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Abstract

Today's dominant discourses of international development increasingly focus on human agency as the measure of development in terms of individual capabilities. The individualised understanding of development takes a 'human-centred' or 'agent-orientated' view of the barriers to development. This article seeks to critically engage with the view of the human and of human agency articulated within this approach. In this discourse, development is taken out of a macro-political-economy context, in which development policies are shaped by social and political pressures or state-led policies. Foucault's insights on the rearticulation of power – shifting from the state-based, sovereign and disciplinary approaches of government ruling over society, towards the biopolitical or 'human-centred' approaches of governance through social processes – will be used to critically engage with the capabilities approach. This article genealogically draws out the changing nature of Western discourses of development and the understanding of policy practices as promoting the empowerment of the post-colonial other in order to examine how development and autonomy have been radically differently articulated in discourses of Western power and how today's discursive framing feeds on and transforms colonial and early post-colonial approaches to the human subject.

Keywords

Amartya Sen, development, human-centred, Michel Foucault, post-liberalism

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Introduction

In today's framings, human agency is at the heart of development discourse. This centrality of the human is often greeted as liberating and emancipatory in contrast to framings of liberal modernity, which are alleged to see economic growth in narrow material terms. The work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has been central to the establishment of the conceptual foundations of human development that provide the discursive underpinnings of today's dominant understandings of development as articulated in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) annual Human Development Reports and Human Development Indices.¹ In this framework, the focus is upon the growth of human capabilities and capacities: the empowerment or freedom of the individual. The concerns of 'development' shift away from the traditional, governmentalised, macro-socio-economic sphere towards emphasising policy directed towards an enabling environment in which individual empowerment and choice-making capabilities are at the forefront. In fact, in going beyond the focus upon development in terms of basic needs, as Martha Nussbaum notes, this approach is often more usefully termed the 'Capability Approach' or the 'Capabilities Approach'.²

The first annual United Nations Human Development Report (1990) opens with these paragraphs:

This Report is about people – and about how development enlarges their *choices*. It is about more than GNP growth, more than income and wealth and more than producing commodities and accumulating capital. A person's access to income may be one of the *choices*, but it is not the sum total of human endeavour.

Human development is a process of enlarging people's *choices*. The most critical of these wide-ranging *choices* are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional *choices* include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect.

Development enables people to have these *choices*. No one can guarantee human happiness, and the *choices* people make are their own concern. But the process of development should at least create a *conducive environment* for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests.

Human development thus concerns more than the formation of human capabilities, such as improved health or knowledge. It also concerns the *use of these capabilities*, be it for work,

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1. It should be noted that although Sen (along with Mahbub ul-Haq) is often credited with developing the concept of human development, its conceptualisation and application by the UN, the World Bank and other agencies are understood to be continually evolving, a point made explicitly in the UNDP's 2010 Human Development Report, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development* (New York: UNDP, 2010), 1. See also Sabina Alkire's Human Development Research Paper *Human Development: Definitions, Critiques and Related Concepts* (June 2010), available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/papers/HDRP_2010_01.pdf
 2. Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), x.

leisure or political and cultural activities. And if the scales of human development fail to balance the formation and use of human capabilities, much human potential will be frustrated.³

The seven occasions on which the word ‘choices’ is used in the first three paragraphs have been italicised in order to emphasise that human development is inextricably tied to the extension of capabilities and opportunities for choice-making.⁴ The key point to note is that these capabilities are disconnected from the level of material social and economic development (and may sometimes run directly counter to them) and go beyond the provision of basic needs. It is also important to highlight that the inter-subjective understanding of choice-making capability means that development is not a matter of merely providing inputs or resources for individuals or communities but also about the choices made in relation to their use. There is a large ideational or inter subjective element to the capability approach – the concern is with ‘the use of these capabilities’ and with the shaping of a ‘conducive environment’ in which the capacities for choice can be exercised and developed.

There has been a lot of academic and technical discussion over the merits and applicability of Sen’s approach, which has generally sought to expand, develop and refine Sen’s framework through critical engagement with his work.⁵ When Sen has been the subject of more direct criticism, this has generally focused on his lack of emphasis upon transformative political struggle to enable development and freedom for the post-colonial subject or the fact that he pays too little attention to the structural constraints of the

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3. UNDP, *Human Development Report 1990: The Concept and Measurement of Human Development* (New York: UNDP, 1990), 1, emphasis added.
 4. See Alkire, *Human Development*, 13, regarding the centrality of ‘the enlargement of choice’ to the definition of human development over the course of the evolution of the concept. As the recent UNDP Human Development Report *Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All* (New York: UNDP, 2011), 1, outlines: ‘Human development ... is about expanding choices. Freedoms and capabilities are a more expansive notion than basic needs. Many ends are necessary for a “good life,” ends that can be intrinsically as well as instrumentally valuable - we may value biodiversity, for example, or natural beauty, independently of its contribution to our living standards.’
 5. See, for example, on the measuring and grounding of the capabilities approach, the work of Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities and Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); critiques of the individualistic foundations, Ingrid Robeyns, ‘Sen’s Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities’, *Feminist Economics* 9, nos 2–3 (2003): 61–92; Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms: Sen’s Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); work on the ‘clustering’ of disadvantages, Jonathan Wolff and Avner de-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); on ‘collective capabilities’, Solava Ibrahim, ‘From Individual to Collective Capabilities: The Capability Approach as a Conceptual Framework for Self-Help’, *Journal of Human Development* 7, no. 3 (2006): 397–416; on ‘group capabilities’, Frances Stewart and Severine Deneulin, ‘Amartya Sen’s Contribution to Development Thinking’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 26, no. 1 (2002): 153–62; on ‘external capabilities’, James E. Foster and Christopher Handy, ‘External Capabilities’, *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Working Paper Series* (2008), available at: <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/OPHI-wp08.pdf> For a good summary, see David A. Clark, ‘The Capability Approach: Its Development, Critiques and Recent Advances’, *Global Poverty Research Group Working Paper 32* (2005), available at: <http://www.gprg.org/pubs/workingpapers/pdfs/gprg-wps-032.pdf>

world market and capitalist social relations.⁶ The human development approach has also been substantially critiqued in the discipline of International Relations from both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives. Many Marxist critics have condemned the shift away from material definitions of development to more inter subjective frameworks of measurement.⁷ From a Foucauldian perspective, Mark Duffield has critically explored the deployment of conceptions of human development as a technology of governance, for example, in *Development, Security and Unending War*:

Sustainable development is about creating diversity and choice, enabling people to manage the risks and contingencies of their existence better and, through regulatory and disciplinary interventions, helping surplus population to maintain a homeostatic condition of self-reliance.⁸

This article seeks to mount a different engagement with human-centred framings of development in both academic and policy literatures, instead taking seriously Sen's claim of 'development as freedom' to explore how human development discursively frames the 'freedom' and 'agency' of the human subject. While Duffield describes well

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6. See, for example, V. Navarro, 'Development and Quality of Life: A Critique of Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom', *International Journal of Health Services: Planning, Administration and Evaluation* 30, no. 4 (2000): 661–74; Ranabir Samaddar, *Flags and Rights* (Kolkata: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group/Timir Printing Works, 2006); Bhupinder Chimni, 'The Sen Conception of Development and Contemporary International Law Discourse: Some Parallels', *Law and Development Review* 1, no. 1 (2008): Article 2, available at: <http://www.jnu.ac.in/SIS/MakingSISVisible/Publications/Sen%20Conception%20of%20Development%20as%20Freedom%20BSChimni.pdf>
 7. See, for example, John Pender, 'From "Structural Adjustment" to "Comprehensive Development Framework": Conditionality Transformed?', *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2001): 397–411; Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); Vanessa Pupavac, 'Witnessing the Demise of the Developing State: Problems for Humanitarian Advocacy', in *State-Building: Theory and Practice*, eds Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson (London: Routledge, 2007), 89–106.
 8. Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 115. See also Vivienne Jabri, *War and the Transformation of Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 96; Julian Reid, 'The Biopoliticization of Humanitarianism: From Saving Bare Life to Securing the Biohuman in Post-Interventionary Societies', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4, no. 4 (2010): 391–411. This understanding of liberal discourses of development as securing life derives from Michel Foucault's juxtaposition of sovereign power vis-à-vis biopower in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1981), 135–45; see also "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 239–63. Work on the biopolitical shift away from state-based framings of material development to societal understandings and the concern with human life itself has also been informed by the work of Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt; see, for example, Marc G. Doucet and Miguel de Larrinaga, 'Human Security and the Securing of Human Life: Tracing Global Sovereign and Biopolitical Rule', in *Critical Perspectives on Human Security: Rethinking Emancipation and Power in International Relations*, eds David Chandler and Nik Hynek (London: Routledge, 2011), 129–43; Patricia Owens, 'Human Security and the Rise of the Social', *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 547–67.

the implications of reinterpreting development in inter subjective rather than material terms, and the shift to neoliberal doctrines of self-reliance, this article is less concerned with critiquing human-centred development as an economically driven policy discourse of intervention, policing, regulation and control. It seeks instead to consider Sen's work in a broader context of the understanding of the human subject itself, particularly as it is articulated at the limits of liberalism and helps to construct and shape these limits – in the problematisation of the colonial and post-colonial subject. It particularly seeks to highlight how these limits are articulated less in the spatio-temporal terms of international hierarchy, associated with traditional liberal discourses of international relations,⁹ and more in the metaphysical terms of the inner life of the subjects of international development policy interventions.

In this respect, Michel Foucault's work, on shifting liberal governing rationalities and the birth of biopolitics, enables us to highlight how Sen's approach fundamentally challenges traditional liberal understandings of human 'agency' and human 'freedom' in this area. It will be suggested that Foucault, following Marx, powerfully theorises the problematic of the shifts and transformations within liberal thought as the liberal project increasingly exhausts the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment.¹⁰ These shifts are incrementally reflected in the shrinking of the liberal world and in the reduction of the liberal understanding of the subject, as barriers and limits are increasingly introduced; at first, as external to the liberal subject and, finally, as internal to the liberal subject. For Foucault, the shifting understanding of the liberal subject was of crucial importance: his work on biopolitics and the governance of the self can be read as a critical engagement with understanding the reshaping of liberal aspirations from a concern with the knowledge of and transformation of the external world to the management of the inner world of subjects, articulated clearly in the shift from government, based upon liberal frames of representation, to biopolitical governance, the regulation of ways or modes of individual being.¹¹ In this shift, our understanding of

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9. See, for example, R.B.J. Walker, *After the Globe, before the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 96–149; Beate Jahn, 'The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part I)', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2007): 87–106.
 10. For Karl Marx, 1830 marked the turning point, from which point onwards the science of political economy, which reached its high point with Ricardo, could only degenerate and become vulgarised, *Capital: Volume One* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), 24–5.
 11. As Foucault indicates, this shift away from state-based, sovereign and disciplinary power to a biopolitical or 'human-centred' approach constitutes 'the population as a political problem' and, within this, focuses on the real lives or the everyday of individuals and communities 'and their environment, the milieu in which they live ... to the extent that it is not a natural environment, that it has been created by the population and therefore has effects on that population' (*"Society Must Be Defended"*, 245). It is this inter subjective 'milieu' which shapes individual behavioural choices and accounts 'for action at a distance of one body on another' and thereby 'appears as a field of intervention' for governance policy making, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 20–1. In this framework, governance operates on society indirectly, through shaping the inter

what it means to be human, and of what being human means for our engagement with the world we live in, is fundamentally altered.

Foucault deals with this problematic on several occasions, most notably in his work on *The Birth of Biopolitics* but also, through analogy, in his study of the decay of Greek democratic thought, especially as reflected in the work of Plato.¹² While Foucault engaged critically with the conceptual basis of this shift,¹³ it is suggested here that in the work of Amartya Sen, this ‘post-liberal’ inversion can be seen in its most fully articulated form:¹⁴ the conception of ‘development as freedom’ inverts classical or traditional framings of both these terms as Sen shifts the emphasis of both problematics to the inner world of the subject. For Sen, development is no longer a question of the material transformation of the external world. In fact, development, in essence, disappears – it has no fixed or universal external material measurement – it is deontologised, or rather assumes the ontology of the human subject itself. At the same time, freedom is also dissolved as a meaningful way of understanding the political or legal status of the subject: freedom also loses its materiality as it loses its external universalist moorings and instead becomes relocated to the interior life capabilities of the individual.

Foucault’s Work on the Genealogy of the Subject

Foucault spent his life working and reworking a genealogy of understanding the shifts in governmentalities and the shrinking of the human subject through the reduction of the world to the inner life of the subject. The creation and the death or decline of the human

subjective processes of societal life itself, rather than through the formal framework of public law in relation to individuals as citizens: ‘action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players’, as Foucault states in *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 260.

12. Foucault, *The Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011).
13. Of course, it is also possible to read Foucault as, to a certain extent, endorsing the shift from classical liberal understandings of freedom. This reading is particularly well articulated by Saul Tobias, ‘Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 22, no. 4 (2005): 65–85; see also Thomas L. Dumm, *Michael Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (London: Sage, 1996); Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1995); William Connolly, ‘Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault’, *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 365–89. My use of Foucault here is not so much to undertake a Foucauldian critique of Sen but to mobilise Foucault’s insights with regard to the potential for subjectivising or internalising the barriers to freedom in liberal discourse.
14. I use the term ‘post-liberal’ to avoid some of the misleading readings generated by the broad and contradictory usage of terms such as ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘biopolitics’ and to highlight the shrinking of the liberal world, analysed here, suggesting that the shift, from transforming the external world to work on the inner world, represents the end of the liberal problematic and the final stage of the Enlightenment project which gave birth to the human subject; see, further, Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

subject and its relationship to the crisis of liberalism and the forms of governing is a rich and engaging one. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he considered whether the subjection of the subject – precisely through its capacity for subjective will; as a subject of individual choices which are both irreducible and non-transferable – was already necessarily implied in the Enlightenment understanding of the subject or whether it was a contingent product of its economic and political development.¹⁵ This, of course, is a vital question for those interested in political alternatives which necessarily depend on a revitalised understanding of the Enlightenment subject or at least of how Enlightenment conceptions might have led to the subjective understandings of liberalism today.

In *The Government of the Self and Others*, Foucault similarly addresses this question. In going back to Immanuel Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment?', he suggested that, despite the framework of self-emancipation, the Kantian project had an ambiguous approach to internal agency which facilitates and legitimises the need for an external or outside agency which acts to 'free' the subject, in this case the Enlightened monarch or, later, the French Revolution.¹⁶ The call for self-emancipation thereby implicitly allows for the possibility that those who have not emancipated themselves can be understood to lack their own agential capacity for choosing freedom and to require development through external agency to enable them to make better choices. Of most importance for this study is that Foucault emphasises that, for Kant, the external agency does not 'free' the subject merely by removing external barriers to freedom.¹⁷

The barrier to Enlightenment is an internal one – the flaw of the subject is a matter of 'will'.¹⁸ The lack of freedom or autonomy is not due to external oppression or material deprivation, but 'a sort of deficit in the relationship of autonomy to oneself'.¹⁹ The king of Prussia or the Revolution does not 'free' the subject in the formal terms of liberation or self-government, but in enabling the subject to act according to reason and through enabling reason to guide government. The fact that this is an inner problem means that subjugation or lack of freedom is not a natural or inevitable product but also that the subject cannot be freed merely by the action of others – of liberators.²⁰ Enlightenment as transformation/development is a matter of enabling the subject to free itself – to govern itself through reason – to use its faculties for reason in the correct way.

Therefore, for Foucault, implicit within Enlightenment assumptions – hidden behind the autonomous subject – was a potential subject in need of governance: a subject which could establish the need for government and which could set the limits to government in its own (lack of) development – understood as internal capacities for self-governance,

15. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 271–3.

16. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 37–9.

17. This point is well noted in Tobias, 'Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities'; however, while Tobias draws out the importance of meeting essential human needs as a precondition for the exercise of freedom, here the concern is with the discursive framing of subjective, internal, barriers to freedom in the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum.

18. *Ibid.*, 29.

19. *Ibid.*, 33.

20. *Ibid.*, 34.

will or adequate choice-making.²¹ This article seeks to build on this insight with regard to the metaphysical understanding of enlightenment as an inner quality or capability which cannot be imposed or given, and which justifies external intervention aimed at inculcating the inner capacities for ‘freedom’. It will argue that this framing is of vital importance to understand the discourse of ‘development as freedom’, as well as other dominant discourses, which talk of the development of autonomy, of self-realisation, of empowerment and of vulnerability and resilience.

Foucault argued that while the liberal problematic always centred around the problematic of human reason and its limits, the ontology of the human subject was one which could only be understood as a historical product of human struggle, rather than as a metaphysical construct.²² This project becomes more important under today’s exhaustion of liberalism, with the focus on limits rather than progress and the turning inwards of liberal framings of the subject. In post-liberal framings, rather than the liberal subject emancipating itself – through its growth and the transformation of its circumstances – there is no longer the starting assumption of a transformative subject, driving progress and emancipation. While there is still a focus on the subject, this subject becomes the object of transformative practices of governance as development rather than the subject or agent of development as external transformation.²³

The sphere of government action is that of governance: of enabling the subject to construct itself, to empower itself. In this process, government no longer stands separate from and above society but instead becomes subsumed into these societal processes.

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21. For Marx and Engels, the idealism of the Enlightenment perspective, which Foucault so correctly highlights, was perceived to have been overcome through the materialist analysis of social relations and the emergence of a universal class which needed to transform these relations in order to emancipate itself: the industrial proletariat. Of course, if this collective agent of self-transformation were not to appear or if it were to suffer a historical class defeat rather than achieve its ultimate aims, then it would appear that it was the Enlightenment which both gave birth to and foretold the death of the ‘human’ as a self-realising subject. The inability of humanity to give meaning to the world through the Enlightenment and therefore the shift to conceiving of itself and its meaning-creating subjectivity as the problem in need of resolution is, of course, acutely articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche; see, in particular, ‘Our Note of Interrogation’, in *The Gay Science* (New York: Dover, 2006), 159–60. See also the powerful insights of Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005).
22. Foucault, ‘What Is Enlightenment?’, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50, 6.
23. See further Jonathan Joseph, *The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) for a study of how governmentality works both at the level of states and individuals; for studies of governmentality as a development discourse, see, for example, Tanya Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); James Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

Government is no longer conceived as wise management directing or controlling society as in the pre-liberal or pre-modern age of Machiavelli; nor is government based on the autonomy of the political sphere and teleologies of material development and calculative progress, as in the age of modern mass society and the nation state.²⁴ The merging of the political into the social, for Foucault, meant that the liberal world becomes reduced to work on the active empowerment of the individual.²⁵ Sen's work fits squarely into this framing: he critiques both the market-based liberal/neoliberal conception of the rational autonomous individual capable of assuming responsibility for its own development and also the state-based, top-down liberal/socialist conception of the subject as passive and the object of social engineering projects of modernisation. For Sen, the individual is the only agent of development but the individual is a vulnerable subject needing the enabling or empowering of external agency: the individual is thereby both the ends and the means of 'development as freedom'.

Development after the Colonial/Post-colonial Problematic

At the centre of the shift from development as material progress to development as inner progress is the problematisation of the inner world of the subject. Rather than the assumption of *homo oeconomicus*, the rational decision-maker, there is an emphasis on the importance of differentiated subjectivity - of superstition, culture, ethics and irrationality - to decision-making. As Sen argues, there is no evidence for the view that individuals' behavioural choices can be understood through the narrow prism of the pursuit of rational self-interest.²⁶ In his view, the liberal understanding that 'we live in a world of reasonably well-informed people acting intelligently in pursuit of their self-interests' is misplaced; our cultural milieus, social embeddedness and inter subjective affectivities mean that normative and value distinctions need to be introduced into the analysis.²⁷ Once there is no universal rational subject, but differently inter subjectively constructed frameworks of behavioural choice, choice-making begins to open up as a sphere for understanding difference and for intervening on the basis of overcoming or ameliorating difference. As Sen notes:

to attach importance to the agency aspect of each person does not entail accepting whatever a person happens to value as being valuable. ... Respecting the agency aspect points to the appropriateness of going beyond a person's well-being into his or her valuations, commitments,

24. See Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*"; *Security, Territory and Population*.

25. In this sense, this work develops the approach of Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, who are entirely correct in noting that this 'ethical *a priori* of active citizens in an active society is perhaps the most fundamental, and most generalizable, characteristic of these new rationalities of government', *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 215; see also Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2010).

26. Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 15–22.

27. *Ibid.*, 17.

etc. but the necessity of assessing these valuations ... is not eliminated. ... [E]ven though 'the use of one's agency is, in an important sense, a matter for oneself to judge', the need for careful assessment of aims, objectives, allegiances, etc., and of the conception of the good, may be important and exacting.²⁸

Where, for classical liberal framings of *homo œconomicus*, the inside of the human head was as out of bounds as the inside of the sovereign state in International Relations theory, the critique of liberal rationalist economic assumptions necessarily focuses on the social or inter subjective construction of the behavioural choices of the liberal subject. The crucial facet of this approach in economic theorising, often called 'new institutionalist economics',²⁹ is that differences in outcomes can be understood as conscious, subjective choices, rather than as structurally imposed outcomes. The important research focus is then the individual making the decisions or choices and the subjectively created institutional frameworks (formal and informal) determining or structuring these choices. This is a social perspective which starts from the individual as a decision-maker and then works outwards to understand why 'wrong' choices are made, rather than equipping the individual with a set of universal rational capacities and understanding the differences in outcomes as products of social and economic contexts and relationships. This perspective is much more individual-focused, but the individual subject is understood as an active agent or producer of their social and economic context rather than as a product or reflection of it. 'Wrong' choices are understood firstly in terms of institutional blockages at the level of custom, ideology and ideas and then in terms of the formal institutional blockages – the incentives and opportunities available to enable other choices. This problematic shares much with therapeutic approaches, which also work at the level of the individual (attempting to remove psychological blockages to making better choices) rather than operating at the level of social or economic relations.

As Foucault noted, the work of these neoliberal or new institutionalist economic theorists was not narrowly concerned with economic theory; the institutionalist approach was closely tied to psychological and sociological framings and drew on legal and historical problematics, raising 'a whole series of problems that are more historical and institutional than specifically economic, but which opened the way for very interesting research on the political-institutional framework of the development of capitalism, and from which the American neo-liberals benefited'.³⁰ Of particular importance, for this article, is the impact of these ideas on UN development programmes and World Bank policy making frameworks in the 1990s, which can be clearly traced in the influence of writers such as Douglass North and, of course, Amartya Sen. I want to suggest that while institutionalist approaches only became dominant after the end of the Cold War, their appearance, especially in the field of International Relations, can be genealogically traced through the discourse of development as a defensive understanding of the gap between

28. Ibid., 42.

29. See, for example, Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

30. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 135.

the promise of freedom and economic progress under the universalist teleological framing of liberal modernity and the limits to this telos, in the lack of economic, social and political progress and the failure to generalise liberal modes of government in the colonial and post-colonial world.

Colonialism was substantially politically challenged and put on the defensive only with the First World War, which led to the rise of the discourses of universal rights of self-determination, articulated both by Lenin, with the birth of the revolutionary Soviet Union, and by US President Woodrow Wilson, with America's rise to world power and aspiration to weaken the European colonial powers. Once brought into the universalist liberal framework of understanding, the discourse of development was used both to legitimise and to negotiate the decline of colonial power. Given its clearest intellectual articulation in Lord Lugard's *Dual Mandate*,³¹ British colonial domination was justified on the basis that the difference between the Western subject and the colonial subject was a question of culture and values – a problem of the inner world of the subject – preventing the colonial subject from economic and social development. Lugard was the first to articulate an institutionalist understanding of development, concerned as much with the inculcation of values and understanding through the export of political institutions of integration, as with economic progress itself. Development was conceived as the barrier to self-determination as much as the achievement of development was conceived as a justification for external rule, for it was through Western 'enlightened' knowledge and experience of transforming the external world that the colonial subject could be emancipated.

The discourse of development, of the 'Dual Mandate' serving both British imperial interests and the self-interest of the colonial subject, could be construed as a discourse of 'Development as Freedom', but one very different from that articulated three-quarters of a century later by Sen. For the colonial mind, the cultural and moral incapacities of the colonial subject prevented development and therefore it was a civilisational task of transforming the subject to create the conditions for autonomy, for the emergence of the liberal subject – for freedom as self-determination. In Lugard's own words:

As Roman imperialism laid the foundation of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands [Britain] along the path of progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt and bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress. ... If there is unrest, and a desire for independence, as in India and Egypt, it is because we have taught the values of liberty and freedom. ... Their very discontent is a measure of their progress.³²

As Foucault highlights with regard to Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment?', the Enlightenment project of civilising those not enlightened enough to civilise themselves was seen to be the work of external agency. In order to be freed, the subject first had to be subjected – just as the civilised Romans had to subject the barbarian Britons. Of course, it was not surprising that the denial of liberal universalist understandings of the subject – explicit in

31. Lord Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 1923).

32. *Ibid.*, 618.

colonial rule and the denial of formal liberal freedoms of self-rule and sovereign independence – should take a civilisational focus. Social and economic difference was used to justify the denial of political and legal equality and at the same time subordinated to universality through the assumption that the colonial power was capable of assisting the colonial subject in their journey towards ‘development’ understood as a higher and more enlightened, ‘modern’ or ‘liberal’ existence.

This discourse of development can, of course, be critically engaged with in the manner of Edward Said’s ground-breaking framework of *Orientalism*, as presupposing ‘Western superiority and Oriental inferiority’.³³ There can be little doubt that the birth of the Enlightenment brought with it a Eurocentric view of the world that was universalistic in its assumptions that differences would be progressively overcome through ‘development’.³⁴ This understanding of progress or civilisation as a universal teleology demarcating those states and societies which were more and less ‘advanced’ was based on the presupposition that the Enlightenment brought economic and social progress to the West and demonstrated a path which could be universally replicated through the enlightenment of the colonial subject through the external agency of colonial power.

However, what is missing in this critique is the transformation in the understandings of the limits and tasks of development. The colonial subject was not interpellated as a liberal subject, but a subject understood as lacking autonomy – the liberal subject had to be created in the case of the colonial ‘exception’, on the assumption that the subject could become a liberal and thereby an autonomous and self-governing subject. Here, ‘development’ was separated temporally and spatially from ‘freedom’. In the classical liberal modernist teleology, the liberal world would expand spatially as the external world progressed temporally towards ‘freedom’. There was a liberal teleology of progress, which was expressed in both spatial and temporal terms, in terms of a liberal ‘inside’ and a non-liberal ‘outside’, seen as shrinking with the progress of development. Development was the mechanism through which the world would be universalised, through which the gap between the liberal vision of the future and the realities of the present would be bridged.

The discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’,³⁵ of the liberal and the colonial/post-colonial world, articulated the limits of liberalism as external, thereby giving an ontological content to development in terms of both spatiality and temporality. There could only be discourses of spatial and temporal differentiation with the understanding that the limits to liberal universalist frameworks of understanding were external ones. As R.B.J. Walker notes, liberal frameworks of international development (reaching an apogee in Walt Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth*) intimately connected the limits of liberalism spatially and temporally.³⁶ The key point to understand with regard to today’s articulation of

33. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), 42.

34. See also Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Adam Burgess, *Divided Europe: The New Domination of the East* (London: Pluto, 1997).

35. Stuart Hall, ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’, in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, eds Tania Das Gupta, Carl E. James, Roger C.A. Maaka et al. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2007), 56–63.

‘development as freedom’ is that the bifurcation – both in spatial and temporal terms – between the West and the Rest has been overcome through a universalising framework which internalises rather than externalises the limits of liberalism. Here, we have a very different, post-liberal, universalism, one which universalises the understanding of the vulnerable subject in need of development. In this respect, development becomes a permanent project of self-development, of freeing the subject from their inner limitations. This project is necessarily inclusive because there is no longer any ‘outside’.

The ‘Agent-Centred’ Framework

In Sen’s ‘agent-centred’ world there are no fixed external universals and therefore there is no framework or yardstick for an external measurement of development. The transformative project of development is reduced down to that of enlarging individual agency understood as choice-making capacity. Freedom now becomes an internal process of empowerment, one with no fixed measure of comparison and no fixed end or goal. Where the colonial subject needed development for the fixed and universal goal of self-government as freedom, Sen’s subject has an ongoing struggle for ‘freedom’ in which the inner life of the individual is both the means for freedom and the measure of freedom:

Expansion of freedom is viewed, in this approach, both as the primary end and as the principal means of development. Development consists in the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency.³⁷

Individuals have to be freed from ‘unfreedoms’, which can take both material and immaterial or ideological forms.³⁸ It needs to be emphasised that while external conditions and institutional structures are seen as contributing to freedom and development, both in terms of rights and protections and material needs such as nourishment and welfare, these external aspects are not themselves constitutive of freedom or development.³⁹

36. Walker, *After the Globe, before the World*, 134.

37. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xii.

38. Material inequalities form an important barrier to freedom; see, for example, Jean Drèze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); *India: Development and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); however, it is important to stress that the meeting of basic needs is a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for the capabilities approach.

39. For this reason, it is important to note the ‘process’ aspects of freedom, for authors such as Sen and Nussbaum, which enable the capabilities approach to go beyond the formal procedural understandings of liberal rights and equality as well as the statist, or consequentialist, approach of focusing on the equality of opportunities or outcomes. Here, the individual’s own agency is the key to their ‘development’ and it is this internal ‘agency aspect’ of the individual which is stressed, for example, Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 17–19. The individual’s reflective participative and active role in decision-making is not merely a technical means to development (e.g. in more efficient policy making) but is actually constitutive of development itself (*ibid.*, 290–2); see, further, Sen, *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Part VI ‘Freedom and Social Choice: The Arrow Lectures’.

Freedom, here, is not articulated in a classical liberal framing of the constitution of an autonomous subject. Where Sen goes beyond the framings of liberal modernity is that development and freedom can only be understood in relation to the inner world of the individual.

Development understood in terms of agential capabilities cannot be measured materially because these capacities are internal to the individual (or internal to the society or community which is the object of developmental concern). Capabilities cannot be measured in terms of surface outcomes: a society may be healthy or wealthy but still lack capabilities. This is because wealth may have stemmed from good fortune or specific characteristics, which cannot be sustained or cannot be replicated. The capabilities approach is not directly concerned with the material outcomes of development policies; nor is it directly concerned with the inputs provided to individuals. At the heart of the concern with human development is the inner capability of individuals to 'choose' 'freely' what is in their own and their society's interests. It is the lifestyle choices freely made which count. As Martha Nussbaum stresses: 'There is a huge moral difference between a policy that promotes health and one that promotes health capabilities – the latter not the former, honors the person's lifestyle choices.'⁴⁰ The inculcation of capabilities is hostile to functionalist or utilitarian approaches, which would support paternalistic or coercive health interventions for societal ends. It is the agential process of individual empowerment which is vital, not the social outcome per se. The 'agent-centred' frameworks of both Sen and Nussbaum ascribe a high value to choice, and place it at the centre of their moral philosophical frameworks.⁴¹

The central point I wish to make here is not so much that development is degraded to a basic level of the material resources which are considered necessary or desirable for the sustainability of poverty, maintaining the 'bare life' of the 'uninsured',⁴² but that the subject and object of development are internalised. Development is judged on the basis of the individual's development and use of 'reasoned agency'. Development is the task of all stakeholders but can only be measured in the individual's inner achievement of 'freedom'. Freedom is thereby not defined in terms of autonomy, self-government or democracy – 'freedom' is no longer conceptualised in the formal liberal sense of either one is free or one is oppressed. Here, freedom is a continuum, the goal of which is never reached as barriers or 'unfreedoms' to 'reasoned agency' can always reappear and can only be known post hoc. Both development – the process of achieving freedom – and freedom itself are internal processes. This is why Sen talks of the 'expansion of freedom', never of the achievement of freedom.

The individual's 'freedom' is conceptually crucial for Sen and becomes the starting point, the means and the end point for understanding development:

Societal 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

40. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 26.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*.

freedoms of individuals, seen as active agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of dispensed benefits.⁴³

If people are not exercising ‘reasoned choice-making’, then there is something wrong with the institutions of society and the inner world of opinions and beliefs. If choice-making is limited or unreasoned, then people lack freedom and development is necessary to act on the institutions which are blocking this process of free and reasoned choice-making. Unlike in liberal framings, where the interests of the subject are revealed through their preferences and choices, rather than problematised, choices are understood as ‘adaptive’ products of individuals’ lack of freedom, like the fox in the fable who calls the grapes sour after he finds that he cannot reach them.⁴⁴ Governments are understood to be responsible for enabling the development of this reasoning capacity, not for the material provision of life’s necessities to enable freedom as an assumed capacity for choice-making. In liberal discourse, the provision of food and nutrition to the poor would be seen as a valuable step to enabling free choice-making; however, in the post-liberal discourse of development capabilities, the provision of food is no more an answer to famine than it is to a lack of nutrition, as ‘a policy that just doles out food to people rather than giving them choice in matters of nutrition is insufficiently respectful of their freedom’.⁴⁵

For the capabilities approach to agential capacity, there is no such thing as the universal liberal subject; there are merely capacity differentials in choice-making which are constituted through the ‘unfreedoms’ with which individuals are confronted. Here, the subject is autonomous but not free. The subject is autonomous as a choice-making actor, but never truly capable of making a ‘free and reasoned’ choice. Freedom – choice-making capacity – has always to be expanded. This need for the expansion of freedom is as necessary for Western subjects as for post-colonial subjects. For Sen, there is no divide between the West and the Rest, no sphere of liberalism and sphere of non-liberal or a-liberal subjects. This is as inclusive an analysis as can be imagined, and in this way completes or overcomes the immanent contradiction between the Enlightenment’s metaphysical conception of the rational and reasoning transformative universal subject and the limits posed by the social relations of capitalist modernity.

In the ‘agent-centred’ approach of Sen, the categories of liberal modernity no longer operate to demarcate a clear conceptual distinction between the formal political and legal sphere and the informal sphere of social and economic processes.⁴⁶ Once freedom is conceptualised not in political and legal terms but in terms of social empowerment, the lack of freedom can exist as much in a wealthy liberal democracy as under any other society. Any individual can become unfree if Sen’s conception of ‘the more inclusive idea of capability deprivation’ is taken up.⁴⁷ In this conception, political freedom and

43. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, xii–xiii.

44. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 54; see also Wolff and de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*.

45. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 56.

46. Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2006); *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

47. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 20.

market economic competition are to be valued because they help facilitate individual choice-making capacities and enable their expression. The assumption is that without ‘development’, individuals will not be free, in the sense of no longer lacking the capabilities necessary to pursue their reasoned goals. Here none of us are free from the need for development. Development is the process of altering the social milieu which shapes our capacities and capabilities for free choices. In this understanding of freedom, there can be no assumption of originary or universal autonomy and rationality, such as that underpinning social contract theorising, the mainstay of the political and legal subject of liberal modernity. To this ‘*arrangement-focused*’ view, Sen juxtaposes a ‘*realization-focused*’ understanding of justice.⁴⁸ For Sen, justice, like development, cannot be universal but only understood in terms of individual empowerment and capacity-building:

The question to ask, then, is this, if the justice of what happens in a society depends on a combination of institutional features and actual behavioural characteristics, along with other influences that determine the social realizations, then is it possible to identify ‘just’ institutions for a society without making them contingent on actual behaviour[?]... Indeed, we have good reason for recognizing that the pursuit of *justice is partly a matter of the gradual formation of behaviour patterns*.⁴⁹

Justice is not a matter of liberal institutional arrangements but about empowering or capability-building individuals; there is no abstract universalism but rather the recognition that ‘realisation’ comes first. On the basis of injustice, or ‘unfreedoms’, then, justice (like development) becomes a process of realisation ‘aimed at guiding social choice towards social justice’.⁵⁰ Justice aims at enlarging justice as freedom in the same way as development aims at enlarging development as freedom. Justice is a continuous process not a fixed and externally measurable end or goal.

The Displacement of the External World

As we have seen, the key to Sen’s perspective of ‘development as freedom’ is capabilities. It is not instrumental outcomes per se, nor resource inputs, but the individual’s ‘capability to choose’.⁵¹ It is vital to draw out that ‘capability to choose’ is very different from the ‘freedom to choose’. The latter conception is that of classical liberalism, which assumes that freedom is all that is required for the rational autonomous subject. The former is the key to understanding Sen’s perspective. Sen disagrees with the liberal perspective, which assumes autonomy is freedom. For Sen, freedom is an ongoing process of empowering the individual; this empowerment is measured not in external outputs but in internal processes of valuation and decision-making. It is not an outcome, not even a non-material outcome, such as ‘well-being’ or ‘happiness’.⁵² It is an internal outcome – it

48. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 10.

49. *Ibid.*, 68, emphasis added.

50. *Ibid.*, 69.

51. *Ibid.*, 235.

52. *Ibid.*, 271.

is a 'way of living'.⁵³ Sen's work, in fact, recaptures some of the pre-modern or pre-liberal theorising of Plato, in focusing upon the inner world rather than the outer world of the subject. He states:

In seeing freedom in terms of the power to bring about the outcome one wants with reasoned assessment, there is, of course, the underlying question whether the person has had an adequate opportunity to reason about what she really wants. Indeed the opportunity of *reasoned assessment* cannot but be an important part of any substantive understanding of freedom.⁵⁴

Sen is essentially seeking to measure the internal or moral life of the subject and arguing that this should be the actual object of policy making and also the indirect means of measuring the extent of 'freedom'. The internal capacities of individuals are revealed only in relation to the choices which they make, in their own understandings of their own needs and interests. Subjects which lack the capacities for adequate choice-making therefore reveal their lack of 'freedom'. Martha Nussbaum (as noted above) stresses this distinction between the liberal assumption that the subject can only be interpellated as a rational and autonomous choice-maker and the 'post-liberal' assertion that interests are not revealed in subject choices:

the Capabilities Approach is not based upon subjective preferences, although it takes preferences seriously. It argues strongly against preference-based approaches within development economics and within philosophy. It views preferences as often unreliable for political purposes. Only the most fully corrected informed-desire approaches play even a subsidiary role in political justification.⁵⁵

This very much follows the pre-liberal framing of Plato in *Gorgias*, when Socrates famously argued with Polus that tyrants lacked power because they lacked a true understanding of their ends, of what would do them good.⁵⁶ In other words, the subjects which require development are not necessarily able to autonomously or rationally judge what is in their own interests. Sen suggests that it is our social embeddedness, the inter subjective construction of our behavioural choices, which is central to the capabilities approach to human development. We therefore require an 'anthropological way' of understanding the ways in which our inter subjective contexts constitute a barrier to the development of our choice-making capabilities.⁵⁷ In his work on *The Idea of Justice*, he expands on how our 'local conventions of thought' may limit our ability to reason; that individual and collective world views and understandings may be partial and one-sided.⁵⁸ He quotes Gramsci's observation that:

53. *Ibid.*, 273.

54. *Ibid.*, 301.

55. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 80.

56. Plato, *Georgias* (London: Penguin, 1960), 35–9.

57. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 120–1.

58. *Ibid.*, 125.

In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man.⁵⁹

For Sen, development is as much a question of ethics as one of material progress. Thereby 'real people' should be treated as ethical subjects who desire the capacity to answer, in their own way, the Socratic question: 'How should one live?'⁶⁰ For Sen, development – the task of good governance – is to enable individuals to become fully ethical subjects, free to reflectively determine their own ends without the 'unfreedoms' or restrictions of cultural and social norms and material deprivations. In fact, Sen turns back on Plato his assumption that there is no such thing as evil, merely ignorance, suggesting, with regard to the parochial understanding of the Greeks in their practice of infanticide, that even Plato suffered from a limited and narrow 'local' understanding of the world.⁶¹ People who in their 'unfreedom' choose to live badly demonstrate the limits of inter subjective reason and thereby constitute the demand for and limit of governance: for 'development as freedom'.

Where does this leave the human subject in Sen? On one level the human subject is all that there is. The goal of policy making is the enabling and the empowering of this subject – of expanding its capabilities and capacities. There is no goal beyond the human subject and no agent beyond the human subject and no measurement beyond the human subject. But the human subject does not set goals; the human subject has no agency and no measuring capacity itself. In capability-building the subject, the subject is denied its own capability as a subject. The human subject is the end to be achieved, through the processes of development, justice, democracy and so on. The project of humanising is the human. For Sen, as for Plato, the project is an internal one rather than an external one. As Foucault suggests, this focus on the inner life connects Platonic thought with Christian thought, similarly denying external transformative agency.⁶²

This shift to work on the inner capacities of the subject, rather than the transformation of the external world, enables us to understand development as a process of freedom. Those who most need to be 'freed' or 'developed' are the poor and the marginal who stand in need of the empowering practices of human development, enabling them to adapt and to become resilient as agents of their own development, vis-à-vis the complex economic, social, political and ecological systems in which they are embedded.⁶³ Here, the 'agent-centred' approach focuses on the choice-making capabilities and capacities of the subject and upon work on the social institutional milieu, in order to enable decisions or choices to become more empowered. The human-centred logic of post-liberalism, so well articulated by Sen, sets out a framework of understanding and of policy making

59. Ibid., 119.

60. Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*, 2.

61. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 404–7.

62. Foucault, *Government of the Self and Others*, 359.

63. *World Resources 2008: Roots of Resilience – Growing the Wealth of the Poor* (Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2008); see also Mark Pelling, *Adaptation to Climate Change: From Resilience to Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2011).

which focuses on the internal life of individuals as shaped by the immediate context of family and child-rearing, especially the importance of the transitional stages to adulthood, to the subject as agential decision-maker. The 2007 World Development Report, *Development and the Next Generation*, clearly articulates this underlying logic:

Decisions during the five youth transitions have the biggest long-term impacts on how human capital is kept safe, developed, and deployed: continuing to learn, starting to work, developing a family, and exercising citizenship. ... Young people and their families make the decisions – but policies and institutions also affect the risks, the opportunities, and ultimately the outcomes.⁶⁴

Development as freedom means capability-building starts with the young as a way of transforming society through reshaping their internal worlds. The Report's discussion of how decision-making can be altered is quoted below:

If death rates are the benchmark, young people are a healthy group: the average 10 year-old has a 97 percent chance to reach the age of 25. Mortality is a misleading measure of youth health, however, because it does not reflect the behaviour that puts their health at risk later on. Youth is when people begin smoking, consuming alcohol and drugs, engaging in sex, and having more control over their diet and physical activity – behaviours that persist and affect their future health. ...

Because the (sometimes catastrophic) health consequences of these behaviours show up only later in life, they are much more difficult and expensive to treat than to prevent. But for many young people, the search for a stable identity, combined with short time horizons and limited information, encourages them to experiment with activities that put their health at risk. ... Reducing risk-taking among youth requires that they have the information and the capacity to make and act on decisions. Policies can do much to help young people manage these risks, especially if they make young people more aware of the long-term consequences of their actions today.⁶⁵

The logic of the argument is that social and economic problems are the result of poor choice-making by people who lack the capacities for good choice-making. Development no longer takes the form of economic and social transformation but of capability-building: empowering the poor and marginal to make better choices and thereby to become more resilient to external threats and pressures. In the 'agent-centred' approach, therefore, capability- and capacity-building can never start early enough, if every individual is to be fully empowered. As Martha Nussbaum argues:

Empirical studies show that early intervention is crucial, building the case for pre-school interventions and programs that partner with families ... a great deal of human potential is being wasted by a failure to intervene early, both through programs designed to enhance future human beings' health in utero and through programmes after birth.⁶⁶

64. World Bank, *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 2.

65. *Ibid.*, 8.

66. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 194.

Once the focus upon human development is on the internal capacities of the individual, the understanding of problems of development involves a retreat into the delicate understanding of the development not of the external world of economic and social products of human activity and labour but of the internal world of the human mind. According to Nussbaum, the development of ‘basic capabilities’ is not a product of nature, not ‘hardwired in the DNA’, but rather is a product of human intervention and therefore it is for government policy making to ensure the correct ‘maternal nutrition and prenatal experience’.⁶⁷ Once the problem is no longer the material circumstances but the post-colonial subject’s lack of freedom – their lack of capability to respond efficiently to their circumstances – the discourse of capability-building infantilises the human subject.

For some capability theorists, such as Nussbaum, this infantilisation is clear in the fact that the capabilities approach can be applied to non-human animal agents as much as to humans. Once the rational capacity for choice-making is denied to the human subject – as it necessarily is in all approaches which argue that the political subject has to be constructed through government intervention in societal processes – then there is no basis for liberal representative political and legal theory. Post-liberal governance practices cannot derive their legitimacy through liberal political theory that assumes universal rationality as the basis for representational equality. Nussbaum, for example, explicitly argues that animals and other sentient beings with agency can be considered to be ‘subjects of a political theory of justice, whether or not they are capable of understanding or assessing that theory’.⁶⁸ The discourse of human development and of capacity- and capability-building, in putting the agency of the individual at the heart of development discourse, inevitably ends up reducing the status of the subject. The internal gaze of human development discourse, in fact, effaces the subject itself, not merely the importance of the material relations of its external world.

Conclusion

The key point, for a critique informed by Foucault’s attention to the metaphysical understanding of ‘development’, as external agency capable of enabling the ‘Enlightenment’ of the subject, is that development loses its external focus on the materiality of the world. Once development is understood as a process of transforming the inner world of the subject, human agency and capacity for choice-making become a ‘grid of intelligibility’ for explaining differences and inequalities and for the institution of practices of governance intervention. The post-colonial subject may be at the centre of development discourse, but it is the subject’s lack of capabilities that are highlighted, rather than the external structures of power relations. This ‘human-centred’ approach replicates that of Kant’s voluntaristic understanding of the internal and subjective nature of barriers to

67. *Ibid.*, 23.

68. *Ibid.*, 88, 157–63; see also similar positions being articulated in critical ‘post-human’ frameworks of international relations, for example Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

Enlightenment. In this framework, as noted above, external development programmes work on empowering and giving ‘agency’ to the individual to enable them to make better behavioural choices – to govern themselves through reason – rather than on the external world of social and economic relations.

When Amartya Sen or human development programmes talk of ‘capability-building’ and agency, this has little to do with modernist conceptions of human agency or of human freedom, which focused upon the barriers to human self-realisation which could be overcome through the development of culture and scientific understanding, enabling us to know and to transform our external world. Sen, in describing ‘development as freedom’, in fact, permanently defers human freedom through asserting that our ‘freedom’ is inevitably differentially constrained through the inter subjectively limited construction of our behavioural choices. In this framing, the barriers to human freedom are inter subjectively constructed products created by humanity itself. The socially contingent constraints of the external world, as mediated by our social relations, become essentialised in terms of the inter-subjective barriers of human cognition. Capitalism is naturalised and normalised at the same time as human rationality is degraded and denied. The problem is thereby constructed as the human rather than the social relations in which the human is embedded.

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