

Remarks to Amartya Sen's book Development As Freedom

Sen is a very enthusiastic writer with a solid understanding of economics. His book is easy to read and understand. One can appreciate the fact that Sen spares the reader the bombardment with boring statistics that most other writers cannot do without, but uses them only when needed to illustrate some point. I appreciated also that Sen takes the time to illustrate the dreadful situations in which women find themselves in countries that struggle economically, but at the same time gives examples on how to improve a situation, as well as examples of what happens when women are given a choice in determine their own lives. However, it is important to understand that women, especially those in countries that struggle financially, very often do not have the choice of improving their own lives. They depend mainly on the good will of their husbands or any other man. One must also understand that the governments of these countries are male-oriented and male-run, and that in most cases men do not want women to succeed, even if this would mean an improvement in their own situations, as Sen pointed out. My critique to Sen is, that although he very ably shows that women have the misfortune of living in financial poverty and dependence, and that interestingly enough the men in the societies he mentions hold the women responsible for many of the problems, which they have neither created nor are able to change, his examples on how to improve their situation are very well meaning but do not seem to have the impact needed to actively promote change. The underlying principle in Sen's book is not necessarily new, but effective, namely that freedom goes hand in hand with education. Education is one of the main factors in improving one's lifestyle as well as increasing one's choices. I agree with Sen too when he very clearly showed that with improved education women have fewer children, and also are able to have outside paid employment, which in turn helps them to gain a better status within their own community. Again my critique to this is that this is very true, but the facts in his book also show, to use his own example, that very few women are able to obtain an education in the first place. Sen also gives various insights into different philosophies that structured economics in the past. He ably shows where some of their weaknesses were as well as where their thoughts are still part of modern economics. In his book Sen conveys a very optimistic view about the economic future in general and shows the influential key elements in a free society: markets, social arrangements, political institutions, and open public discussion. He speaks of different freedoms, the intrinsic importance of human freedom as the pre-eminent objective of development, which has to be distinguished from the instrumental effectiveness of freedom of different kinds to promote human freedom. He stresses the point that the instrumental role of freedom concerns the way different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general, thus promoting development. At the same time Sen also suggests that the quality of our lives should not only be measured by our wealth but by our freedom.