

Amartya Sen, Democracy as a Universal Value (1999)

- “A country does not have to be deemed fit *for* democracy; rather, it has to become fit *through* democracy.”
- What is the “Lee hypothesis”? How does Sen respond?
- “Many economic technocrats recommend the use of economic incentives (which the market system provides) while ignoring political incentives (which democratic systems could guarantee). This is to opt for a deeply unbalanced set of ground rules.”
- What does Sen mean when he says that democracy has *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *constructive* importance?
- Regarding democracy’s *constructive* value:
 - Why is it important to debate the idea of what constitutes a “need”? (“We do not see immortality as a “need” because it is clearly unfeasible. Our conception of needs relates to our ideas of the preventable nature of some deprivations and to our understanding of what can be done about them.”)
- “the claim of a universal value is that people anywhere may have reason to see it as valuable....[especially] whether people might see some value in a claim that they have not yet considered adequately.”
- Counterarguments (how does Sen respond to each?)
 - “poor people are interested...in bread, not in democracy”
 - Cultural differences: “Asian values”, and Islam

Development as Freedom (preface and introduction)

- “Individual agency is, ultimately, central to addressing these deprivations. On the other hand, the freedom of agency is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements...there is strong evidence that economic and political freedoms help to reinforce one another, rather than being hostile to one another (as they are sometimes taken to be).” (preface)
- “Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states.” (3)
- “the citizens of Gabon or South Africa or Namibia or Brazil may be much richer in terms of per capita GNP than the citizens of Sri Lanka or China or the state of Kerala in India, but the latter may have very substantially higher life expectancies than the other...[and] African Americans have an *absolutely* lower chance of reaching mature ages than do people in many third world societies, such as China, or Sri Lanka, or parts of India.” (6)
- “To be *generically against* markets would be almost as odd as being generically against conversations between people (even though some conversations are clearly foul and cause problems for others—or even for the conversationalists themselves).” (6)
- How does Sen argue that the debate over the role of markets in society is too starkly black and white? (7)
- Five types of freedoms, viewed instrumentally: political freedoms (free speech and elections), economic facilities (opportunities to participate in trade and production), social opportunities (education and health facilities), transparency guarantees, and protective security.

From a 2007 Speech at the New School, “The Content of Democracy”

- Understanding the **human development index**, **social choice** theory, and its relation to Sen on justice
 - Comparative versus transcendental theories of justice
 - Sen’s “capabilities approach” as against Rawls’ “primary goods” approach
 - The obligation of “effective power”

“Amartya Sen Shakes Up Justice Theory”

From *The Idea of Justice*: “If a theory of justice is to guide reasoned choice of policies, strategies, or institutions, then the identification of fully just social arrangements is neither necessary nor sufficient.”

- Sen’s capabilities approach as cutting the Rawls-Nozick Gordian knot?