s agency/well-being distinction here. Either choice would require some additional explanation, or emphasis, on the role of certain concepts. More importantly, neither choice excludes a strong and central role for empowerment as agency or as capability-set expansion.

Instead, I rest my case for claiming (contrary to scholarly critiques) that Nussbaum, like Sen, makes use of the robust empowerment concept of agency. Furthermore, in light of (1) their (at least partial) agreement on the use of lists and democratic deliberation in valuation, and (2) the fact that despite emphasizing different language of empowerment, both Nussbaum’s and Sen’s versions of the capability

approach make sense of empowerment, not only as agency, but also as capability-set expansion in the various spheres of life; I submit that many of the often cited differences in the interpretation and role of empowerment of the two versions are more a matter of style than of substance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter considers the meaning and role of empowerment within Martha Nussbaum's version of the capability approach. Neither Sen nor Nussbaum explicitly use the language of empowerment. However, after critically engaging the empowerment concepts used in each account, I have come to the conclusion that empowerment plays a robust role on both versions of the capability approach.

I propose that two of the most important forms of empowerment found within the capability approach are (1) agency, and (2) capability-set expansion. Agency, or the ability to decide for oneself and act autonomously to bring about change in the world, is heavily emphasized on Sen's account as a critical dimension of his agency/well-being distinction. Nussbaum rejects Sen's distinction, but often uses the language of agency and freedom as she explains her approach. Moreover, she systematically accounts for agency as part of the capability/functioning distinction. For Nussbaum, agency is already represented within the concept of capabilities. If an individual has the capability to achieve functioning X, then they have the ability to decide for oneself and to act autonomously to achieve X where the achievement of X is a change in the world.

In focusing on the capability/functioning distinction, Nussbaum places great emphasis on empowerment as capability-set expansion. (Of course, given Nussbaum's

use of agency and capability, capability-set expansion *is* also a promotion of agency.) For Nussbaum, this sort of empowerment involves ensuring that individuals have certain valuable capabilities so that they can freely choose for themselves what to do, be, and achieve, in their own lives. As I argued in Chapter Four, Sen's account can also be read as advocating empowerment as capability-set expansion. This advocacy is most obvious in Sen's promotion of what he calls well-being freedom, which reflects one's capability set. I believe this understanding of empowerment as capability-set expansion is an extremely important, but little talked, about theoretical and practical contribution of the capability approach to the understanding of development in general and the role of empowerment within development in particular. I discuss and explain this significance of this contribution in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Nussbaum's version of the capability approach can (and does) encourage and account for the enhancement of individual and group agency, primarily as capability-set expansion. Sen's version of the approach can (and does) encourage and account for the capability-set expansion and the promotion of valuable capabilities, as he calls for the bolstering of both agency and well-being freedom. Thus, it seems that although they use different language and at times emphasize different aspects of empowerment, Sen and Nussbaum are – at some level – both promoting the same robust role of empowerment in human development: enhancing the substantive freedom of individuals to achieve a lifestyle they value. In view of this common ground shared by the scholars, I suggest that many of the empowerment related differences found in Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach are not substantial, but rather matters of style.

This suggestion will undoubtedly spark debate (if not ire) among capability theorists, so I want to make clear what I am *not* claiming. I am not claiming that differences of style are completely insignificant: the style of an approach may make it more or less attractive, confusing/clear, easy/difficult to implement and/or to evaluate, and so forth. For example, one may prefer to talk in terms of more or less robust agency (as Nussbaum herself often does), than in terms of more or less robust capabilities.

I am also *not* claiming that there are *no* differences between Sen and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach. Sen clearly advocates the use of an agency/well-being distinction, which Nussbaum avoids. Nussbaum clearly advocates the use of a list of central capabilities, which Sen avoids. These differences may lead some to favor one approach, and others another. My current project does not involve the sort of analysis that would be needed to justify recommending one approach as superior to the other. I have argued, however, that Nussbaum's proposed use of a list, does not severely restrict the freedom, or agency, of individuals, groups, or even political communities, in deciding what to value, and especially how to live their lives.

I have *not* argued that use of the sort of list proposed by Nussbaum (as opposed to the relatively under-defined deliberatively democratic valuation process in Sen account) would not make *any* difference. Nussbaum's list provides political communities with a detailed starting point for debate and some clear guidelines to be used in the process of revision and weighting of the list of capabilities. Sen's approach leaves all of these matters almost entirely up to the deliberations of the communities themselves.

One consequence of this difference is that empowerment in the form of capability-set expansion on Nussbaum's approach is focused on ensuring that every

individual's capability set includes – as a minimum – the basic capabilities universally required for a life with dignity as identified by a global consensus (to which the local community may have contributed) and further revised, specified, and weighted by national and local political communities. In contrast, empowerment in the form of capability-set expansion on Sen's approach seeks to expand individual capability sets in accordance with whatever the national and local community themselves have democratically determined to be valuable, independent of any Nussbaum-type list of universal requirements identified by a global consensus. I believe that this is a genuine difference between the two approaches. However, I do not believe that this difference undermines either my claim that practical agency play a robust role with both Sen's and Nussbaum's version of the capability approach, or my suggestion that *many* (but not necessarily all) of the differences in the role of empowerment found within the two versions are more a matter of style than of substance.

## Nussbaum's List of Central Human Functional Capabilities<sup>236</sup>

- 1. Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
- 2. Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
- 3. Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
- 4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason — and to do these things in a 'truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.
- 5. Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
- 6. Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience.)

---

<sup>236</sup> Nussbaum. 2000, pp. 78 – 80.

**7. Affiliation.** (a) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (b) Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity or national origin.

**8. Other Species.** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

**9. Play.** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

**10. Control over one's Environment.** (a) Political Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (b) Material Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods); having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

## Chapter Six

### Institutionalized Power and Empowerment

*There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom.*

Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999.

*[G]ender relations do not operate in a social vacuum, but are products of the ways in which institutions are organized and reconstituted over time.*

Naila Kabeer, *Institutions, Relations and Outcomes*, 1999.

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Two of this essay argues that the capability approach to human development offers a superior conception of empowerment than the traditionally dominant economic growth approach of development does or can provide. The detailed examination of the role of empowerment in both Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach in Chapters Four and Five finds that empowerment plays a robust

role in both versions; and that while neither version systematically uses the term “empowerment” the concept of empowerment is central to each account both as agency and as capability-set expansion. Together, the previous chapters make it clear that the capability approach is a valuable approach for understanding, cultivating, and evaluating empowerment in international development.

Despite its proven value in these areas, prominent scholars, including friends of the capability approach, have expressed concern over the ability of the approach (in general, and Sen’s version in particular,)<sup>237</sup> to address adequately the relationship between institutionalized power (defined presently) and inequality. Economist Marianne Hill claims that the capability approach “does not analyze the role of institutionalized power in causing or perpetuating inequalities in individual opportunities to achieve” and that “[u]ntil...the capability approach addresses the issue of social power, the analysis of well-being will be incomplete, and decisions made to enhance human capabilities will systematically fall short.”<sup>238</sup> Philosopher Christine Koggel argues that: “If not entirely absent in Sen’s account, power and oppression are not sufficiently recognized as factors in inequality in women’s lives that are relevant to the kinds of policies required ... for increasing women’s freedom and agency.”<sup>239</sup> Although the specific criticisms vary, the general concern (or complaint) can be understood as a worry that Sen does not do enough to address the important role that institutionalized power plays in generating, reinforcing,

---

<sup>237</sup> Most of the literature concerning the capability approach’s ability to address social power focuses on Sen’s account. However, I believe that the central concerns of scholars apply, perhaps in slightly different ways, to Nussbaum’s version as well. I suspect that Sen’s approach simply receives more attention mainly because it is the original version of the capability approach. In this chapter, I too focus on Sen’s version.

<sup>238</sup> Marianne Hill. 2003. "Development as Empowerment." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3): pp. 117-135. (Here, p. 117.)

<sup>239</sup> Christine Koggel. 2003 “Globalization and Women’s Paid Work: Expanding Freedom?” *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3): pp. 163 – 183 (Here, p. 165).

and reproducing the inequalities that prevent or limit various groups of individuals from acting as agents or expanding their capability sets – that is, from experiencing, or engaging in, empowerment.

This chapter has two main parts. The first part offers a detailed explanation of one version of the general concern that Sen does not do enough to engage institutionalized power. The second part critically analyzes Sen’s work on inequality and empowerment, including his treatment of institutionalized power. I do not take up specific charges of scholarly critics (like Hill and Koggel). But I do consider the general concern as it is explained in Part One.

I find that although Sen clearly acknowledges the importance of institutionalized power – especially as it relates to gender inequality and its relationship to empowerment as agency – he does not fully engage it. I submit, however, that this failure to account for every aspect of institutionalized power is not a *fatal* flaw of either Sen’s work or of the capability approach. After all, Sen is obviously aware of the issues and has done some important work in the right direction. Moreover, I believe his work, and the capability approach, can be extended to more adequately address the relevant issues of institutionalized power. I end with the suggestion that work done in feminist economics (including Nailia Kabeer’s *Social Relations Approach*<sup>240</sup>) and philosophy (including Marilyn’s Frye’s work on social categories<sup>241</sup> and Christine Koggel’s *Relational Theory*

---

<sup>240</sup> Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian. eds. *Institutions, Relations, and Outcomes: Framework and Case Studies for Gender Aware Planning*. London: Zed Books. 1999; Naila Kabeer, ed. *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*. London: Zed Books. 2005; Naila Kabeer. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso Books. 2003; Candida March, Ines Smyth, and Maitrayee Muckhopadhyay. *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks*. Oxfam Publishing. Oxford. 1999.

<sup>241</sup> Marilyn Frye. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. The Crossing Press. California. 1983. Marilyn Frye. “Categories and Dichotomies” as it appears in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. Lorraine

*of Equality*<sup>242</sup>) can provide the basis for a philosophically and practically more complete understanding of institutionalized power and, in turn, empowerment as agency and capability-set expansion. Although I do not make a case for it here, in future work I intend to show that such an understanding would not only fit nicely within the capability perspective, but would also extend and enhance both Sen's work in particular and the capability approach in general.

### **Part One: Institutionalized Power**

Scholars, as we have seen, have suggested that Sen's work on the capability approach does not do enough to deal with the important role that institutionalized power plays in generating, reinforcing, and reproducing the inequalities that limit or prevent various groups of individuals from acting as agents or expanding their capability sets, that is, from engaging in empowerment processes, or being empowered. In order to understand this general concern about Sen's work on the capability approach, we must understand institutionalized power and several related key concepts. In what follows, I offer an explanation of these key concepts, before explaining why the concern is significant for Sen and for the capability approach.

The complex concept of *institutionalized power* has deep roots in Marxist and socialist thought as well as in various strands of feminist philosophy and economics.<sup>243</sup>

---

Code. ed. Routledge. 2004. (pp. 73 – 74). Marilyn Frye. "Categories in Distress" as it appears in *Feminist Interventions in Ethics and Politics*. Barbara S. Andrew, Jean Keller, et. al. eds. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2005. (pp. 41 – 58).

<sup>242</sup> Christine M. Kogge. *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. 1998.

<sup>243</sup> The relevant concept of power is central to several – but not all – feminist theories including Marxist, socialist, postmodern, and radical feminism. (It is often contrasted with the more atomistic concept of

Institutionalized power can be understood as power that exists as a result of social differences – including inequalities – present in the social relations, which are *systematically* generated, reinforced, and reproduced by both formal and informal institutions. Institutions at work within a given society may include the international community, the state, the legal system, the military, the political party, the market, the firm, the banking system, the church, the village, the community, the tribal council, the household, the family, marriage, and many others.

These institutions embody frameworks of “rules,” or patterns of behavior, that define social groups and social relations. Both formal and informal institutions may explicitly profess (and sometimes strive for) one official set of rules, which may include, for example: “all are equal before the law” while actually operating within another, unofficial, and often implicit, framework of rules, for example, one in which people (of any color, but especially black people) who murder white people are much more likely to be sentenced to death than people who murder black people.<sup>244</sup> An adequate analysis of institutionalized power requires us to look beyond the official and explicit rules of institutions and to understand the unofficial, but nevertheless powerful, social rules of intuitional frameworks. Social rules are not absolute. There may be exceptions to the rules, and the rules may change over time.

Social groups are social categories that are created, perpetuated, and recreated by institutions. Examples of social categories include: women, men, the elderly, wives,

---

power discussed by liberal feminists.) Power also plays a role in feminist economic approaches that draw on these philosophical feminist theories, see for example, Naila Kabeer’s *Social Relations Approach* (see note 4).

<sup>244</sup> According to the Amnesty International’s report “Death by Discrimination: The Continuing Role of Race in Capital Cases:” “Even though blacks and whites are murder victims in nearly equal numbers of crimes, 80% of people executed since the death penalty was reinstated [in the US in 1977] have been executed for murders involving white victims.” <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr510462003>

widows, the able-bodied, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Brahmans. Institutionalized norms determine how individual group members (are expected to) relate to one another in the context of society.

Social relations are the structural relationships of social groups. Gender relations are one type of social relation. Gender relations describe the relationships between men and women within a given society or institutional framework.<sup>245</sup> As products of institutions, such relationships define the roles, responsibilities, and freedoms, and in turn, the power shares of individual group members: including who does what, who gets what, who decides what, who controls what (and whom), who serves whom, and so forth. The differences in the roles, responsibilities, freedoms, membership conditions, and relative power shares of social groups are social differences. Social differences between men and women are gender differences.

Unfortunately, the power available to the individual members of the different social groups in the institutionalized relations of society is often unequal. The inequalities of institutionalized power found in social relations often represent a relative (or, as we shall see, in some cases absolute) deprivation of some groups and a privileging of others. Although social groups, social relations, and social differences are all products of changeable social patterns, institutions – which are controlled by privileged groups – tend to work to reinforce current social roles and in turn, social inequalities, thereby confirming the social power (or control) and advantages of the privileged groups.

---

<sup>245</sup> For the sake of simplicity, in this example, I restrict gender to the categories “women” and “men.” As I do so, I am aware of the irony that in making this move I am privileging these categories and excluding altogether various other categories, that are often argued to be gender categories (including queer, transvestite, and others) from the set – or category – of “gender categories.”

## Sex and Gender

Institutions work to generate, reinforce, and reproduce the current system and perpetuate the inequalities of social relations in at least two ways. First, institutions conflate social kinds with natural kinds, and thereby allow social differences to appear to be fixed natural and objective facts about *the way things are*. Second, institutions defend current social systems – oppression, inequalities, and all – as essential to a valuable and valued culture; thereby allowing social differences to appear to be cultural treasures that reflect *the way things ought to be*. I consider each of these two ways in which institutions work to generate, reinforce, and reproduce inequalities of societies, before explaining why social inequalities can be oppressive and deadly.

Within the institutions that make up society, the *social* categories of various groups, including race, skin color, ethnicity, caste, tribe, and even social class (through phrases like “blue blood” and “good breeding”) are often conflated with related biological categories and cited as a basis for various social roles and inequalities. For example, the social categories of gender “woman” and “man” are often conflated with the significantly different *biological* categories of sex for human beings: “female” and “male.” Male and female human beings exhibit basic biological differences, for example, different reproductive organs and abilities, and different chromosomal make ups.<sup>246</sup> For the most part, however, male and female human beings are biologically similar.

---

<sup>246</sup> Biologists may be quick to point out that natural kinds (or natural categories) are not as neat and absolute as they are often portrayed. “Male” and “female” may be clear and tidy natural categories when compared to the relatively messy social categories of “men” and “women.” But even seemingly tidy dichotomies of “male” and “female” have trouble with, for example, hermaphrodites, abnormal chromosomal make ups, and elective “sex changes” in which reproductive organs are transformed, while chromosomal make ups remain the same.

Both males and females are helpless at birth, susceptible to disease, and to injury and death. They both require nutritious food, clean water, protection from harsh environments, and sometimes medical attention to survive. Both males and females are capable of learning language, new concepts and skills. They are both capable of reasoning, performing difficult tasks, introspection, making sense of the world, having hopes, fears, goals, and plans of their own, and of cooperating with others. They are both capable of feeling pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, and of being cruel and kind. These few biological differences and many biological similarities are universal for males and females. They occur throughout the history of the modern human species and across cultural and geographical boundaries in every society and in every social category of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, caste, and so forth.

In contrast to sex differences, gender differences are neither universal nor fixed. The roles attributed to women and men are products of social practice that can, and often do, vary from one society to another and change over time. As the Oxfam “Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks explains:

Sex is a fact of human biology; gender is not. The experience of being male or female differs dramatically from culture to culture. The concept on gender is used by sociologists to describe all the socially given attributes, roles, activities, and responsibilities connected to being a male or a female in a given society. Our gender identity determines how we are perceived, and how we are expected to think and act as women and men, because of the way society is organized.<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> March. 1999. p. 19.

However, when sex differences are conflated with the gender differences the social determined attributes of “women” and “men” created within a particular society are perceived to be fixed natural traits that are rooted in biology and hence are taken to be brute facts about the world that cannot be changed. When social differences like gender are taken to be natural biological traits, the different roles, responsibilities, freedoms, membership requirements, and relative power shares of social groups are *misunderstood* to be natural (hence good – the way nature and/or God intended them to be) and therefore unchangeable facts about groups of human beings.

Consider, for example, that in many societies formal and informal institutions encourage the belief that because females bear children and males do not, women are *categorically* and *naturally* more qualified, and therefore, better, parents than men. It is often inferred from this that *all* and *only* women should rear children. In some cases, it is further inferred that women who do not have children, or women who do not care for children full time, are not “real” or “good” women. In more extreme – but certainly not uncommon – cases, the role of women is restricted entirely to the domestic sphere. Indeed in some cultures (for example in parts of rural India<sup>248</sup>), women are actually secluded from public view.

Consequently, women’s participation in institutionalized public sphere activities, for example the market, the state, or the academy, is formally or informally restricted. The dubious and unofficial (indeed, often implicit,) grounds for their restriction is that because women are designed (by nature or God) for the domestic sphere, it would be

---

<sup>248</sup> Miller, Barbara, D. “Female Labor Participation and Female Seclusion in Rural India: A Regional View.” As it appears in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Jul., 1982, pp. 777-794)

unnatural, counter to their design, or even wrong, for them to participate in the public sphere. In addition to the social stigma of “bad” woman; women who participate in the public sphere often do not receive the same privileges as men in the public sphere (as I make clear below).<sup>249</sup>

Likewise, men who care for children – especially men who care for children full time – or do not have a robust public sphere involvement deviate from the socially determined role for men. Consequently they are often excluded from many of the privileges granted to men (or “real men”) in society. The often implicit grounds for their exclusion are that men are not designed for domestic participation. So, individuals – both females and males – are socially penalized, often by exclusion, for deviating from the assigned gender roles of their society.

Both formal and informal institutions generate, reinforce, and recreate social roles and relations. Consider, for example, just a few of the ways in which institutions in the United States promote and preserve gender relations.<sup>250</sup> Institutionalized norms dictate that full time employment is required to qualify for important benefits, such as health insurance, and that full time employment is at least forty hours a week. This norm contributes to the social expectation that one parent of a family works forty hours a week (so that the family can have benefits) while the other stays home to care for children. A

---

<sup>249</sup>It is worth noting that so called “stay at home moms” in the US also feel excluded from public sphere based social communities. This social phenomenon in the US is called “The Mommy War,” and is an example of what some feminists call the double bind of oppression – there is no empowering choice for women. As *Washington Post* Writer Tracy Thompson writes: “Feminists say they value sisterhood, but behind the scenes, stay-at-home mothers often criticize office-going moms for neglecting their kids, and working mothers often disparage their at-home counterparts for getting some sort of retro free ride.” For more see: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/mommywars/mommy.htm>

<sup>250</sup> I chose to discuss gender roles in the United States in order to make it clear that limiting social roles, inequities, and oppression are not simply problems that plague developing nations.

forty hour minimum work week, makes it more difficult for couples to share child care and wage earning responsibilities, than would, for example, public health care, or an institutionalized system that allowed workers who work a minimum of 25, or 30 hours a week to earn benefits – which would allow two parents more of an opportunity to work both in the public sphere and in the private sphere.<sup>251</sup>

Despite the 1963 federal law known as the Equal Pay Act – that is, the official institutional rule – it is also an institutionalized norm that men make more money than women. On average, women who work full time in the United States earn seventy-seven cents for every dollar earned by men who do “comparable work.”<sup>252</sup> This is a clear example of an inequality resulting from institutionalized gender bias. (I discuss social inequalities and their consequences in greater detail below.) This norm not only encourages families deciding to have a parent stay home to care for children to choose the woman (long after biologically significant factors like recovery from labor or breast feeding are relevant<sup>253</sup>), but it also plays a role in reinforcing the stereotype that women

---

<sup>251</sup> Consider the following example of an institutionalized Swedish policy that together with affordable child care facilitates rather than discourages women to participate in the public sphere: “Anna [Eriksson] and her partner, Henrik Persson, 33, live just outside Stockholm with their 16-month-old son and have another baby on the way. Swedish couples — women and men — get 13 months paid leave and another three months at a fixed rate. Of that, 60 days must be taken by the mother, another 60 by the father, and the rest can be divided however they choose. (New mothers in the U.S. who have worked one year receive 12 weeks unpaid leave.) “The system means there’s no financial hardship,” says Anna, “and your job is still waiting for you afterward.” (By law, employers must hold a new mother’s job for her for the duration of her maternity leave.)” Women in Sweden still earn only 83% of the pay that men earn for comparable work. Hayworth, Abigail. “The Best Country for Women” MSN News. June 27, 2007.

<sup>252</sup> Moreover, there is no state in which women earn as much as men; and people of color consistently earn less than white people, with women of color earning less than men in the same racial or ethnic category. US Census Bureau: “Current Population Survey” 2005. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html> It is also worth noting that according to the United Nation’s 2006 *Human Development Report*, there is no country in the world in which women make as much money as men.

<sup>253</sup> It is not necessary that men and women should be treated *identically*, only equally. Societies and institutions should recognize relevant biological difference between females and males for example, by

(including single and childless women) are less competent contributors to the public sphere.

Thus women are not only likely to have less money, and consequently a lower standard of living (or a need to depend on a man for material support), but also less social capital, or power to influence public sphere institutions, discourse and policies, for example, the wage gap between men and women.<sup>254</sup> The fact that women are consistently underrepresented in elected US public offices may be a reflection of this claim. The US has never had a female president or vice president, and despite women's relatively great gains in public office in recent years, there are still significantly fewer women governors, senators, and congressional representatives.<sup>255</sup>

These are just a few of many interwoven institutionalized norms that make up the social fabric of society. Countless other formal and informal institutions such as the church, "mom's groups," and family expectations also play a role in reinforcing certain gender roles and social power distributions often justified with appeals to biology or nature. These limited social roles result in limited options, or capabilities, for both women and men, but especially women, who in the United States and throughout the world consistently find themselves on the disadvantaged side of social relations. In many cases (as discussed below), members of disadvantaged social groups face grave deprivations of basic needs including food and medical attention, as well as violence, and even death.

---

accommodating breastfeeding mothers in the work force, or making testicular cancer screenings available to men.

<sup>254</sup> The same holds true for people of color. *Cf.* note 10.

<sup>255</sup> The presence of people of color in US politics is even lower.

Despite the institutionalized beliefs of members of a given society, gender roles and relations are not natural or fixed facts. Indeed, gender roles and relations can and do change, even within one generation. For example, professional women are much more a part of society than they were in our mothers' or our grandmothers' generation. Moreover, the current generation has introduced the increasingly socially recognized category "stay-at-home-dad." It is also true that gender roles and relations can and do vary, even within societies found in a single country – although many in the United States recognize the category of stay-at-home-dads, others still view arrangements in which men are primary caregivers and women are primary bread winners as "unnatural" and therefore wrong.

These changes and variations as well as even a cursory examination of social roles in various societies reveal enough differences in gender roles to make it clear that social roles are not unchangeable facts about the world. As economist Naila Kabeer explains:

Some societies allow large areas of overlap in the lives of men and women while others are organized in ways which maintain a very rigid segregation between the world of men and the world of women, what men do and what women do. What they tend to share is the idea that their own way of organizing roles and relations between women and men is the 'natural' and hence, only way of doing it. In many South-east Asian societies, it is believed that women are naturally more commercial and concerned with money and they play a prominent role in trade and commerce. In much of South Asia, of course, women are considered to be

hopeless with money, and financial matters are entrusted to men.<sup>256</sup>

As the world becomes increasingly connected through technological advances, including easier travel, the internet, and satellite television, it becomes clear that there is more than one way to understand social relations and roles, and in turn, it becomes increasingly difficult to defend social roles as objective biological facts true of human beings throughout the world. Of course, as discussed in the above example, even technologically advanced – or well developed – and relatively heterogeneous societies like the United States, institutions continue to produce, reinforce, and recreate social roles and relations – including inequalities – that are often defended as “natural” on biological grounds.

### **Gender Roles and the Sanctity of Culture**

Another common line of defense for the inequalities generated and sustained by institutionalized power is that social relations are a matter of culture, and therefore a valuable and treasured aspect of identity for all involved. As Kabeer observes: “A defense based on the sanctity of culture... moves us away from disputes over *facts* to disputes over *values*.”<sup>257</sup> Thus, the fact that human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, religious tradition, caste, or gender all share overwhelming biological similarities, but have very different social roles within different societies, poses little or no threat to

---

<sup>256</sup> Naila Kabeer. “From Feminist Insights to Analytical Framework: An Institutional Perspective on Gender Inequality” in Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian. Eds. *Institutions, Relations, and Outcomes: Framework and Case Studies for Gender Aware Planning*. London: Zed Books. 1999. pp. 1 – 48. (Here, p. 5.)

<sup>257</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 7.

institutionalized power inequities justified by appeals to cultural values. Moreover, the rules of official institutions that explicitly call for equal treatment of all can be quickly denounced on the grounds that social differences, and even inequalities, are a valued part of the informal, or “extra-institutional,” culture.

Unlike biological facts, cultural norms and values are not expected to be independent facts about the world; instead they exist in the values and belief systems of society members. Of course, in many cases, appeals to sanctity of culture are intended to justify a particular society’s brand of gender relations that conflate biological sex with gender. Moreover, in some cases, culture is conflated with biology in a different sense. Arguments are made that by being born into a certain culture from parents of a certain culture, one is inextricably tied to the values of that culture *as a matter of fact*. Yet, such beliefs about membership in the cultural community are themselves products of culture that vary greatly from society to society. For our present purposes, culture can be understood as the collective value system of a social community.

The formal and informal institutions of a given culture work to generate, reinforce, and recreate the values and beliefs of that culture, sometimes simply for the sake of reinforcing and recreating them – that is, for the sake of tradition. Many of the values and beliefs of cultures are about social roles and relations. Unfortunately, in many societies the role of some social groups, often women, is one of subordination reinforced by institutionalized violence justified as a part of the relevant culture. As economist Kanchan Mathur explains:

In some societies, the threat and practice of violence is used to ensure women remain within socially-defined boundaries of behavior and space; in others their status as “property”

of male family members deprives them of rights over their own bodies and sexuality within the familial sphere; in yet others, violence against women may constitute a legitimized and routinised aspect of prevailing cultural definitions of gender.<sup>258</sup>

Institutions, limited social roles, inequalities, and even practices of violence, are all defended with appeals to the sanctity of culture. In some cases, many of the individuals who are trapped in subordinate roles in which they are denied rights and subjected to violence are among those who defend the oppressive practices of their cultures.

Consider the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), or female circumcision, which takes place in twenty-eight African countries as well as several other parts of the world. FGM is a procedure in which all or part of the external female genitalia is removed, usually with crude instruments (including, pieces of broken glass and old razor blades) that have not been sterilized, and no anesthetic. This institutionalized practice is reinforced by the market, the family, religion, marriage, the community and various overlapping institutional forces.

Performing such circumcisions is an established trade for some women who depend on the practice for their livelihood. Female circumcision is believed to ensure marital fidelity, enhance fertility, and promote child survival. In fact, FGM makes intercourse extremely painful – which may limit infidelity. However, FGM can also lead to sexual dysfunction, which undermines fertility. Moreover, FGM increases the risks of child and maternal mortality in labor. Nevertheless, men will refuse to marry (and to pay

---

<sup>258</sup> Kanchan Mathur. “From Private to Public: The Emergence of Violence as an Issue in the Women’s Development Program, Rajasthan.” In Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian. Eds. *Institutions, Relations, and Outcomes: Framework and Case Studies for Gender Aware Planning*. London: Zed Books. 1999. pp. 288 – 311. (Here, p. 288.)

dowries for) girls<sup>259</sup> who have not been circumcised. In societies that practice FGM, female genitalia are believed to be unsightly and dirty; removing them is said to be necessary in order to promote health. In fact, the procedure often results in infections, and in some cases death. Some believe that the procedure is required by Islam, but the practice predates the Islamic faith. The procedure is often considered a right of passage into womanhood.<sup>260</sup>

Citing the above social norms as their reasons, families who want to promote or preserve their good name in the community look past the pain, health issues, and risks of death as they subject their young daughters to the procedure. Likewise, girls who want to be (viewed as) “good women” and eligible for marriage within the community (as young as nine years old) agree to endure the procedure despite the pain and the risks. As they do so, they reinforce and recreate the social roles of the “good family” and “good woman” within their cultural society.

The United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), and several other national and international organizations recognize female genital mutilation as an act of institutionalized violence against women. Girls who are subjected to FGM lack several valuable capabilities, including Martha Nussbaum’s central capabilities of bodily health and bodily integrity. Yet, countless men and *women* have defended the excruciatingly painful, ultimately unhealthy, and sometimes deadly, practice of FGM as a traditional act sacred to their culture. They often reject the criticism and concerns of the

---

<sup>259</sup> The fact that in *some* communities that practice FGM girls are often given by their families to marriages to men with multiple wives in exchange for dowries as young as nine years old is a distinct, but related oppressive cultural practice.

<sup>260</sup> “Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet,” *World Health Organization*. Fact Sheet No. 241. June 2000.

UN and the WHO as mere outsider interference. For example, Eunice Sitatian Kaelo, a Maasai woman from Kenya describes her mother as saying:

Female circumcision is our culture. Why should we be  
forced to abandon it when we were born into it?  
Abandoning our culture would be annoying our ancestors.  
It would bring a curse to the entire community.<sup>261</sup>

Thus, at first blush it seems that at least some women *choose* FGM as a valuable part of their culture, and that discontinuing the practice would undermine their agency.

However, it is very unlikely that women are acting as agents (at least not the robust sense of the word found in the capability approach) when they defend female circumcision, or any system of violence or oppression. Cultural violence is often perpetuated by oppressive institutions that render genuine agency impossible. Given the rules of the society in which they find themselves, girls who submit to FGM (or accept other forms of violence as simply part of being a woman) may feel forced to choose the lesser of two evils. For example, a girl can either risk her life while submitting to an excruciatingly painful procedure and gain the acceptance of the community, or shame her family (and her ancestors) and be ostracized by her community and all of its resources. This “choice” seems even less like an act of agency when one thinks that girls are often subjected to FGM at a very young age – as young as nine years old in the case of the Massai.

Moreover, from within the confines of any society, it is often difficult to recognize the institutional patterns that we take to be part of our lives, even when they

---

<sup>261</sup> Olekina, Ledama. “FGM: Maassai Women Speak Out” In *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. Issue 28, Volume 4, December 2004. Cambridge, MA.

result in terrible inequalities, oppression, violence, and death. As Simone Weil tell us: “Someone who does not see a pane of glass is not aware of not seeing it.”<sup>262</sup> Agents have some understanding their choices.<sup>263</sup> As a Massai, Kaelo herself was proud to be circumcised as a young teenager during a coming of age ceremony. It pleased her family and she gained status in the community. However, she has since become more aware of the risks involved and declared that it is her life’s ambition to abolish the procedure among the Massai.<sup>264</sup>

Whether defended as matters of fact, or in the name of cultural sanctity, institutionalized power too often results in the relative deprivation of the members of some social groups and privileges others by confining individuals to certain narrow – often oppressive – social roles. These social roles are continuously reinforced and recreated by society’s various formal and informal institutions through both official and implicit social rules. Rigid institutionalized social roles prevent development of agency and limit the expansion of capability sets of individual members of social groups. For members of underprivileged or subordinate social groups, these limitations frequently result in social, and sometimes violent, oppression (as discussed above), as well as grave material deprivations, and even death.

---

<sup>262</sup> Simone Weil. “Are We Singing For Justice?” in *Ecrits de Londres*, trans. Marina Barabas.

<sup>263</sup> What exactly it means to understand a choice is an interesting and important epistemological question. It is also, beyond the scope of this essay. How well one must understand a choice in order to act as an agent is another difficult and important question that I hope to take up in future work. I believe there is a correlation between understanding one’s choices and agency. However, for my present purposes it is sufficient to say that a young girl of nine or ten years old acting on the encouragement of her parents (the institution of the family) is very unlikely to be acting as an agent.

<sup>264</sup> Tara Tidwell Cullen. “A Woman’s Approach to Dealing with a Perilous Right of Passage.” *Christian Science Monitor*. June 8, 2005. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0608/p15s02-woaf.html>

In many cases, honoring the responsibilities and privileges associated with social relations are taken to be so important that doing so is on par with – or even trumps – meeting the universal biological needs of some socially disadvantaged human beings. In the case of gender relations, such inequalities result in the oppression and death of millions of women throughout the world. Recall from Chapter One that Sen uses the phrase “missing women” to refer to the many women that would be alive today if their access to medical treatment, food, and other essential needs had been equal to the access men in their communities enjoy. Although women face disadvantages and oppression in many parts of the world, missing women are especially prevalent in paternalistic cultures in which resources are scarce. However, Sen effectively shows that discrepancies in survival rates of male and females has less to do with scarcity of resources and more to do with patriarchal societies. (I discuss this in greater detail in Part Two of this chapter.)

In light of the gravity of social inequalities resulting from institutionalized rules, or patterns, it is clear that an approach to human development should account for the role that institutionalized social power plays in generating, reinforcing, and reproducing such oppressive and deadly inequalities, and work against such power structures to empower individual members of disadvantaged groups. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, some scholars have expressed concern that Sen’s work on the capability approach does not do enough towards promoting empowerment in the face of institutionalized power. In the following section, I assess Sen’s work on inequalities and empowerment.

Before moving on to Part Two, I want to make clear that any consideration of inequality or oppression within the context of development reveals the painful reality that women are by far the largest and most consistently oppressed group. For this reason “empowerment issues” are often equated with or reduced to “women’s issues.”<sup>265</sup> I believe that such a reduction is a mistake. When we reduce all social empowerment to female empowerment, we fail to recognize not only the limitations of the social category of men, but also the complex reality that individuals participate in more than one social group and that such participation can result in cross-cutting inequalities in the structural hierarchy of society. Any adequate theory of empowerment must recognize that institutionalized social power creates and sustains not only inequalities rooted in the social relationships of gender, but also inequalities that exist in relationships among other social groups or categories including: caste, race, social-economic class, age, marital status, educational status, sexual orientation, religion, tribe and so forth.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter One, there is no country in which women are treated as well as men.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, as Kabeer rightly points out, gender is by far the most significant social relation because “for any given category of disadvantaged groups in society, women, by and large, suffer from all of the disadvantages of men in their class but in an intensified form as a result of direct gender discrimination in the allocation of resources and responsibilities.”<sup>267</sup> Thus, while we must be careful not to commit the common mistake of simply reducing empowerment issues to women’s issues, we are justified in focusing on gender relations and the inequalities that affect the lives of

---

<sup>265</sup> For example, the United Nations’ empowerment index is a “Gender Empowerment Index.”

<sup>266</sup> According to the findings of the UNDP’s GDI and GEM. HDR 2006.

<sup>267</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 21.

women when discussing and analyzing institutional social power (as I have done in this section and Sen does throughout his work). Sen does not make the mistake of equating social inequality or empowerment issues with women's issues. He does, however, focus almost exclusively on gender relations and women's agency.

### **Part Two: Sen, Institutionalized Power, and Empowerment**

In this section, I assess Amartya Sen's work in light of concerns that he fails to offer an adequate account of the important role that institutionalized power plays in generating, reinforcing, and reproducing the inequalities that prevent or limit various groups of individuals from acting as agents or expanding their capability sets – that is, from being empowered. I discuss the valuable – and often overlooked – contributions that Sen makes towards understanding the relationship between institutionalized power and empowerment as he focuses on gender roles and gender inequalities. I find that although Sen does recognize the significance of institutionalized social roles, he does not do enough to address *fully* the many issues of institutionalized power that are relevant to empowerment.

However, I submit that this failure to engage fully all of the issues of institutionalized power is not a *major* deficiency either of Sen's work, or of the capability approach. Sen is aware of the significance of institutions and social power, and has done some important work in the right direction (or so I argue). Moreover, I propose that both his work, and the capability approach, can be extended (with some help from feminist theory) to offer a more complete and compelling account of the relevant issues of institutionalized power.

## **Survival Ratios, Inequalities, and Empowerment**

One reason Sen's critics may often overlook his contributions towards understanding the institutionalized power is that his analysis does not focus on institutions directly.

Consequently he seldom uses the language of institutions and institutionalized power.

This failure to focus on the level of institutions and social power weakens Sen's treatment of institutional power and empowerment. (I discuss these limitations at the end of this chapter.) Nevertheless, I believe that Sen can and should be read as understanding and addressing many of the issues of institutionalized power raised in Part One. Sen's important work (much of which has been conducted with economist Jean Drèze) has made clear just how serious the institutionalized social inequalities women face truly are.

Instead of analyzing institutional rules, Sen focuses on statistical analysis, most significantly, female to male survival ratios.<sup>268</sup> Sen explains that he focuses on this ratio not only because "this indicator of gender inequality is important in its own right" but also because "it sheds some interesting light on other aspects of gender relations, and through that on a number of interlinked features of ... society."<sup>269</sup> In Sen's work such "other aspects of gender relations" and relevant "interlinked features of society" are usually represented by statistical findings that reflect institutionalized gender relations. For example, female literacy, paid labor, property rights, political participation, fertility rates, and more. Increased female participation in these areas often serves as proxies for enhanced agency, or empowerment, within Sen's account.

---

<sup>268</sup> Female to male survival ratios represent how many females are alive for every living male. So, if the ratio is 1.05, then there are 105 females for every 100 males. Likewise if the ratio is 0.86, then there are only 86 females for every 100 males.

<sup>269</sup> Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen. *India: Development and Participation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford University Press: 1996, 2002. (here p. 232.)

Sen has shown that when given equal care and access to important resources including food and health care, women tend to have lower age-specific mortality rates than men. In other words, when women have relatively equal basic capabilities, they tend to live longer than men, resulting in comparatively high female to male ratios. For example, in the North America and Europe the female to male ratio is around 1.05.<sup>270</sup> However, in much of the world – particularly in Asia and North Africa – millions of women are “missing” in the sense of being dead prematurely as a result of avoidable gender biases in terms of access to essential resources. In such places, female to male ratios range from .98 in North Africa to as low as .86 in parts of North India.<sup>271</sup>

One remarkable contribution of Sen’s work is the revelation that the differences in female to male ratios found in different parts of the world are not determined by the availability of resources or economic growth within a region. Rather the differences are largely correlated with institutionalized differences in the gender relations of the relevant societies. It is worth noting that Sen’s work consistently recognizes institutionalized patterns and practices, even if he does not consistently refer to them as “institutionalized.”

Consider the range of female to male ratios in India. In the northwestern states of Haryana and Punjab, which have experienced rapid economic growth since independence, and which have far higher per-capita incomes than other Indian states, the female to male ratios are very low: 0.86 and 0.87, respectively.<sup>272</sup> However, in the

---

<sup>270</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 230.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 245, 231.

southern part of the country, ratios are relatively high: 0.99 in Tamil Nadu, 0.98 in Andhra, and most notably 1.06 in Kerala.<sup>273</sup> Sen explains:

These regional patterns of female-male ratios are consistent with what is known of the character of gender relations in different parts of the country. The north-western states, for instance, are notorious for highly unequal gender relations, some symptoms of which include the continued practice of female seclusion, low female labour-hour force participation rates, a large gender gap in literacy rates, extremely restricted female property rights, strong boy preferences in fertility decisions, widespread neglect of female children, and drastic separation of a married woman from her family. In all these respects, the social standing of women is relatively better in south India.<sup>274</sup>

Furthermore, in Kerala, where the female to male ratio is 1.06 (higher than any of the major regions in the world, except Eastern Europe),<sup>275</sup> there is “a major success in the expansion of female literacy, considerable prominence of women in influential social and professional activities, and a tradition of matriliney.”<sup>276</sup>

The institutionalized values of societies reflected in these statistical social differences are also to blame for the fact that many “women tend to fare quite badly in relative terms compared with men, even in the same families.”<sup>277</sup> Girls and women are

---

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. p. 231.

<sup>274</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 231.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 232.

<sup>277</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 229.

often not valued as much within the household and therefore do not enjoy the same basic capabilities as boys and men, including the freedom to be well nourished. This institutionalized practice holds true, even when there are sufficient resources to ensure proper nourishment for the whole family, and in spite of periods of economic growth.

In fact, Sen has found that in many parts of India “higher levels of poverty tend to go with higher female-male ratios.”<sup>278</sup> Sen suggests that this may be because “the partnership aspect of gender relations is stronger in poorer households, where survival depends on effective cooperation, than among privileged households where women tend to have more dependent and symbolic position.”<sup>279</sup> Sen presents evidence that suggests that this “more dependant” feature of the role women as a social group within the household, may affect the status of women in different classes and castes differently. This suggests that in at least some castes and classes, the systematic oppression and deprivation of women and girls is likely to be defended as a matter culture.

It is a common, and well supported,<sup>280</sup> social anthropological hypothesis that as a region experiences economic growth, the lower (scheduled) castes engage in a process of emulation of higher – more patriarchal – castes, in which the role of women is limited and subservient. Tragically, the lifestyle of women plays the role of some sort of a social status symbol during this process. (A stay-at-home wife is thought to be a sign of success.) In other words, as lower castes experience some economic gains, the role of women is often more restricted in the household; and this restricted role is correlated with

---

<sup>278</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 244.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> See Sen, 2000, p. 243, n. 35 for more information on this process of emulation, commonly called the ‘Sanskritization’ process.

the deadly deprivation and low survival rates of women and girls. Thus, Sen's work can be understood as showing that, insofar as economic expansion or upward economic mobility has an influence on female to male ratios in regions (of India) where society reinforces and recreates patriarchal gender relations, it seems that economic growth actually leads to some *intensification* of gender bias (especially among scheduled castes). Sen concludes: "Achieving greater gender equality involves a process of active social change which is not automatically linked with economic growth."<sup>281</sup>

Sen shows that economic development, understood as a simple increase in GDP (as within the economic growth perspective discussed in Chapters One and Two,) does not promise a remedy for – *and may actually intensify* – the sort of institutionalized gender bias that generates the social power inequalities that, in turn results in the premature deaths of girls and women. Sen also provides evidence that human development efforts that target the empowerment of women and girls, that is, the expansion of female capability sets as well as the enhancement of female agency, are very effective in mitigating gender bias in survival rates. Statistical analysis shows that capabilities that are likely to give women more voice in the home, including education (especially literacy) and paid work outside the home, are among the most significant variables in raising female to male ratios (in India and elsewhere).<sup>282</sup> As Sen writes:

[W]orking outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of women in the household and society. Her contribution to the prosperity of the family is then more

---

<sup>281</sup> Sen, 2002. p. 243.

<sup>282</sup> See: Sen, 2002 pp. 245 – 257; Sen 1999, pp. 190 – 192; and M. Murthi, A.C. Guio, and J.P. Dereze. "Mortality, Fertility, and Gender Bias in India", *Population and Development Review*, 1995 vol. 21.

visible, and she also has more voice, because of being less dependant on others. Further, outside employment often has useful “educational” effects, in terms of exposure to the world outside the household, making her agency more effective. Similarly, women’s education strengthens women’s agency and also tends to make it more informed and skilled.<sup>283</sup>

Sen is aware of the importance of institutionalized power differences in both formal and informal institutions. He clearly works to show that it is the *social* standing of women in the household and society and not simply GNP, or even household income, that must be changed if women are to be empowered as effective agents, and to enjoy the basic capabilities that not only enhance their well being, but also make possible their survival.

Sen also suggests that when women are empowered (through education, employment, property rights, etc.), all people – men, women, girls and boys – benefit. When women are literate and work outside the home, their own social standing (or, share of social power) is not the only one improved. The social status of girls also improves, which, in turn, results in a more equitable intra-family distribution of resources, including food and medical care. In other words, there is a correlation between higher levels of female literacy and labor force participation, and lower levels of female disadvantage in child survival.<sup>284</sup>

Women’s employment alone does not seem to have a clearly significant influence on *overall* child mortality rates, that is, rates for girls *and* boys, under five. (Yet, Sen

---

<sup>283</sup> Sen, 1999. pp. 191-92.

<sup>284</sup> Sen, 2000, pp. 246 – 49.

suggests that more research needs to be done on this topic.) This is most likely due to the fact that women who work outside of the home are often burdened with a “double day” doing all that is required of them at their job and all the domestic chores of the private sphere including child care. Moreover, as Sen notes: “men typically show great reluctance to share the domestic chores.”<sup>285</sup> Under such circumstances, child care is only one of many important duties women must juggle, and therefore may not significantly improve.

Unlike women’s employment, women’s literacy has a strong and obvious influence on child mortality rates in many countries throughout the world. For example, when other variables are kept constant, “an increase in the crude female literacy rate from, say, 22 per cent (the actual 1981 figure [for India]) to 75 per cent reduces the predicted value of under-five mortality for males and females combined from 156 per thousand (again, the actual 1981 figure) to 110 per thousand.”<sup>286</sup> In contrast, an increase in male literacy from 22 to 75 per cent only reduces mortality rates for children under five from 167 per thousand to 141 per thousand. Furthermore, a 50 per cent reduction in economic poverty only reduces under-five mortality rates from 156 per thousand to 153 per thousand.<sup>287</sup>

Sen shows that an increase in women’s empowerment, represented by an increase in female literacy, paid labor, property rights, and other statistical proxies for women’s empowerment, also results in some real benefits to the lives of men. Not only do men benefit from the ideal and material contributions women make through work and public

---

<sup>285</sup> Sen 1999, p. 196.

<sup>286</sup> Sen 1999, p. 155.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

participation, men also enjoy a less violent society. Sen reports that in India, as well as other parts of the world, “homicide rates are highly correlated (inversely) with the female-male ratio in the population. This correlation is very robust.”<sup>288</sup> When one considers that men are both the victims and the perpetrators of the vast majority of homicides<sup>289</sup> it is clear that lower homicide rates benefit men, perhaps even more so than the rest of society.

Finally, Sen presents evidence that suggests that when women are empowered as agents within the household and society, they have fewer children. This is good not only for women, but also for the environment, upon whose limited resources everyone depends. As Sen notes: “The adverse effects of high birthrates powerfully include the denial of substantial freedoms—through persistent childbearing and child rearing—routinely imposed on many Asian and African women.”<sup>290</sup> Moreover, lower fertility rates reduce the “general problems of environmental overcrowding from which both men and women suffer.”<sup>291</sup> It is remarkable that female literacy and female labor participation are the *only* known variables to have a significant effect on fertility rates.

### **Sen’s Contributions Examined**

It is clear that even though Sen neither focuses his analysis on the rules of institutions, nor always uses the language associated with institutional power, he has made several valuable contributions towards understanding institutionalized gender roles, gender

---

<sup>288</sup> Sen 1999, p. 269.

<sup>289</sup> Sen 1999, p. 267.

<sup>290</sup> Sen 1999, p. 198.

<sup>291</sup> Sen 1999, p. 195.

inequalities, and their relationship to empowerment. I consider the following to be among his most significant contributions to understanding institutionalized power: (1) gender inequalities rooted in social roles results in the premature death of millions of women. (2) Deadly gender inequalities do not automatically decline – but, in fact, may intensify – as a region experiences economic growth. (3) Increases in certain capabilities, for example, literacy, paid labor participation, property ownership, and so on, among women, lead to women having a higher status in the household and society, and in turn to lower child mortality rates, lower homicide rates, and lower fertility rates (which are good not only for women, but also for the environment).

Two important and overlapping lessons can be drawn from this third contribution. First, changes in the rules or patterns generated and sustained by formal public sphere institutions, for example, gender aware labor codes and educational programs, can have a great influence on the patterns informal private sphere institutions, for example, food distribution in the household. In other words, contrary to popular belief, institutions are not separate and independent entities (as implied, for example, by the often professed official US policy of “separation of Church and State”). Instead, norms, values, and practices cut across institutions in such a way that a change in the (official or unofficial) rules one institution can influence the rules of other institutions – even those in a different sphere of life. (Consider the influence both religious beliefs and scientific work have on the political issue of whether or not to fund stem cell research in the US.) Second, the benefits of female empowerment extend beyond women to *all* people in society – men, girls, and boys. Hence, female empowerment is not just a “special interest issue” that

benefits only some sub-set of the population, but is important to the well-being of all people.

Sen's analysis provides important empirical evidence that an increase in female employment and literacy are the keys to female survival. However, statistical analysis alone cannot tell us *how* to bring about such increases in a patriarchal society in which men dominate women and the dependence of women is valued as a means to increased social status and power. Sen goes beyond statistical analysis as he makes clear that he is aware that a change in the roles of women in a patriarchal culture requires a change in social norms and values. That is to say, Sen understands that in order for oppression and tragic inequalities justified on the grounds of culture to change, the culture – that is the norms and values of society – must change. Neither simple increases in economic resources, nor mere changes in the official or explicit rules and policies of formal institutions, will result in expansion of capability-sets or the enhancement of agency of women.

Sen goes further to say that he believes that democracy – particularly a robust democracy in which women are full participants in public dialogue – is vital to changing sexist social norms and values. Sen holds that: “the practice of democracy gives the citizens an opportunity to learn from each other, and can profoundly influence the values and priorities of the society.” He adds that, “[v]alue formation is as much a democratic activity as is the use of social values in the determination of public policy and social response.”<sup>292</sup>

---

<sup>292</sup> Amartya Sen, *Rationality and Freedom*. Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 2002. (p. 25.)

Sen acknowledges that bolstering democracy in general, and the participation of women (and other underprivileged social groups) in particular within a society where privileged (male) elites are likely to use their dominant share of social power to recreate and reinforce their advantage is not easy. Indeed he concedes that value shaping “public dialogs are...hard to achieve...despite [formal] democracy, because of the low level of elementary education, especially for women;”<sup>293</sup> and that social inequality “often prevents the underprivileged from participating effectively in democratic institutions, and gives disproportionate power to those who command crucial resources such as income, education and influential connections.”<sup>294</sup> In other words, Sen recognizes that we are faced with a serious problem: women need a robust democracy to change values enough to gain access to paid labor, education, and other empowering capabilities that enhance voice and social power. Yet, a robust democracy is difficult to achieve without the education and enhanced voice and social power of women.

Sen offers two complementary solutions to what he calls “the problem of voicelessness:” *assertion* and *solidarity*. For Sen, assertion, or self-assertion, occurs when oppressed or underprivileged individuals assert themselves through political organization or mobilization, for example, through the establishment of a women’s cooperative that supports individual women as they attempt to enter the market place. Sen is aware that many underprivileged do not have real opportunities for self assertion due to the current institutional power structures. As he explains:

The daily struggle leaves them with little leisure to engage in political activity, and efforts to do so sometimes invite

---

<sup>293</sup> Sen, 2002. (pp. 288-89. n. 49.)

<sup>294</sup> Sen, 2000. p. 28.

physical repression. Lack of formal education and access to information restricts their ability to intervene in public discussions and electoral debates, or to make effective use of the media, the courts, and other democratic institutions. Lack of adequate collective organizations further enhances this political marginalization.<sup>295</sup>

Where there is little or no opportunity for assertion, Sen believes that solidarity must play a major role in expanding the capabilities of the underprivileged. Solidarity with oppressed groups occurs when individuals or social groups, who are not themselves the primary victims of social injustice but are better placed to advance the cause of the underprivileged due to their own relatively privileged positions in society, align themselves with the disadvantaged group and organize political movements on their behalf.

Although solidarity is a valuable and often necessary part of the empowerment, there are risks and problems with solidarity movements. Solidarity movements can result in an overly dependent relationship in which the unprivileged group fails to gain their own voice. Such movements can be an inauthentic representation – or worse – a misrepresentation of the unprivileged group’s interests. Moreover, as Sen points out, the most disadvantaged and voiceless social groups are often “unattractive partners” for solidarity-based movements, which tends to reinforce their marginalized position within the social framework.

It is clear that Sen does a lot of work towards addressing the important role that institutionalized power plays in generating, perpetuating, and recreating the inequalities

---

<sup>295</sup> Sen. 2002. p. 29.

that prevent or limit various groups of individuals from acting as agents or expanding their capability sets – that is, from actively engaging the empowerment process or being empowered. He makes several important observations about the effects of capability-set expansion to include “agency enhancing” capabilities that improve the social standing of women both in the household and in society. He recognizes the need to change social norms and values – and not just GNP, household incomes, or official institutional policies in order to combat oppression. He makes a useful proposal about how to advance empowerment through democratic participation – at times facilitated by assertion and solidarity – in the face of the reality of institutionalized inequalities of social power, including inequalities of voice in public dialogue. These are all important steps towards a complete account of empowerment in the face of oppression generated by institutionalized power.

Despite these important contributions, however, it can nevertheless be argued that Sen stops short of *fully* accounting for many of the relevant issues of institutionalized power. In not directly engaging institutional frameworks; Sen’s work inevitably fails to capture all of the relevant issues. It is only through directly analyzing the official, and especially the unofficial, rules of institutions that generate and reinforce social roles that we are able to get a more complete picture of how gender and other social relations, and in turn inequalities and oppression, are generated and maintained. Without focusing on institutions and social power, Sen’s important statistical focused work can provide only part of the story of how we are to understand the institutional frameworks that determine social relations, and in turn, to transform social roles.

Sen recognizes, for example, that men are often unwilling partners in women's empowerment. He mentions "problems arising from inflexible male participation"<sup>296</sup> and that due to male influence and gender bias "it is much harder for women to start a business enterprise, even of a very modest size."<sup>297</sup> But he does not fully analyze the social relationship between men and women. With the exception of his observations about homicide rates, Sen does not comment on how a change in the social role of women is bound to change the social role of men.

For example, Sen laments that men are unwilling partners in the domestic sphere and that this results in a double day of work for women and – by no coincidence – low standards of care for children. Yet he does not address how the attitudes and social role of men, or any other aspects of gender relations, can and should change as women become increasingly empowered. Sen fails to address the fact that a change in the institutionalized social role of women is a change in the social framework as a whole, and, as such, it will affect the role of men. For example, when the role of women changes from having no say in household decisions to having some say in such decisions, the role of men – who previously had complete say in such decisions – has also changed. If she now has some power in household decisions, he cannot retain complete power in the same decisions.

As we seek to bring about the changes that empower women, it is important to recognize and understand how men will adjust (positively and negatively) to changes in the role of women. Put more generally, Sen does not offer a way to understand the *relational* aspects of social *relations* (including gender relations) and their part in

---

<sup>296</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 196.

<sup>297</sup> Sen, 1999. p. 201.

determining social (gender) roles. This is important, because as discussed in Part One of this chapter, these institutionalized social relationships that define the roles, responsibilities, and freedoms, and in turn, determine the power shares of individual group members.

In addition, Sen does not do enough to address the fact that institutions are not themselves neutral. He helpfully makes clear that female literacy and participation in the work force are empowering in that they give women a greater voice in both the private and the public sphere. He also concedes that, due to gender bias (or implicit social rules), it is much more difficult for a woman to start a business than for a man to do so. However, Sen does not go further to explain what the implicit rules of social bias are, or the role that such rules play in reinforcing gender roles in the work place, in schools, or in court houses, nor does he explain how we can work to change biased rules.

This shortcoming is significant because the very institutions that Sen is counting on to be the instruments of empowerment, including schools, the work place, and even the parts of the robust democracy that Sen calls for (for example the press, political parties, and so on,) are themselves infected with gender biased social rules. Thus, Sen's call for democracy, assertion, and solidarity is not enough to understand how to transform biased institutional frameworks and the resulting oppressive and sometimes deadly social roles. To sum up, it seems Sen does not do enough to show how his framework can represent either the complete complex reality of social relations or the often biased institutions that make up our societies. Consequently, he does not provide a complete understanding of what can be done to empower individual members of disadvantaged groups in oppressive societies.

I do not believe, however, that Sen's incomplete treatment of institutionalized power should be seen as a *fatal* flaw of his work or of the capability approach. After all, Sen has already made – and continues to make – several momentous (indeed, Nobel Prize winning) contributions to international development ethics in general and several quality contributions towards our evaluation and understanding of institutionalized power in particular. Moreover, he is clearly aware that more work needs to be done towards recognizing the complex social and cultural relations that result in social inequality, even if he chooses to leave that work for another time, or for others to pursue. For example, Sen acknowledges that there are patterns of interest in “the association between gender inequality on the one hand, and cultural and political distinctions (such as the scope for religion-based politics)” on the other, which call for “further social, anthropological and cultural investigations.”<sup>298</sup> Sen quickly adds that he does not attempt – at least not the current context – to take on such investigations. Thus, it does not follow from the fact that Sen has not *fully* analyzed the role of institutionalized power in generating and sustaining inequalities, that he is unaware of the importance of such analysis. Nor does it follow that the capability perspective cannot accommodate a more complete analysis of institutionalized power and inequalities.

One could argue, however, that Sen's failure to place a greater emphasis on institutional power is a sign that he does not recognize how very significant it is for empowerment and agency. I concede that such a failure – a failure to *recognize fully* the importance of institutional power – would certainly be at least a *minor* defect in Sen's work. However, I am not convinced that we have enough evidence to conclude that Sen

---

<sup>298</sup> Sen, Amartya and Jean Dreze. *India: Development and Participation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford University Press. 2002. (Here p. 262.)

does so fail. We do know – based on his work discussed above – that he at least recognizes the importance of such power and – to some extent – the consequences of social inequalities. Furthermore, in this chapter I am only concerned with making the weaker, but nevertheless significant, claim that while Sen might (or might not) fully recognize the importance of institutionalized power, the account that he gives of this important factor as it relates to social inequality and oppression is valuable, but limited. Again, this limited treatment should not be considered an incurable shortcoming of either Sen’s work or the capability approach.

### **A Promising Direction: Kabeer’s Social Relations Approach**

Although I do not attempt to develop such an account in this essay, I believe (and intend to demonstrate in a future project) that work done in feminist economics and philosophy would prove exceptionally helpful in augmenting the capability approach’s empowerment concepts of agency and capability-set expansion in a way that fit nicely within the capability approach . For example, Naila Kabeer’s *Social Relations Approach*, focuses directly on both the official and the implicit social rules of the formal and informal institutions that make up society. Compared to Sen’s focus on statistical information (including male to female survival ratios) as proxies for empowerment, this direct focus on the level of institutions facilitates a deeper and more informed understanding of institutionalized power and its role in producing and reproducing gender relations and oppressive and deadly inequalities. In this way, Kabeer makes possible a more complete understanding of how to cultivate empowerment in the face of such institutionalized forces. As Kabeer explains, her “framework is intended to direct

attention to the existence of gender inequalities in the prevailing distribution of resources, responsibilities and power and to analyze how they are thrown up by operations of the institutions which govern social life.”<sup>299</sup>

In focusing on institutions, Kabeer’s approach evaluates the explicitly expressed or official ideologies and rules professed by institutions (for example, “all are equal before the law”). Kabeer observes that the official principles of institutions – including informal institutions – do not often represent the actual social rules and inequalities that are generated and sustained by institutions. She notes that when inequalities are explicitly observed within institutions, they “tend to be explained in terms that justify them.”<sup>300</sup>

Thus, inequalities within the family and community tend to be attributed to natural difference, divine will, culture and tradition while inequalities within firms, bureaucracies and other public bodies are rationalized as the operation of neutral market forces or merit based rules of recruitment and promotion.<sup>301</sup>

Accordingly, there is not only a level of official policy at which most institutions explicitly pledge to uphold principles of justice and equality, but also a level of official explanations and rationalizations for the inequalities that systematically occur despite their pledged efforts. Both levels of explanation are, of course, separate from the actual social practices upheld and systematically reproduced. However, the official policies and

---

<sup>299</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 12.

<sup>300</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 13.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

explanations are frequently and uncritically reproduced in all areas of society through text books, public policy, the media, and public discourse. Kabeer holds that: “[I]t is the role of analysis to move beyond the “official” ideologies professed by, or attributed to, different institutional arenas to a critical empirical scrutiny of the actual rules and practices through which their different organizational forms are constituted.”<sup>302</sup> This point, which is not mentioned by Sen, is crucial because political movements and development interventions that neglect to look beyond the levels of official “value-neutral” policies and explanations will fail to grasp and engage the actual roots of oppressive inequalities.

Kabeer’s approach also fully explains another point Sen does not take far enough: the essential role social *relations* in understanding institutional power and empowerment. Kabeer understands that from the moment a child enters the world the child is recognized not just a boy or a girl, but as a son or a daughter. As she explains:

[W]hile the parent-child relationship is gender neutral as a concept, in reality it refers to highly gendered relationships between mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons, which are enacted by individual women, men, girls, and boys at the individual level but which are also governed by cultural norms and values that spell out how they treat each other and what they can expect of each other.<sup>303</sup>

Kabeer recognizes that institutionalized gender relations, including gender inequalities are entrenched in society and individual concepts of identity: “they have taken root in the

---

<sup>302</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 13.

<sup>303</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 18.

hearts and minds of both women and men.”<sup>304</sup> Consequently, they will be difficult to change. Kabeer considers in depth what such changes might mean for both women and men, the strategies some may use to resist change (including, the idea that change is unnatural, or will destroy the culture, or the family, and so forth). She also considers strategies that may be employed to overcome such resistance, including recruiting the support of men.

Most significantly, Kabeer makes a compelling case for transformative development practices. Transformative development strategies do not simply attempt to integrate women and girls into existing institutions (for example, schools, the work force, politics, and so forth) with existing male biases. Instead such strategies seek to transform the gender biased values, norms, and practices of such institutions.<sup>305</sup> Kabeer appreciates that such transformative strategy is a long term strategy and that “most women will need resources to cope with the present situation before they can take on the task of transforming that situation.”<sup>306</sup>

I will not further elaborate on Kabeer’s contributions to the theory and practice of development in the face of institutionalized power here. Instead, I briefly suggest that her account is compatible with the capability approach. Like the capability approach, Kabeer’s approach is an approach to *human* development. Oxfam describes the approach as concerned “not simply about economic growth, or improved productivity,” but with “human well-being” and “human dignity” which, on this view are “seen as concerning

---

<sup>304</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 28.

<sup>305</sup> Kabeer does concede that integrationist tactics are sometimes a necessary part of transformation. See Kabeer, 1999. pp. 33 – 45.

<sup>306</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 32.

survival, security, and autonomy, where autonomy means the ability to participate fully in those decisions that shape one's choices and one's life chances at both the personal and the collective level."<sup>307</sup> Thus both approaches hold that development must extend beyond markets and economic growth to all spheres of life. Moreover, Kabeer's conception of empowerment can be read as promoting not only capability-set expansion (or changes in the distribution of "resources and opportunities"), but also enhancing agency among the disadvantaged. For Kabeer:

Empowerment processes seek to bring about changes in the distribution of material and symbolic resources and opportunities between men and women within the development process but also—and crucially—to bring about changes in the beliefs and values which they have assimilated in the process of acquiring a gendered sense of selfhood where these constitute a constraint on their capacity for exercising agency in their own lives.<sup>308</sup>

Even though I cannot in the present essay provide more than a suggestive account of Kabeer's work or more than an adumbration of its potential use within the capability perspective, I believe the anticipations I do provide show that Kabeer's work would extend and enhance Sen's work and the capability approach. Furthermore, in so doing, I have begun to defend my claim – and will do so more thoroughly in future work – that Sen's account and the capability approach can be extended to accommodate a more adequate and complete understanding of institutional power and empowerment.

---

<sup>307</sup> March, 1999. p. 103.

<sup>308</sup> Kabeer, 1999. p. 38.

Likewise, although I will not do so here, I plan to show in future work that not only work done in feminist economics, but also work done in feminist philosophy can be very valuable in augmenting the concept of empowerment within the capability approach. Specifically, Marilyn Frye's work on social categories and Christine Koggel's "relational theory of equality" can provide the philosophical groundwork for an understanding of empowerment as the process of expanding the social categories (and in turn the social relations and social roles) we can create, participate in, and occupy. On this view, people empowered as agents decide (at least to some extent) for themselves what it means to be a "real man" or a "good woman" and how individual members of such categories relate to others (for example, gender relations), including the roles they are expected to play. I expect that extending the concept of empowerment in this way is not only philosophically interesting, but also practically useful, for example, in alleviating what the World Bank calls "gender anxiety." Gender anxiety is anxiety about what it means to be a "good woman" or a "good man." People experience gender anxiety as institutionalized gender roles in their societies change. Of course, this concept of "gender anxiety" can be extended to make sense of "race anxiety," "caste anxiety," "age anxiety" and various other forms of social anxiety that might emerge as institutionalized social roles change.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have considered the concern expressed by scholars that Sen does not sufficiently recognize the important role that institutionalized power plays in generating, reinforcing, and reproducing the inequalities that prevent or limit various groups of individuals from acting as agents or expanding their capability sets – that is, from

actively exercising and experiencing empowerment. After a detailed explanation of this criticism, I presented Sen's many and significant contributions towards understanding and combating the oppressive and deadly inequalities that result from institutional inequalities.

I found that Sen is certainly aware of the importance of institutionalized power, even if he does not systematically analyze institutions or consistently use the language often associate with social power. He is also aware of (at least part of) the role it such power plays in generating inequalities and limiting empowerment. I concede, however, that Sen fails to give an adequate or complete account of institutionalized power. Specifically his account fails to (1) grasp adequately the relational aspects of social relations and their part in determining social roles and, in turn, individual power shares; and to (2) account fully for unofficial rules, or biases, in the institutions that make up our societies.

I submit, however, that this shortcoming is by no means fatal to Sen's work or, more generally, to the capability approach. After all, Sen has not only made several valuable contributions towards understanding institutional power and power inequities as they relate to oppression and empowerment; but he also recognizes that there is important work yet to be done. Moreover, I believe that Sen's work so far, and the capability perspective in general, is well suited to accommodate such additional work towards understanding and combating institutionalized power and its role in preventing and limiting empowerment. I suggest and intend to show in future work that work done in feminist economics and philosophy offer promising and insightful tools for conducting this investigation.

## Conclusion

This project begins with a comparative evaluation of two international development perspectives: the traditionally and still dominant economic growth perspective and the relatively new capability perspective. Both use many of the same key terms, and profess to value and promote many of the same ideals (including poverty, participation, empowerment, and many others), often through the same channels (for example, education, democracy, health care, and so forth). However, my evaluation reveals that the two approaches define key terms differently, and have very different ideals, goals, and means.

The economic growth approach is an approach to *economic* development, as such it seeks to reduce or eliminate poverty understood as income poverty defined by the percentage of people living under the poverty line (one or two US dollars a day) or by a low (or falling) GNP. The capability approach, in contrast, is an approach to *human* development. It defines poverty as a deprivation of valuable and valued capabilities, or freedoms (for example, the freedom to be well nourished), and understands development as a process of expanding such freedoms.

These central goals shape the scope of the concepts and the means of development in each approach. For example, within the economic growth participation and empowerment are restricted to the market, and education, democracy, and health care are valued as instrumental goods, and only to the extent that they result in an increase in GNP. In contrast, within the capability perspective, participation and empowerment are sought in every sphere of life – public and private – and education, democracy, and health care are valued both as instrumental freedoms that allow individuals to do and be the things they value (that is, to achieve valued functionings), and as valuable for their own sake. Because education, democracy, and health care are seen as valuable for their own sake – and not as means to a higher GNP – those operating within the capability will work to bring the about regardless of whether or not they increase GNP. My comparative evaluation makes clear that the capability approach has both a richer, more accurate, understanding of poverty and development, and a more a more comprehensive, and therefore, a theoretically and practically superior, concept of empowerment than the economic growth perspective does or can provide.

After making my case for the capability approach as a superior approach to international development, I consider Thomas Pogge's critique of the approach. Pogge argues that the capability approach has several serious shortcomings, and therefore the attention it receives from academics and policy makers cannot be justified. However, a careful reading of Pogge's criticism reveals that his critique of the capability approach is based on a misunderstanding of the approach and therefore unfounded.

Pogge fails to represent fully the role of capabilities as opportunities valued for their own sake. He makes the mistake of limiting the capability approach to a mere

resource distribution system, and consequently fails to acknowledge the important role of empowerment within the approach. Finally, Pogge misrepresents the capability approach as he overlooks Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's focus on meeting thresholds of basic or central capabilities, and attributes to them an elaborate and complex vertical ranking process that takes into account all the properties of natural human diversity that neither Sen nor Nussbaum could accept. I conclude that it is Pogge's account of the capability approach, and not the capability approach itself, that cannot be justified.

Having identified and defended the capability approach and especially the role empowerment plays within the approach as generally superior to other approaches at work in development in Chapters One, Two, and Three, I turn my focus to a more detailed evaluation of the role of empowerment within both Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach in Chapters Four and Five. My examination of Sen's account explains his use of several empowerment concepts. I question Sen's use of "Realized Agency Success" as an agency concept on the grounds that it does not require *any* act of agency on the part of the individual who enjoys the success. Although neither Sen nor Nussbaum systematically uses the word empowerment, I observe that Sen's account can be read as offering two valuable and central roles for empowerment: agency, which is the subject of many discussions of empowerment within the capability literature, and capability-set expansion, which until now, seems to have gone unnoticed as an empowerment process within the capability approach.

In evaluating Nussbaum's account I find that – as on Sen's account – empowerment plays a strong role both as agency and (perhaps especially for Nussbaum) as capability-set expansion. This finding is not uncontroversial, as many capability

scholars hold that because Nussbaum rejects Sen's distinction between well-being and agency and proposes a list of central capabilities, she cannot offer a robust account of agency, and therefore of empowerment. My controversial finding that (like Sen), Nussbaum has a strong concept of empowerment, is followed by the even more controversial suggestion that many of the differences between Sen and Nussbaum are more a matter of style than substance.

After explaining the role of empowerment within the capability approach in some detail, I consider a general version of an often expressed criticism of Sen's work as it related to empowerment. Specifically, I investigate whether Sen does enough to engage the role of institutionalized power in generating, reinforcing, and reproducing inequalities that prevent individuals from being empowered. After providing an explanation of institutionalized power and its relevance to empowerment, and in turn, development, I evaluate Sen's contributions to our understanding of this subject.

As we look closely at the realities of institutionalized power differences among all people, it becomes painfully obvious that women are the greatest victims of oppression and the most in need of empowerment. Sen's work focuses on female to male survival ratios and other statistics that can be understood as proxies for female empowerment (including literacy rates, employment rates, fertility rates, and so forth). Sen makes powerful connections between the presence of basic capabilities that enhance female agency, like literacy, and dramatic increases in survival rates of not just women, but also children. Sen recognizes that institutions, including the family, the marketplace, and the community are interlinked such that a change in one institution (female education) can result in a change in another institution (female survival). He also realizes that changes,

and especially empowerment processes, in these institutional spheres depend more on cultural values and norms than on economic resources. Sen proposes a robust democracy as the means for changing norms and values and in this way bringing about empowerment in the face of institutionalized power inequalities.

Despite Sen's contributions, all of which are steps in the right direction, Sen stops short of offering a completely adequate account of institutional power and the role it plays in limiting empowerment processes and achievements. However, I argue that that this shortcoming is not a fatal flaw of Sen's work or the capability approach. After all, Sen has not only made several valuable contributions on the topic, but he is also aware that more work needs to be done. Moreover, I submit that Sen's work and the capability approach in general are well suited to accommodate a more complete understanding of institutionalized power and an enhanced concept of empowerment for development. There is good reason to believe that feminist economics and philosophy (for example, Naila Kabeer's *Social Relations Approach*, Marilyn Frye's work on social categories, and Christine Koggel's relational theory of equality) can provide the groundwork for extending Sen's valuable work in such a way that enhances – but does not replace – the empowerment concepts of capability-set expansion and agency at work in the capability approach.

Taken as a whole, this project can be understood as making a strong case for the role of empowerment within the capability approach, and in turn the approach itself. I propose that the capability approach offers two valuable central concepts of empowerment: agency and capability-set expansion. These concepts play a role in understanding empowerment processes in every sphere of life from the household, to the

market, to the government, and beyond. They make sense of empowerment and its obstacles, including not only economic poverty, but also the more sophisticated obstacles of institutionalized power. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the concepts as they exist in the capability approach can be enhanced to better understand and overcome the oppressive forces that prevent individuals from achieving lives they have reason to value.

The project has a lot to offer both the theory and the practice of development. Many of the contributions will benefit both theory and practice (as these areas are not isolated). Development theory and practice will benefit from a clear articulation of the differences that exist between the capability and the economic growth despite the surface level agreements of the approaches; from the recognition of the important role of institutionalized power in development; and from the acknowledged potential of feminist thought in the context of development and empowerment – especially in recognizing the important need for transformative – not simply integrative – change in social policies. Capability theorists will benefit from the explanation of empowerment as both capability-set enhancement and agency; from my suggestion that Sen and Nussbaum are more alike than most recognize; and from a clear understanding of Thomas Pogge’s criticisms, and why they cannot be justified.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agarwal B., Humphries J., Robeyns I. "A Special Issue on Amartya Sen's Work and Ideas: A Gender Perspective," *Feminist Economics*, 9 (2-3, July-November, 2003).
- Alkire, Sabina. "Why the Capability Approach?" *Journal of Human Development* (Vol. 6. No. 1. March 2005): 247 – 67.
- "Dimensions of Human Development." *World Development* 30 (2002): 181 – 205.
- *Valuing Freedoms. Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. "Sen, Ethics, and Democracy." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July-November, 2003): 239 - 61.
- Bohman, James. *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.
- Cohen, G.A. "Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods and Capabilities." In *The Quality of Life*, edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 9 – 29. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Crocker, David A. 1983. *Praxis and Democratic Socialism: The Critical Theory of Markovic and Stojanovic*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983.
- "Functioning and Capabilities: the Foundation of Sen's and Nussbaum's Development Ethic." *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 584 – 612.

- "Functioning and Capability: the Foundation of Sen's and Nussbaum's Development Ethic, part II." In *Women, Culture and Development*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, 153 – 98. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
  - "Consumption, Well-being and Capability." In *The Ethics of Consumption. The Good Life, Justice and Global Stewardship*, ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.
  - *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Ellerman, David. *Helping People Help Themselves: From the World Bank to Alternative Philosophy of Development Assistance*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. The Crossing Press. California. 1983.
- "Categories and Dichotomies" In *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. Lorraine Code. ed. 73 – 74. Routledge. 2004.
  - "Categories in Distress" In *Feminist Interventions in Ethics and Politics*. Barbara S. Andrew, Jean Keller, et. al. eds. 41 – 58. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2005.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. 2003. "The Human Development : Operationalizing Sen's Ideas on Capabilities." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July-November, 2003): 301 – 17.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and A. K. Shiva Kumar (eds.). *Readings in Human Development: Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development* . New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Gasper, Des. "Sen's Capability Approach and Nussbaum's Capability Ethics." *Journal of International Development* 9 (1997): 281 – 302.
- "Development as Freedom: Taking Economics beyond Commodities – The Cautious Boldness of Amartya Sen." *Journal of International Development* 12 (2000): 989 – 1001.
  - "Is Sen's Capability Approach an Adequate Basis for Considering Human Development?" *Review of Political Economy*, 14 (2002): 435 – 60.
- Gasper, Des, and Irene van Staveren. "Development as Freedom - and as What Else?" *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July-November, 2003): 137 – 61.
- Gasper, Des. *The Ethics of Development*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

- Hill, Marianne. "Development as Empowerment." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July- November, 2003): 117 – 35.
- Iversen, Vegard. 2003. "Intra-Household Inequality: A Challenge for the Capability Approach?" *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July- November, 2003): 93 – 115.
- Kabeer, Naila. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso, 1994 (reprinted 2003).
- Kabeer, Naila, ed. *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*. London: Zed Books, 2005.
- Kabeer, Naila and Ramya Subrahmanian. Eds. *Institutions, Relations, and Outcomes: Framework and Case Studies for Gender Aware Planning*. London: Zed Books. 1999.
- Koggel, Christine M., *Prospectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1998.
- "Globalization and Women's Paid Work: Expanding Freedom?" *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July- November, 2003): 163 – 184.
- Korsgaard, Christine. "Comment on G.A. Cohen and Amartya Sen," In *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 54 - 61. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Leach, Fiona. *Practicing Gender Analysis in Education*. London: Oxfam GB, 2003.
- March, Candida, Ines Smyth, and Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay. *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks*. London: Oxfam GB, 1999.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Nature, Functioning and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Supplementary Volume, 1988): 145 – 84.
- "Human Functioning and Social Justice. In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism." *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 202 – 46.
- "The Good as Discipline, the Good as Freedom." In *The Ethics of Consumption*, ed. David Crocker and Toby Linden, 312 – 41. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998.
- "Aristotle, Politics and Human Capabilities: A Response to Antony, Arneson,

- Charlesworth and Mulgan." *Ethics* 111 (2000): 102 – 40.
- *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
  - "Adaptive Preferences and Women's Options." *Economics and Philosophy* 17 (2001): 67 – 88.
  - "Beyond the Social Contract: Towards Global Justice." In *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Canberra, 2002.
  - "Moral Expertise? Constitutional Narrative and Philosophical Argument." *Metaphilosophy* 33 (2002): 502 – 20.
  - "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July- November, 2003): 33 – 59.
  - "Capable Management: An Interview with Martha Nussbaum." *Philosophy of Management* 3 (2003): 3-16.
  - "Beyond the Social Contract: Capabilities and Global Justice." *Oxford Development Studies* 32 (2004): 3-18.
  - "Body of the Nation: Why Women Were Mutilated in Gujarat." *The Boston Review* 29 (2004): 33-38.
  - "On Hearing Women's Voices: A Reply to Susan Okin." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32 (2004): 193-205.
  - "India, Sex Equality, and Constitutional Law." In *Constituting Women: The Gender of Constitutional Jurisprudence*, Beverly Baines and Ruth Rubio-Marin. eds. 174 – 204. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
  - "Promoting Women's Capabilities." Pp. 241-56 In *Global Tensions*, Lourdes Benaria and Savitri Bisnath. eds. 241 – 56. New York: Routledge, 2004.
  - "Care, Dependency, and Social Justice: A Challenge to Conventional Ideas of the Social Contract." Pp. 275-99 In *Living Longer: Ageing, Development and Social Protection*, Peter, Lloyd-Sherlock. ed. 275 – 99. London: Zed Books, 2004.
  - "Women's Bodies: Violence, Security, Capabilities." *Journal of Human Development: Alternative Economics in Action* 6 (2 2005): 167 – 83.
  - *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

- Nussbaum, Martha, and Amartya Sen, eds. *The Quality of Life. WIDER Studies in Development Economics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Okin, Susan Moller. "Poverty, Well-Being, and Gender: What Counts, Who is Heard?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31 (2003): 280 – 316.
- Peter, Fabienne. "Book review of *Women and Human Development*, by Martha Nussbaum." *Feminist Economics* 7 (2001): 131 – 35.
- "Gender and the Foundations of Social Choice: The Role of Situated Agency." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2003): 13 – 32.
- Pettit, Philip. 2001. "Capability and Freedom; a Defence of Sen." *Economics and Philosophy* 17 (2001): 1 – 20.
- Pogge, Thomas. ed. *Global Justice*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002.
- "Can the Capability Approach be justified?" *Philosophical Topics* 30 (2002).
- Pedrajas, Marta. "El Desarrollo Humano en la Economía Ética de Amartya Sen," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Valencia, 2005.
- Przeworski, Adam et. al. *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Qizilbash, Mozaffar. "Capabilities, Well-Being and Human Development: A Survey." *The Journal of Development Studies* 33 (1996): 143 – 62.
- "A Weakness of the Capability Approach with Respect to Gender Justice." *Journal of International Development* 9 (1997): 251- 62.
- "The Concept of Well-Being." *Economics and Philosophy* 14 (1998): 51 – 73.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- "Social Unity and Primary Goods" in Sen, Amartya and Bernard Williams eds. *Utilitarianism and Beyond*. 159 – 88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- *Political Liberalism*, Revised edition, Columbia University Press, 1996.
- *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Ray, Biswanath. *Welfare, Choice and Development: Essays in Honour of Professor*

- Amartya Sen*. Delhi: Kanishka, 2001.
- Richardson, Henry S. "Nussbaum: Love and Respect." *Metaphilosophy* 29 (1998):254.
- Robeyns, Ingrid. "An Unworkable Idea or a Promising Alternative? Sen's Capability Approach Re-examined." In *Center for Economic Studies Discussion paper 00.30*. Leuven, 2000.
- "Gender Inequality: A Capability Perspective." Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- "Is Nancy Fraser's Critique of Theories of Distributive Justice Justified?" *Constellations* 10 (4, 2003): 538 – 53.
- "Sen's Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities." *Feminist Economics* 9 (2-3, July- November, 2003): 61 – 92.
- "The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey." *Journal of Human Development* Vol. 6. No. 1. March, 2005.
- Roemer, John. *Theories of Distributive Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Scanlon, T. M. "Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy: 3 Sen and Consequentialism." *Economics and Philosophy* 17 (2001): 39 – 50.
- Seabright, Paul. "Pluralism and the Standard of Living." In *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. 393 – 409. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Sen, Amartya. "Utilitarianism and Welfarism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 463 – 89.
- "The Welfare Basis of Real Income Comparisons: A Survey." *Journal of Economic Literature* 17 (1, 1979).
- "Equality of What?" In *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. S. McMurrin. Salt Lake City, 1980.
- "Public Action and the Quality of Life in Developing Countries." *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 43 (1981): 287.
- "Development: Which Way Now?" *The Economic Journal* 93 (1983): 745.
- *Resources, Values, and Development*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- "The Living Standard." *Oxford Economic Papers*, (1984): 74-90.

- "Rights and Capabilities." in *Resources, Values and Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- *Commodities and Capabilities*. Amsterdam: North Holland, 1985.
- "Goals, Commitment and Identity." *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization* 1 (1985): 341 – 55.
- "Well-being, Agency and Freedom." *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXXII (1985): 169 – 221.
- "Women, Technology and Sexual Divisions." *Trade and Development* (1985): 195 – 223.
- "The Standard of Living." pp. 1-38 In *The Standard of Living*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn. 1 – 38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- "The Concept of Development," In *Handbook of Development Economics*, ed. H. Chenery and T.N. Srinivasa. 9 – 26. Elsevier Science Publishers, 1988.
- "Freedom of Choice: Concept and Content." *European Economic Review* 32 (1988): 269.
- "Economic Methodology: Heterogeneity and Relevance." *Social Research* 56 (1989): 299.
- "Food and Freedom." *World Development* 17 (1989): 769.
- "Indian Development: Lessons and Non-Lessons." *Daedalus* 118 (1989): 369.
- "Gender and Co-operative Conflicts." In *Persistent Inequalities*, ed. Irene Tinker. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- "Justice: Means Versus Freedoms." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990): 111 – 21.
- "Welfare, Freedom and Social Choice: a Reply." *Recherches Economiques de Louvain* 56 (1990): 451 – 85.
- "Presidential Address: The Nature of Inequality." In *Markets and Welfare*, ed. Kenneth J. Arrow. 2 – 21. London: Macmillan, 1991.
- *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

- "Capability and Well-being." In *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. 30 – 53. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- "Markets and Freedoms: Achievements and Limitations of the Market Mechanism in Promoting Individual Freedoms." *Oxford Economic Papers* 45 (1993): 519.
- "Gender Inequality and Theories of Justice." In *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover. 259 – 73. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- "Rationality and Social Choice." *The American Economic Review* 85 (1995): 1.
- "World Economy." *Nieman Reports* 49 (1995): 32.
- "Fertility and Coercion." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 63 (1996): 1035.
- "On the Foundations of Welfare Economics: Utility, Capability and Practical Reason." In *Ethics, Rationality and Economic Behaviour*, ed. Francesco Farina, Frank Hahn, and Stefano Vannucci. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- "On the Status of Equality." *Political Theory* 24 (1996): 394.
- "Editorial: Human Capital and Human Capability." *World Development* 25 (1997): 1959 – 61.
- "From Income Inequality to Economic Inequality." *Southern Economic Journal* 64 (1997): 384.
- *On Economic Inequality*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1997.
- "Population Policy: Authoritarianism Versus Cooperation." *Journal of Population Economics* 10 (1997): 3 – 22.
- "Human Development and Financial Conservatism." *World Development* 26 (1998): 733.
- "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10 (1999): 3.
- *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf, 1999.
- "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason." *The Journal of Philosophy* XCVII (2000): 477-502.
- "A Decade of Human Development," *Journal of Human Development*. 1 (2000).

- "Three Nobel Laureates on the State of Economics: Interviews with Robert Solow, Kenneth Arrow, and Amartya Sen." *Challenge!* 43 (200): 22-31.
  - "Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy: "Reply." *Economics and Philosophy* 17(2001): 51 – 66.
  - "Why Health Equity?" *Health Economics* 11(8, 2001): 659 – 66.
  - "Globalization, Inequality and Global Protest." *Development* 45 (2002): 11-16.
  - *Rationality and Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
  - "Capabilities, Lists and Public Reason" in *Feminist Economics*, 10 (November 2004): 3.
  - *The Argumentative Indian*. London, Penguin Books, 2005.
  - *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2006.
- Sen, Amartya, and Jean Dreze, *Hunger and Public Action*. Clarendon Press Oxford, 1989.
- Sen, Amartya; Stern, Nicholas; Stiglitz, Joseph; Fischer, Stanley. "Development Strategies: The Roles of the State and the Private Sector." *The World Bank Research Observer* (1990): 421.
- Sen, Amartya, and Jean Dreze. *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Sen, Amartya, and Jean Dreze. *India. Development and Participation*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Staveren, Irene van. *The Values of Economics*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Streeten, Paul. "Freedom and Welfare: A Review Essay on Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom." *Population & Development Review* 26 (2000): 153 – 62.
- Tong, Rosemarie. "Towards a Feminist Global Bioethics: Addressing Women's Health Concerns Worldwide." *Health Care Analysis* 9 (2001): 229 – 46.
- *Feminist Thought. A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, Colorado: Westville Press, 1998.
- Tong, Rosemarie, and Nancy Tuana. eds. *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application*. Boulder, Colorado: Westville Press, 1995.

Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990.

— *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997.

— *Democracy and Inclusion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.