

## **The engineered subject as an ethical achievement throughout the capabilities while positive freedoms according to Amartya Sen.<sup>1</sup>**

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### Abstract.

This paper reconstructs the senean bond among equality of opportunities, development and expansion of capabilities as well as their foundation. Sen states that equality of opportunities promotes development and this only occurs if capabilities or real freedoms are expanded. Development is an expanding process of the real freedoms towards people. This freedom is individual but it must include the freedom of all other people. Moreover, it is an individual freedom with social commitment. Following this idea, Sen raises the discussion on equal opportunities to an ethical field. The ethical management of the agent, which achievement is the engineered subject, is possible and necessary throughout the key conceptions of Amartya Sen linked as it is uttered in this analysis.

Keywords. Engineered-subject. Ethical-achievement. Capabilities. Linked components.

Si no creyera en lo que agencio...  
(If I did not believe in what I agency...)  
La Maza, Silvio Rodriguez

Since the 70s, Amartya Sen has innovated the way of approaching economic analysis, managing to think economics from a philosophical perspective and, especially, the issues of development. The key lies in the analysis of development based on freedom of choice. In addition to analyzing the economic postulates, the question that Sen tries to answer is how we can judge how good a range of choice is regardless considering the nature of the alternatives that constitutes that rank (Sen, 1999b, p.70).

Sen has expanded his position that economic development should not only encompass quantitative variables but also should be understood as an improvement to the set of opportunities for individuals that would expand their positive capabilities. These capabilities are the condition of possibility of Sen's development theory. While the negative liberties are the non-prohibition, the positive liberties are the construction of the means to perform the functions, being the functions the purposes to which each human being aspires, depending on

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is a modification and expansion of the one presented in the debate board "MECHANISM DESIGN: EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS, PRACTICAL RELEVANCE AND DOMAIN OF APPLICABILITY", XVIII National Congress of Philosophy, from October 4th to 6th, 2017, City of San Juan, Argentina and is inserted in the project UBACyT "From economics to ethics: methodological evaluation on the demarcation of a meta-ranking that considers commitment, the inclusion of others and exposure to risks for decision-making". The central thesis is still under development.

their desires in their socio-cultural contexts. The forefront of that research occupies the positive liberties that individuals possess. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen defines development as a process of expanding the [positive] capabilities enjoyed by individuals (Sen, 1999b, p.75). In this way, poverty is not a merely material fact, but is much more complex: it includes issues related to social policies, economic equity, and social cultural rights.

“Sen’s approach holds that economic development is the increase of people's positive freedoms, their right to do and be and to be expanded, precisely, their capabilities”. (Sen, 2009, pp. 94-95). If this is achieved, the subject is considered to be agenciaded.

The agenciaded subject, and this is the key, is considered an ethical achievement, which is being established through the link among equal opportunities, development and capabilities’s expansion. (Sen, 2009, pp. 325-328)

Having exposed these concepts, we present the intricate link. Sen raises the discussion on equal opportunities to an ethical level. Essentially, he states that the equality of opportunities promotes development and this happens only if real capabilities or real freedoms are expanded. What is this based on?

Sen understands development not only as the growth of GDP, the increase of personal incomes, technological progress, etc., but also as a process of expansion of the real freedoms of people. According to the author, the expansion of real freedoms is 1) the primordial end and 2) the principal average of development, which he calls the constitutive role and instrumental role of freedom in development, respectively. The constitutive role is related to the importance of fundamental freedoms for the enrichment of human life (Sen, 1999b, p.55). Among these fundamental freedoms we can mention some elementary capabilities such as avoiding starvation, malnutrition, premature mortality, as well as enjoying the freedoms connected to capabilities of reading and writing, of expressing oneself freely, of taking part in politics, etc. As a constitutive role, development implies the expansion of these as well as other human freedoms. In this sense, he disagrees with the stricter approaches to development (based on GDP growth or technical progress), which often query whether political participation contributes or not to development. To Sen, the question is wrongly formulated: it is not about contributing to development, but it is a constitutive part of development itself. A person, no matter how rich that person could be, who may lack this or other freedoms - always real or positive –could be lacking something that the person has reasons to value. Thus, the process of development, when judged in terms of the increase of human freedoms, must include the elimination of the deprivations of the people.

However, human’s freedoms have not only an intrinsic importance but also an instrumental one. The instrumental role of freedom refers to the way in which different types of rights and opportunities contribute to expanding the freedoms of humans and, therefore, to foster development (Sen, 1999b, p.56). ). This idea is related to the obvious connection that the expansion of each type of freedom must promotes to development, and that the different types of freedom are interrelated to an extent that freedom can contribute extraordinarily to increase others. (Sen, 1999b, p.57)

Sen considers five types of instrumental liberties: each of them tends to conduce to the general capability of people to live more freely, yet they help to complement each other. Firstly, political liberties refer to the opportunities that individuals have to decide who should govern them and under which principles (Sen, 2000, p.58). In other words, political liberties understand the political rights that accompany democracies in the broadest sense of the term, such as the possibility of dialogue, of voting, of expressing their point of view, among others.

Secondly, economic services refer to the opportunity for agents to make use of economic resources to consume, produce or make exchanges (Sen, 1999b, and p.59). The economic rights of people are reflected throughout their wealth: the higher the level of income or wealth, the greater the chances of consuming or exchanging what they want.

Thirdly, social opportunities refer to the systems of education or health, for example, that society has, and that influence the fundamental freedom of the agents to live better (Sen, 1999b, p.60). These services turn out to be of essential importance both for private life and for participating in political and economic activities.

Fourthly, transparency guarantees refer to the need for sincere openness that agents can expect: the freedom to interrelate with the guarantee of disclosure of information and clarity (Sen, 1999b, p.62). That is to say, society works by presupposing the existence of a minimum degree of confidence. In fact, when the confidence is violated, the lives of many people can be affected in a negative way.

Finally, protective security is necessary to provide a network of social protection that prevents the affected population from falling into the greatest misery (Sen, 1999b, p.64). To this regard, numerous institutional mechanisms such as unemployment benefits and assistance for the poor, programs to alleviate famine or emergency public employment to provide income to the poor are carried out for the purpose of protecting that part of the community that is under inferiority of conditions.

In Sen's approach, it is considered that development is achieved when people are capable of doing more things, and not when they have greater purchasing power. So, the notion of capabilities plays a central role. Precisely, Sen understands development as the capability of people to transform their assets into what they consider necessary to live the life they want to live. If the purpose is to focus attention on the true opportunities that agents have to reach their goals, then those relevant personal characteristics that determine the conversion of the goods in the agent's capability to reach their respective goals should be taken into account.

Rent and wealth may be desirable, but it is not a desirability on itself, because they are means that people use to get more freedom. In this sense, it is fundamental to integrate the role of income and wealth with that of capabilities –i.e., with the transformation of assets into real freedoms. For example, an incapacitated person may own a larger basket of goods and yet be less likely to lead a normal life than a healthy person with a smaller basket. The same happens either with elderly people or with greater tendency to get sick. A specific case is that of the African-Americans in the United States who, despite having a per capita income considerably higher than the inhabitants of China or Kerala, whose life expectancy is lower. Clearly, income does not provide enough information to assess the well-being of people; other factors such as

medical insurance, access to education, social violence and many others also significantly influence the quality of life of the communities.

It is necessary to clarify, though, one of the Senian keys: the functions. The concept of functions reflects the things that a person can be or do, such as eating well –not to starve-, participating in politics, etc. Likewise, the capability of a person refers to the various combinations of functions that can be achieved, since for Sen the functions are *télōs*. Therefore, the capability is a type of freedom: the freedom to achieve different combinations of functions or different lifestyles. For instance, a rich person may choose to fast, and in doing so would be getting similar results to those who are forced/obliged to starve. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that while the first person has a set of capabilities by which he/she can decide between different ways of feeding, in the case of the second one that set is more limited. Fasting by choice is not the same as skipping a meal out of need. The fact of having the chance to eat makes fasting what it really is: to decide not to eat when there exists the possibility of doing it. In this sense, the negative freedom is the non-prohibition while the positive is the fact, the state itself. There is nothing to prevent the Hindu laborer from vacationing at the Ritz Hotel in London, for example. (Sen, 1999a, p. 113). The laborer has the negative freedom but not the positive one because, in fact, he cannot do it, he does not have that capability or real or positive freedom. One of the main Sen's thesis states that the development of capabilities originates equality.

The last item to be exposed corresponds to the concept of equality.<sup>2</sup> Upon entering into this problematic, Sen discusses three theories of equality: utilitarian equality, total utility equality and Rawlsian equality. Regarding Utilitarian Equality (Sen, 1980, pp. 198-205), the utilitarian objective is to maximize the total utility of a community. It is not relevant how it is distributed among the participating agents; the essential thing is that the marginal utility of each –one- of them can be equalized. It should be remembered that the marginal utility is the utility that each agent obtains from an additional basket.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, (Total Utility Equality, Sen, 1980, pp. 205-213), welfarism considers that it is possible to judge the goodness in the totality of a situation in accordance with the goodness of the profits of that situation. This is a less demanding vision than that of utilitarianism, as it does not require that the goodness of profits be judged according to the global-total.<sup>4</sup> Finally, (Rawlsian Equality,

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<sup>2</sup> For this topic, cf. Leonardo Ivarola, Sandra Maceri, "Expansion of opportunities: its relationship with development and creative destruction" upcoming paper.

<sup>3</sup> Utilitarian equality is the equality that can be derived from the utilitarian concept of goodness applied to problems of distribution. Perhaps the simplest case is the "pure distribution problem": the problem of dividing a given homogeneous basket among a group of persons. Each person gets more utility the larger his share of the basket, and gets utility only from his share of the basket; his utility increases at a diminishing rate as the amount of his share goes up. The utilitarian objective is to maximize the sum total of utility irrespective of distribution, but that requires the equality of the marginal utility of everyone — marginal utility being the incremental utility each person would get from an additional unit of basket. According to one interpretation, this equality of marginal utility embodies equal treatment of everyone's interests.

<sup>4</sup> Welfarism is the view that the goodness of a state of affairs can be judged entirely by the goodness of the utilities in that state. This is a less demanding view than utilitarianism in that it does not demand - in addition - that the goodness of the utilities must be judged by their sum-total. Utilitarianism is, in this sense, a special case of welfarism, and provides one illustration of it. Another distinguished case is the criterion of judging the goodness of a state by the utility level of the worst-off person in that state - a criterion often attributed to John Rawls. One can also take some other function of the utilities - other than the sum-total or the minimal element. Utilitarian equality is one type of welfarist equality.

Sen, 1980, pp. 213-216), Rawls raises the existence of a series of primary goods that, supposedly, all rational individuals would want, beyond their particular preferences.<sup>5</sup>

It is relevant to note that Sen (Basic Capability Equality, Sen, 1980, pp. 217-220) proposes a different way of understanding equality. In this new conception, neither utilities nor primary goods intervene, but "capabilities". More specifically, equality to Sen is an equality of basic capability.<sup>6</sup> Having reached this point, the attention of the goods to which a person can access towards what the goods suppose for human beings is displaced.

According to Sen, if people were very similar, the equality of basic capability would be meaningless. Nevertheless, experience indicates that the conversion of goods into capabilities changes substantially from one person to the next one, and the equality of the former may be far from the equality of the latter (Sen, 1999a, p.153).

Let's consider the case of a disabled person. The disabled is at a disadvantage in terms of capabilities regarding other agents. Yet, this disadvantage is not taken into account by other approaches to equality. Namely, if the disabled were a person who is happy to see the rainbow or when his football team wins, his usefulness would be the same as that for a rich man to buy a yacht or who is vacationing in Dubai. Similarly, it may not be optimal to implement policies that improve the quality of life of the disabled, as this can generate costs that diminish the utility of the community as a whole. There is even the possibility that the disabled is a person who may enjoy an important economic welfare; in such a case, the analysis of equality based on primary goods would leave him out of, precisely, its analysis.

Sen, on the other hand, considers that a better way to evaluate equality is to eliminate or at least to alleviate the disadvantage that a disabled has compared to other members of the community. Thus, there will be equality when the disabled has the same capabilities as the rest of people. To this concern, the key is not to equate profits, marginal profits or even wealth but to abolish the disadvantages suffered by some people so that they can have the same capabilities as others. They can have the real opportunity to achieve valued functionings, selected from a wider range of good possibilities only if the ethical paradigm becomes a real possibility.

The whole "Equality of What?" (Sen, 1980) focuses on equality at a higher sphere, the ethical one, as it was tried to be shown above in this paper. Besides, it is important to note freedom is not only individual but includes the freedom of all other people. Moreover, it is an individual freedom with social commitment. The treatment of individual freedom is acquiring a clear perspective of social development. Being free to live the way anybody want can be greatly helped by the choices of others (Sen, 1999a, p 23) and it would be a mistake to think of achievements only in terms of active choice by oneself.

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<sup>5</sup> Rawls's "two principles of justice" characterize the need for equality in terms of - what he has called - "primary social goods." These are "things that every rational man is presumed to want," including "rights, liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect."

<sup>6</sup> Basic capability equality is a partial guide to the part of moral goodness that is associated with the idea of equality. Basic capability equality corresponds to total utility equality, and it can be extended in different directions. The new dimension can be utilised in different ways, of which basic capability equality is only one.

To sum up, it has been reconstructed the senean link between equality of opportunities, development and expansion of capabilities as well as their foundation. Sen states that equal opportunity promotes development and this only happens if real capabilities or freedoms are expanded. Development is a process of expanding the real freedoms of people. This freedom is individual but must include the freedom of all other people. Again, it is an individual freedom with social commitment. In this sense, it is necessary to repeat, Sen raises the discussion on equal opportunities to an ethical level (Sen, 2009, pp.200-204).

In general terms, the agency subject, that is to say, the engineered subject is an ethical achievement. And this is also true for some analyses of certain economic processes. Indeed, a possible analysis of economic processes is one in which the study of the capabilities of individuals intervenes for their own agency. Thus, the formation of expectations is detrimental to uncertainty, decisively determining economic results. The ethical management of the agent is possible and necessary throughout the key conceptions of Amartya Sen whose links have been highlighted in this paper.

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