Where is the Human in Human-Centred approaches to Development?: A Foucauldian Critique of Amartya Sen’s ‘Development as Freedom’

Draft paper for 'Reading Michel Foucault in the Postcolonial Present: A Symposium'.
University of Bologna, Italy, March 3-4, 2011.

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Abstract

This paper engages with Foucault’s critical exploration of shifts and transformations in liberal frameworks of governmental rationality to consider how our understanding of the human subject has been transformed within development discourses. In today’s dominant conceptualization of human-centred approaches to development, individual autonomy or freedom is the central motif for understanding the problematic of development. Human agency has been placed at the centre and is increasingly seen to be the measure of development, in terms of individual capabilities. The individualized understanding of development takes a rational choice perspective of the individual or ‘the agent-orientated view’ (Sen 1999: 11). This paper 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 an economic context of GNP growth or industrialization, or a social and political context, in which development policies are shaped by social and political pressures or state-led policies. Foucault’s work on the disappearance or invisibility of power, particularly as articulated through the shift towards biopolitical frameworks of liberal governmentality – focusing on the irreducible decision-making subject – ‘the rationality of the governed’ (2008: 312) will be used to critically engage with Sen. This paper 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.

Key words: development, late-liberalism, Michel Foucault, Amartya Sen, Friedrich Hayek, Anthony Giddens
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 as a matter of material richness. The work of Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen has been central in establishing the conceptual foundations of the human development discourse underpinning today’s dominant understanding of development and to the establishment of the United Nations Development Programme’s annual Human Development reports and Human Development Index. Here it is the growth of human capabilities and capacities which is central: the empowerment or freedom of the individual. Development is taken out of a macro socio-economic context and seen as a question of individual inclusion and choice-making capabilities. 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, 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. (UNDP 1990: 1, emphasis added)

I have italicised the seven occasions on which the word ‘choices’ is used in the first three paragraphs. I have done this to emphasise that human development is inextricably tied to the extension of choice-making capabilities. The key point to note is that these capabilities are disconnected from the level of material social and economic development; as the third and fourth paragraphs emphasise, choice-making capability is thereby disconnected from the external environment seen as providing inputs or resources for capabilities. There is a large internal or subjective element to the capability approach – the concern is with ‘the use of
these capabilities’ and with the ‘conducive environment’ in which good choice-making can take place.

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 Sen’s framework rather than to critically engage with it (for a good summary see Clark 2005). When Sen has been the subject of criticism, this has generally focused on the need for collective political struggle to constitute development and freedom for the post-colonial subject or for paying too little attention to the structural constraints of the world market and capitalist social relations (see, for example, Navarro 2000; Samaddar 2006; Chimni 2008). The human development approach has also been substantially critiqued from a traditional development perspective for the shift away from material definitions of development to a more subjective measurement (see, for example, Pender 2001; Ben-Ami 2006; Duffield 2007; Pupavac 2007). Mark Duffield usefully highlights the problematic in his critical exploration of human development as a technology of governance Development, Security and Unending War (2007):

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. (2007: 115)

This paper seeks to mount a different engagement with Sen’s work, instead taking seriously the claim of ‘development as freedom’ to explore Sen’s reading of the human subject. While Duffield describes well the implications of reinterpreting development in subjective rather than material terms, in shifting to self-reliance, this paper is less concerned with critiquing human-centred development primarily from the viewpoint of it 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. In this respect, Foucault’s work on shifting liberal governing rationalities and the birth of biopolitics, enables us to highlight how Sen’s work poses fundamental questions 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;¹ these shifts are incrementally reflected in the shrinking of the

¹ For Marx, 1830 marked the turning point, from which point onwards the science of political economy, which reached its highpoint with Ricardo, could only degenerate and become vulgarized:

In France and England the bourgeoisie had conquered political power. Thenceforth, the class struggle, practically as well as theoretically, took on more and more outspoken and threatening forms. It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy. It was thenceforth no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it
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 on liberal frames of representation, to biopolitical governance, the regulation of ways or modes of individual being. In this shift, our understanding of what it means to be human, and of what being human means for our engagement with the world we live in, have been fundamentally altered.

Foucault deals with this problematic on several occasions, most notably in his work on The Birth of Biopolitics (2008) but also through analogy in his study of the decay of Greek democratic thought especially as reflected in the work of Plato (2010). While Foucault engaged critically with this shift, I want to suggest that in the work of Amartya Sen this shift can be seen in its most fully articulated form: 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 material transformation: development is no longer about the external world. In fact, development disappears – it has no 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 of the individual.

What is at stake here is no small matter and I further want to suggest that the post-colonial critique of liberal modernity needs to engage with this problematic, clearly established in the late work of Foucault, to avoid being articulated within dominant frameworks of ‘late’ liberal understandings and policy practices. If this reading of Foucault is relevant to today, then perhaps it is most relevant for post-colonial critical frameworks. Perhaps the introduction of difference into the discourses of freedom and development - and their removal from liberal universalist conceptions of the liberal subject, enframed within sovereign states and the formal rights of citizenship, and from liberal teleologies of progress as linear material development – may lead us to other and more problematic traps, from which it will be more difficult to extricate ourselves. Rather than take the route suggested by Duffield and others, of understanding ‘development’ or

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1 I use the term ‘late’ liberal to highlight that the shrinking of the liberal world, analyzed here, and to suggest 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. I have previously used the term ‘post-liberal’ to critically engage with this shift (Chandler 2010).

2 was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prize-fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic. (1954: 24-25)
‘freedom’ themselves as universalising, liberal, or problematic concepts, which need to be avoided, maybe we should be thinking of how to escape the metaphysics of the Enlightenment, not through the rejection of its universalist legacy but through the struggle to ground our own historically-specific understandings of what the human subject is and could be.³

Foucault’s Work on the Genealogy of the Subject

In The Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault drew out the implications of late liberalism, in his terminology ‘neo-liberalism’ or biopolitical governmentality. He was very keen to draw out the limitation of the Left or Marxist thinking of his day, which saw in neo-liberalism merely the rolling back of the state and the expansion of market forces, with the increased emphasis on the self-reliance and the responsibilisation of the subject (which Duffield’s critique seems to replicate) (2008: 129-50). Foucault’s focus is upon why it would be problematic to see this discourse as purely an economic discourse which assumed that its only affects were economic ones and that it’s contestation could be easily understood in terms of Left versus Right/ state versus market. He argued that the discourses of biopolitical governmentality reflected a major shift in how politics could be understood or contested, and that this shift was entirely missed in traditional Left/Right polemics (2008: 116-7).

Foucault highlighted major shifts and transformations within liberal discourse, which made this transformation in the relationship between the subject and the state very different (2008: 118). Essentially, he argued that late liberalism shrinks the understanding of human subjectivity, removing the foundational sphere of rational autonomy. In so doing, Foucault suggested that the binaries of liberal thought are dissolved, there is no longer a conceptual distinction between the external world and the inner world, between subject and object, between public and private, between the formal sphere of politics and law and the informal sphere of social and economic relations (2008: 267-86). There is no longer the universal starting position of the Enlightenment subject – capable of knowing and transforming the external world: of self-realisation, of self-emancipation. There is no longer a liberal teleology of progress.

Foucault suggested that late liberalism inverts our understanding of the human subject, at the same time making the internal life of the subject the subject of governance. Power and agency are reduced to the level of individual decision-taking. Individual decisions construct the world which we live in and shape the context for further decisions which individuals make. This world is continually being made and remade by the human subject. But the human subject is not the classical subject of the Enlightenment: there is no assumption of growth in knowledge or understanding or progress. Effective governance can only be seen after the event on the basis of the outcomes of decisions, right or wrong choices.

³ Foucault argued that this was a practical as much as an intellectual project of constructing a ‘critical ontology of ourselves, of present reality’ (2010: 21): ‘I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historicico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings.’ (1984: 8)
cannot be established at the time. Government constantly needs to intervene to adapt institutions to enable better individual decisions, to work on the empowerment of the decision-making individual. This is a continual process of preventive management of society based upon the indirect shaping of the capacities and conduct of its individual members (2008: 159-79).

Foucault spent his life working and reworking a genealogy of understanding the shifts in governmentality 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 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 it’s 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 (2008: 271-3). This, of course, is a vital question for those of us 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 late liberalism.

It seems to me that in The Governance 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 has 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 (2010: 37-9). 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, is that for Kant, the external agency does not ‘free’ the subject by removing external barriers to freedom.

The barrier to Enlightenment is an internal one – the flaw of the subject is a matter of ‘will’ (2010: 29). 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’ (2010: 33). The King of Prussia or the Revolution do 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 (2010: 34). 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, the Enlightenment subject was always one which was a potential subject of development understood as ‘freedom’ in similar terms to those articulated by Sen and human development agencies. 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, will, adequate choice-making. This framing is of vital importance to understand the discourse of ‘development as freedom’, as much as of other dominant discourses, which talk of the development of autonomy, of self-realization, 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 (whereby, we can stand outside or ‘escape’ the Enlightenment problematic, or embrace or oppose it):

We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment. Such an analysis implies a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible; and these inquiries will not be oriented retrospectively toward the ‘essential kernel of rationality’ that can be found in the Enlightenment and that would have to be preserved in any event; they will be oriented toward the ‘contemporary limits of the necessary’, that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects. (1984: 6)

For Foucault, this project becomes more important under today's late-liberalism, with the exhaustion and turning inwards of liberal framings of the subject. In his view, with the birth of biopolitics, rather than the liberal subject emancipating itself through its growth and the transformation of its circumstances, there was no longer the starting assumption of a transformative subject driving progress and emancipation. There was still a focus on the subject, but this was a subject unable to know or to transform: thus, the late liberal subject becomes the object of transformative practices of governance as development rather than the subject of development as external transformation. The sphere of government action, is that of governance: of enabling the subject to construct itself, to empower itself. In this process, power or government finally disappears or dissolves itself into society. Government is no longer conceived as wise management directing or controlling society as in the pre-liberal or pre-modern

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4 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 was 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-realizing 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 Nietzsche (see, in particular, ‘Our Note of Interrogation’ 2006: 159-160).
age of Machiavelli, nor is government based on developing society and
calculative progress as in the age of classical liberalism of modernity, where
mass society and the nation state meant that ‘society must be defended’ (see,
Foucault 2003; 2007). In late liberalism, for Foucault, the assumption is that the
liberal world is reduced to work on the governance of the self. Sen’s work fits
squarely into this analysis. Sen critiques both the market-based liberal/neoliberal
conception of the rational autonomous individual capable of assuming
responsibility for its own development but 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’.

The Subject of Late-Liberal Development – Hayek, Huntington and North

Liberal frameworks of understanding have always been the most vulnerable in
the sphere of economic thought (as indicated in footnote 1 above) and it has
been in the sphere of economic theorising that the critique of liberal
assumptions of the universal, rational autonomous subject – the liberal bearer of
rights (in the political sphere) and interests (in the economic sphere) – has been
most critically articulated, as Marx highlights, as apologia. Apologia has been
most necessary in the economic sphere because it is with the problematic of
development that the gap between liberal promises of universality and
teleologies of progress come up against the realities of uneven development and
the reproduction of substantial social and economic inequalities. In the context
of the Cold War and the period of class consensus of the post-war boom Western
theorists of development understood the post-colonial world to be open to
modernisation and development within a universalist framework in which it was
expected that Western forms of economic and social existence could be
reproduced.

Arguments which challenged the classic liberal assumptions about autonomy
and progress developed in a cohered way in the discipline of economics, in
response to the crises of the market in the 1920s and 1930s and later in
response to the failures of post-colonial development in the 1970s. In both cases,
the critique of the liberal paradigm serves as apologia (an attempt to explain and
justify the status quo as inevitable) rather than as critique (an attempt to explain
through positing potential alternative ways of thinking or acting). Whereas the
liberal paradigm was universalist, the late-liberal paradigm relies upon
complexity and differentiation. It is complexity which is the key to challenging
classic liberal assumptions about perfect competition or perfect information. For
the developers of institutionalist approaches, the apologia goes further to assert
that there is no such thing as capitalism with a capital ‘C’, rather, there are many
capitalisms. There is no universalist logic of capital; no grand-narrative (in the
words of the critical sociologists, which were later to take up a similar stance).

The key aspect which economic theory brings in, later shared by critical
sociologists, is subjectivity - the inner world of the subject: the importance of
superstition, culture, ethics and irrationality to decision-making. As Sen argues, there is no evidence of the view that individuals engage in rational choice-making on the basis of the pursuit of self-interest. 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 in a world where our social relations and affectivities mean that ethics need to be introduced into the analysis (1987: 17). Once there is no universal rational subject, but different rationalities, 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, 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. (1987: 42)

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 apologetic critique of liberal rational economic assumptions, necessarily focuses on the internal life or inner life of the liberal subject. The understanding of irrational outcomes of market competition is transferred from the study of capitalist social relations to the study of irrational (non-universalist) human motivations and understandings.

As John R. Commons described institutional economics back in 1936, it is based on understanding the importance of ‘man’s relationship to man’ which is ignored in classical liberal economic theory which, to him, appeared to be ‘based on man’s relation to nature’ (1936: 242). For Commons, the intangibles, such as good will, conceptions of rights and duties etc, all influenced the ‘reasonable’ price that the buyer was willing to pay. These intangibles were understood to be shaped by collective institutions and collective norms and controls, which meant that the classic liberal assumptions of perfect competition did not exist. Commons suggested that there was a ‘nationalistic theory of value’: that these national collective institutions meant that it was a fiction to think of the market as universalist in its operation; as much of a fiction as the belief in the universal individual subject of classical liberal political and economic theory:

Even the individual of economic theory is not the natural individual of biology and psychology: he is that artificial bundle of institutes known as a legal person, or citizen. He is made such by sovereignty which grants to him the rights and liberties to buy and sell, borrow and lend, hire and hire out, work and not work, on his own free will. Merely as an individual of classical and hedonistic theory he is a factor of production and consumption like a cow or slave. Economic theory should make him a
citizen, or member of the institution under whose rule he acts. (Commons 1936: 247-8)

This paragraph above sums up the essence of late-liberalism, which frees the individual from the strictures of classic liberal assumptions, allowing autonomy of choices but only once the individual is understood as a product of an institutional framework. For Commons, this methodological focus on the volition or choice of the individual was described as behaviouralism, where the will of the agent could be objectively understood through observed behaviour (Forest and Mehier 2001: 592). Commons therefore stressed that rather than treating humans as automatic pursuers of fixed interests, real life behaviour had to be understood as shaped by institutional forms, especially those of custom and social norms. Individuals freely and rationally chose but on the basis of their cultural contexts and understanding. Here the individual will is both an act of volition and conscious rational choice but also a product of historical and social context, shaped and constructed on the basis of existing or habitual norms and values (ibid.: 593).

The work of Commons and other institutional economists was developed further by Herbert Simon, who directly challenged the assumptions of the rational decision-making capacity of the classical liberal subject, dethroning the autonomous rational subject – homo œconomicus - from economic rational choice theory. In his argument, there was no such thing as perfect information or perfect rationality, merely ‘bounded rationality’ where not all the facts can be known or all the possible options considered. This critique of a universalist rationality was based on maintaining the liberal assumptions of the rational and autonomous actor but questioning the extent to which the outcomes would be universally understood as rational. The decisions made with ‘bounded rationality’ were still rational, i.e. made on the basis of a freely willed conscious decision but they no longer necessarily resulted in furthering the collective good or in optimal outcomes. This critique of the rationality of the classical liberal subject was to have immensely powerful consequences, in being the intellectual basis upon which the late-liberal paradigm could be built: that of the simultaneous recognition and problematization of decision-making autonomy.

The crucial facet of institutionalism 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 an 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 context and relationships. This perspective is much more individual-focused but the individual subject is understood in isolation from their social and economic context. ‘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 problematization of the individual 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 at the level of social or economic relations.

As Foucault noted, the work of these neoliberal or institutionalist theorists was not primarily 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.’ (2008: 135) Of particular importance, for this paper, is the impact of these ideas on United Nations development programmes and World Bank policy-making frameworks in the 1990s, which can be clearly traced in the influence of Douglass North\(^5\) 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, dates from the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Western understandings of development become increasingly defensive. I situate this defensiveness in relation to two separate concerns. Firstly, the fear that development will lead to social upheaval and to post-colonial states (particularly in East Asia) being drawn into the Soviet orbit of influence. Secondly, this defensiveness is based upon the need to explain the failure of post-colonial development in much of the world, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. This defensive framework of apologia leads to a shift of development thinking away from the transformation of the external world – social and economic progress – to a concern with the inner world – the subjectivity - of the post-colonial subject. This shift takes the form of the inculcation of institutionalist frameworks of analysis, in which the subject is problematised rather than the social and economic relations in which they are embedded.

\textit{The Colonial Problematic}

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 weaker the European colonial powers. Once brought into the universalist liberal framework of understanding, the discourse of development was used to both legitimise and to negotiate the maintenance of colonial power. Given its clearest intellectual articulation in Lord Luggard’s \textit{Dual Mandate} (1923) British colonial domination was justified on the basis that the difference between the Western subject and the colonial subject

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} Douglass North’s ideas had already come under Foucault’s consideration in the late 1970s, and are discussed within the framework of the \textit{Birth of Biopolitics}. The ideas of North on the development of capitalism... are directly in line with the opening made by the neo-liberals...’ (Foucault 2008: 135)
was a question of culture and values – a problem of the inner world of the subject – preventing the colonial subject from transforming the external world, from economic and social development. Lugard is 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 through 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’ of 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 to 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 civilizational 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. (1923: 618).

As Foucault reflected on Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’, the Enlightenment project of civilizing those not enlightened enough to civilize 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 civilized 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 colonial rule and the denial of formal liberal freedoms of self-rule and sovereign independence – should take a civilizational 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.

The discourse of development can, of course, be critically engaged with in the manner of Edward Said’s ground-breaking framework of Orientalism (1995), as presupposing ‘Western superiority and Oriental inferiority’ (1995: 42). 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’ (see also Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997; Burgess 1997). This understanding of progress or
civilization 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 framework is the distinct difference in the discourse of development under colonialism and today’s late-liberalism. The colonial subject is not a liberal subject, but a subject understood to lack autonomy – the liberal subject has to be created in the case of the colonial ‘exception’, on the assumption that they can become liberal, and thereby, autonomous and self-governing subjects. Here ‘development’ is separated temporally and spatially from ‘freedom’: in the liberal teleology, the liberal world will expand spatially as the external world progresses temporally towards ‘freedom’. There is a liberal teleology of progress, which is 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 is the mechanism through which the world will be universalised, through which the gap between the liberal vision of the future and the realities of the present will be bridged.

*The Post-Colonial Problematic*

The struggle for colonial independence and the discrediting of ideas of race and difference in the Second World War, shifted attention to the external world rather than the inner world of the post-colonial subject. The post-colonial subject, by definition was understood to be a liberal and self-determining subject. Attention to the inner world of the subject was seen as the preserve of the racialised and hierarchical colonial order which was seen as being consigned the past. The universalist understanding of the subject pre-supposed that the lack of freedom and independence was the barrier to material development and that newly independent post-colonial states would now be free to develop unhindered. The greatest concern of ‘development’ or ‘modernisation’ theorists was that this process should be guided by market-based frameworks and pro-US allegiances. The link between development and Cold War concerns is more than aptly illustrated in the sub-title of Walt Rostow’s *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* of 1960.

The dominance of modernisation theory was a brief one. The narrow focus on economic growth as facilitating ‘lift off’ to the universalising of the world was tempered by liberal concerns with modernity – particularly the threat of communism and the concern that capitalism could be understood to be the barrier to liberal universalist aspirations. The leading theorist of the limits of development or state-led modernisation approaches was Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek, whose ideas have become central to current understandings of the limits to development. Writing in the 1950s, Hayek was concerned that universalist discourses of development and progress would lead to the dominance of socialist or communist frameworks of government. In order
to combat this, Hayek sought to reintroduce difference as ontologically prior to universality and to flag up the internal limits to progress rather than to focus on external limits. Perhaps the most insightful work is his 1952 *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology*. As the title indicates, for Hayek, the key area in which limits were to be located was in the psychological make-up of the subject.

For Marx, the key attribute of the human was the ability to imagine an end or goal before carrying it out – the capacity, through reason, to subordinate the self to an external object of transformation – to consciously transform the world through a self-directed aim (1954: 174). Hayek, on the other hand, was interested in the hold of the past and the incapacity of the subject to cope with the external world because reasoning could only be based on the way that individual ways of thinking are predicated upon past experiences. Our minds build models and expectations based on previous experiences which mean that our behavioural responses depend less on the ‘reality’ we are confronted with than with the psychological preconditioning of our minds. Our consciousness, in fact, prevents us from engaging with the world in a reasoned and rational way (1952: 25). For Hayek:

> Like many of the traditional schools of psychology, behaviouralism thus treated the problem of mind as if it were a problem of the responses of the individual to an independently or objectively given phenomenal world; while in fact it is the existence of a phenomenal world which is different from the physical world which constitutes the main problem. (1952: 28)

Hayek’s focus on the mind of the subject enabled him to remove the external world as an object of universalist understanding: in effect, he argued that the external world was merely a subjectivist phenomenological product. That it was not the external world of social relations which produced and reproduced difference and hierarchy but the internal differences of the human brain. The problem is not that we are not rational or ‘enlightened’ enough to understand the external world, but that the external world only appears through the phenomenological constructions of our minds. These phenomenologies are the products of ‘interpretations’ based upon inherited and learned experiences which mediate between the experience and the response: ‘we cannot hope to account for observed behaviour without reconstructing the “intervening processes in the brain”’ (1952: 44). It is our brains which make us respond differently to our external environments and can help explain different developmental outcomes which reproduce the same experiences and response mechanisms. Internal difference can therefore reproduce external difference regardless of universalising experiences.

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6 ‘A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality... He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will.’ (Marx, 1954: 174)
In Hayek’s work, we not only see how psychological explanations begin to play a larger role in understanding the limits to universality and to progress but also how change and transition – development – can be reinterpreted as internal problems. Brains are complex, integrated networks but they are also malleable and capable of adaptive change, depending upon the extent to which ‘phylogenetic’, inherited patterns and connections, and ‘ontogenetic’ aspects, acquired by the individual during the course of their lifetime, interact (1952: 80-81). Where Marx sharply distinguished the human from the natural world, Hayek’s focus on the psychology of the brain focuses on how humans are limited, in ways which are little different to any other living organism:

The continued existence of those complex structures which we call organisms is made possible by their capacity of responding to certain external influences by such changes in their structure or activity as are required to maintain or restore the balance necessary for their persistence. (1952: 82)

Individuals, especially in more complex organisms like humans, will respond differently to external stimuli in ways which enable them to discriminate differently between different stimuli and to react differently. Often these differences will not be intentional but arbitrary or accidental. The key point for Hayek is that differential experiences and reactions necessarily result from the innate historical experiential differences of individuals and their different internal (rather than external) environments: ‘one of the most important parts of the “environment” from which the central nervous system will receive signals producing linkages, will be the milieu intérieur, the internal environment or the rest of the organism in which the central nervous system exists’ (1952: 109).

Our inner world is the product of our experiences and shaped by our pasts: what we have learnt or think to be true is a product of the linkages in our brains shaped by past ways of thinking and makes the future a blank page. In fact, external changes or new problems or contexts are understood to produce and accentuate difference rather than lead to uniformity as we are differentially equipped to respond. We respond to external stimuli in limited and arbitrary ways which are continually evolving after the fact (not prior to it as Marx suggested). For Hayek, there can be no universalist frameworks of understanding or presuppositions of progress, rather we live in a world of difference and change which is not amenable to rational or scientific interventions. Hayek also highlights the problem of change and of human capacities to cope with change, suggesting that gradual adaptation and learning is necessary. We cannot know what will work in advance, only learn what was wrong in retrospect: ‘Human reason can neither predict nor deliberately shape its own future. Its advances consist in finding out where it has been wrong.’ (1960: 37) The human subject may be the agent of history but not by conscious human design, instead social order emerges post-hoc ‘as a result of adaptive evolution’ (1960: 53).
Hayek inverses the liberal framework of the autonomous and rational subject capable of transforming the external world through asserting that liberal frameworks and institutions are necessary precisely because the liberal subject is not capable of knowing or transforming or controlling the external world. Liberalism reaches its end point in this defence of liberal modernity on the basis that democracy and markets work best because this enables us to adapt and to cope with problems without the possibility of knowledge or control – reducing human collectives to the ontological status of biological organisms merely capable of adaptation through evolutionary chance rather than through conscious decision-making.

Hayek’s view of internal limits of the human subject was marginal in the domestic liberal consensus politics of the Cold War, but nevertheless the shift in focus to the non-material aspects of development echoed this idea of inner limits as the framework of modernisation theory, with its classical and universalist liberal teleology, started to lose ground in the 1970s. In the international sphere, the key break comes with the publication of Samuel Huntington’s 1968 work *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Tellingly, the liberal teleology of ‘development’ or ‘progress’ is replaced with non-directional ‘change’. The problem for Huntington is no longer that of development as material progress, which sees development and the transformation of external social and economic conditions in an entirely positive light, but of ‘change’: highlighting the instabilities associated with development and suggesting that external economic and social transformation should not necessarily be seen as the primary concern.

In his landmark book, Huntington suggests that the problem is not merely that of social and economic conditions; that rather than being merely concerned with material development, the inner life of the post-colonial subject was also deserving of attention. For Huntington, the concern was that without adequate ‘institutionalization’ the development of new political forces with economic transformation would lead to instability and revolution. Huntington problematises the capacity of the post-colonial subject to deal with change rather than progress and posits the solution at the internal level of cultural, societal and political development rather than external material development. Huntington inverses the liberal understanding that social and political institutions reflect social and economic development to suggest that they are a barrier to dealing with change as there is the lack of a public sphere of civil society. The problem thus becomes internal mindsets rather than the lack of economic development per se:

Thus in a politically backward society lacking a sense of political community, each leader, each individual, each group pursues and is assumed to be pursuing its own immediate short-run material goals without consideration for any broader public interest. (1968: 31)

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7 Huntington does not argue that these institutions (or the lack of them) are a barrier to economic development, closely involved in US strategy in Vietnam, his concern is that of preventing social resistance to elite rule taking a communist direction.
For Huntington, the problem lies with the heads of the post-colonial subjects rather than with the material conditions: ‘At the psychological level, modernization involves a fundamental shift in values, attitudes and expectations’ (1968: 32). The problem is the gap between economic developments and cultural, social and political mental attitudes. Huntington argues that this gap needs to be filled by the development of institutions capable of constituting a collective national consciousness and preventing modernisation from leading to communist revolution.

While Huntington develops an institutionalist analysis, his concern is less with economic development per se than with transitional instability. The key factor to note, in the context of this paper, is that institutionalism marks a shift from a concern with the external world to a concern with the internal world of the subject. Starting with the problem of the minds, values and attitudes of the post-colonial subject rather than the economic and social context, Huntington argued that the problem was the subject’s inability to cope with ‘change’: that the post-colonial mind, in fact, lagged behind social and economic progress and created a problem which needed to be addressed.

This institutionalist concern with transition and with the subject’s alleged inability to ‘adapt’ was also expressed in the 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union, in relation to the newly-won independence of Central and East European states. Here it was alleged that it could take several generations for those freed from Soviet regulation to develop the right mental attitudes to enable democracy and market forces to work effectively. Many people, such as Francis Fukuyama (1995), argued that the problems of transition could not be grasped in terms of the destructive impact of market social relations but rather through the prism of ‘culture’, suggesting that the work of anthropologists would be more useful than political science. This institutionalist framework has also been applied in discussions of post-conflict transition, most popularly articulated by Roland Paris, with his conceptualisation of ‘institutionalization before liberalization’ (2004). Paris argues that before liberalizing - giving free-reign to political and market competition - it is important to ensure that post-conflict subjects have the required inner capacities for rational and reasoned decision-making.

However, the most conceptually developed institutionalist framework of understanding has been that of Douglass C North. North’s project, initially, had been less concerned with the problematic of transition that the lack of transition: the explanation for the continuation of severe structural inequalities despite the increasing integration of post-colonial states into the capitalist market relations of a global marketplace, which could be expected to drive out inefficient practices in the drive to universalise profits.

‘Neo-institutionalism’, as North terms it, develops as apologia in order to explain the failure of international development, or why ‘the gap between rich and poor nations, between developed and undeveloped nations, is as wide today as it ever was and perhaps a great deal wider than ever before’ (North, 1990: 6). Institutionalism arises in the international sphere as a theory of differential development, which challenges Marxist approaches, which focused on the
reproduction of market inequalities and the operation of imperialist power relations. Rather than looking outside the post-colonial state, at the external context of development, the apologist focus shifted attention to the inside: to the institutions of the post-colonial state and society and how they are shaped by and limited by the mindset of the post-colonial subject.

According to Douglass North: ‘institutions define and limit the set of choices of individuals’ (1990: 4):

Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve through time and hence is the key to understanding historical change. (1990: 3)

The institutionalist approach, sought to remove the ‘naturalist’ or ‘materialist’ basis of non-sociological approaches - which derived interests and needs from socio-economic contexts - and instead focused on the inter-subjective aspects of rules and norms: ‘Separating the analysis of the underlying rules from the strategy of the players is a necessary prerequisite to building a theory of institutions. (North, 1990: 5) The ‘strategy’ of the players, i.e., the articulation of political demands, the economic choices made etc etc are not understood as ‘natural’ but as shaped and constructed by the prior and pre-existing institutional rules. If these rules or norms are poorly constructed or no longer adequate then these demands and choices may be problematic.

What the institutionalist approach emphasizes is the fact that individuals may act ‘rationally’ but in an ‘irrational’ context – i.e., where the institutional constraints are poor – and therefore rational actions may perpetuate irrational and counterproductive outcomes. In other words, the market will not necessarily tend towards equalizing outcomes if the institutional context creates the wrong incentive structures (North, 1990: 6-7). For the institutionalists, the Western advocates of free market solutions were wrong in idealizing the capacities of both markets and independent interest-based individuals, what they ignored was the crucial role of institutions which enabled both markets and individuals to efficiently make decisions. In the institutionalist world, there is no liberal assumption that the pursuit of individual interest will contribute to the collective good. If both individual and collective interests are jointly served this is either the work of fortuitous accident or of good institutional frameworks.

One of the key reasons for the lack of conjunction between individual and collective interests in post-colonial states and societies was understood to be that of culture or ideology. Here culture and ideology serve as apologia to suggest that there is very little that Western intervention can achieve as even formal institutional changes may possibly not be enough or could be counterproductive as the deeper problem is at the informal institutional level (North, 1990: 45). Institutionalists focus on the lack of knowledge of market individuals and their lack of capacity to interpret and objectively judge on the
basis of even this limited knowledge. However, in the framework of applying this paradigm to the failure of the market in the post-colonial world the problematization of subjectivity went further, with the decisions and ‘choices’ made by societies and elites understood to be irrational because the institutional norms and values were divisive, for example, accepting nepotism and patronage or promoting racial, ethnic, class or gender discrimination.

The work of North clearly illustrates the transformation of the liberal paradigm which is highlighted by Foucault. This is not the colonial discourse where the subject is seen to lack the capacity for autonomy – where liberal universalist teleologies bifurcate the world into the civilized/uncivilized, included/excluded, liberal/non-liberal. It is important to emphasize that the late liberal paradigm is dependent on the universalizing of the grounding liberal ontology of self-determining, free-willed, decision-making subjects (North, 1990: 5). The problems, whether of development, democracy or of security are understood as problems of freely-willed individual ‘choices’. These choices are ‘rational’ at the level of the individual but the inner-world of the individual prevents these choices from being rational (in terms of leading to progress and efficiency, as in the liberal paradigm) in their outcomes, because the rationality of outcomes depends on the formal and informal institutional frameworks in place. Rather than autonomy providing a universal capacity for independence, it is on the basis of this autonomy that institutionalists understand the existence of inequalities and differences.

The more autonomy the post-colonial subject has the easier it is for the late-liberal paradigm of ‘development as freedom’ to understand the limits to development in terms of the capacity or capability of the decision-making subject. In the words of North, this autonomy is the cause of the lack of economic and social convergence as: ‘Individuals from different backgrounds will interpret the same evidence differently and in consequence make different choices... The result is that multiple equilibria are possible/prevalent.’ (2005: 62) It is autonomy of decision-making which is the problem rather than the solution. In the words of Oxford professor and World Bank policy-advisor Paul Collier, the post-colonial subject and the post-colonial state have too much autonomy and too much sovereignty rather than too little (2010: 191).

Late-Liberalism and Giddens

In order to contextualise and situate the work of Sen, up to this point in the paper, I have traced late-liberalism genealogically through the work of those authors who have stressed the internal world of the decision-making as constituting the key limit to the powers of government or to transforming the external world. This discourse of limits has been most thoroughly articulated where liberalism has been at its most defensive, at the articulation of the limits which justify the restrictions of liberal rights or which rationalise structural inequalities. It was only in the post-Cold War era that this discourse of limits could become central to governing rationalities. Today, it is clear in discourses of ‘Beyond Left and Right’ or of ‘The Third Way’, that what was once marginal or of use only at the limits of liberalism has now become central to understanding the
world we live in and the role of the human subject within this. As Foucault highlighted, it appears that the last refuge of liberalism is the world of the decision-making subject. The decision-making subject has filled the world to the extent that the external world no longer exists in a meaningful way for us today.8

The external world has disappeared in two interconnected ways. Firstly, it is unknowable, it is globalized, the relations of cause and effect no longer appear to operate because we have lost control over the consequences of our actions. The unintended effects overwhelm the intended ones because the world is much more complicated and interconnected than we imagined in liberal teleologies of progress and control. Secondly, the external world disappears because we can no longer distinguish ourselves from the world. In the words of Anthony Giddens, there is no longer any external ‘nature’ – our external world has been shaped by human actions and choices, but not conscious ones. Not only is the world unknowable it is unknowable because it is a human world. While it is a human world, it is not thereby a liberal world as we knew it: the external world has been closed-off to us and with it there can be no universal framing bringing us together on the basis of human beings as transforming subjects. Our inner worlds can only force us apart rather than unite us.

This is a human-centred world, because we have created it, we are responsible for the outcomes, but instead of being creators and constructors, as we believed, we have been acting blindly and ignorantly. We have power or agency in a formal sense of world changing capabilities but we lack the knowledge of our true interests – we are like tyrants basing our rule on ignorance and therefore only capable of destruction. The solution to the human world is not in the development of material capacity; it is not in the furtherance of institutions such as democracy but a matter of the way that we govern or rule, in how we make decisions, how we respond to externalities. Essentially the solution to the problem is already contained within the post-Cold War problematic of ‘globalisation’: the disappearance of the external world suggests that the inner world is the only sphere for managing change. This is the ideological basis for the discourse of resilience: that ‘freedom’ and ‘development’ can only be understood in terms of improved choice-making capacities. There is still a discourse of

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8 Of course the historical construction of an external world was always problematic and a projection of human social relations. As Nietzsche suggests, humans give value and meaning to the world not the other way around:

> Whatever has value in the world, has not it in itself, by its nature – nature is always worthless – but a value was once given to it, bestowed upon it and it was we who gave and bestowed! We only have created the world which is of any account to man! (2006: 132)

This understanding of the external world as dictating to us is also critiqued by Marx in his comments that capitalist social relations give rise to the fetishism of commodities: the appearance that relations between people are dictated to by the external force of market relations so that ‘the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves’ (1954: 79). The point of importance though, is that despite the fact that the external world is historically and ideologically shaped and constructed, the disappearance of the external world as amenable to human reason and understanding has fundamental consequences in terms of closing off critical and emancipatory possibilities.
transformation but it is not about the transformation of the external world but the ongoing process of transforming the inner world of individuals. The lack of completeness of the human subject is not posed in relation to a pre-liberal subject but in relation to the liberal subject itself.

Anthony Giddens, has been one of the most articulate advocates of the shift from the external to the internal world, in his work *Beyond Left and Right* and on *The Third Way*. He clearly articulates the shift from the liberal modernist belief that developments in science and technology might enable the extension of humanity’s control over the external world: that ‘human beings can become not just authors but the masters of their own destiny’ (1994: 3). However, he argues that today we are aware that the aspiration of controlling and shaping our external world was a product of human hubris and the lack of understanding. Today’s globalised world is dislocated, uncertain, in many ways a ‘runaway world’. What is more:

...disturbingly, what was supposed to create greater and greater certainty – the advance of human knowledge and ‘controlled intervention’ into society and nature – is actually deeply involved with this unpredictability... The uncertainties thus created I shall refer to generically as manufactured uncertainty. (1994: 3-4)

These uncertainties, because they are conceived of as human products (or by-products) cannot be dealt with through Enlightenment prescriptions of ‘more knowledge, more control’ (1994: 4) but rather through coming to terms with the need to limit and rethink our understanding of humanity’s relationship with the external world. The problem for Giddens is the indirect nature of our relationship to our environment. For him, globalisation can best be described as ‘action at a distance’ (1994: 4): globalisation - the complexity and interconnectedness of our world - means that our actions have effects at a distance from their intended effects and that similarly we are effected by the actions of others, despite their intentions. In other words, what we do has global effects although we cannot see or predict what these may be.

For Giddens, but from a different perspective to Nietzsche, the human is all there is and the human needs to reject the cosy meanings and understanding which liberal modernity imposed on the world at the cost of the human subject:

Today we must break with providentialism, in whatever guise it might present itself. Not for us the idea that capitalism is pregnant with socialism. Not for us the idea that there is a historical agent – whether proletariat or any other – that will more or less automatically come to our rescue. Not for us the idea that ‘history’ has any necessary direction at all. We must accept risk as risk, up to and including the most potentially cataclysmic of high-consequence risks; we must accept that there can be no way back to external risk from manufactured risk. (1994: 249)

The key point to grasp from Gidden’s framework is that our decisions or our choices have much broader and more powerful consequences than we can
imagine. The logical consequence is that our world becomes seen and understood as a product of our individual choices. For Giddens there is no outside to humanity conceived of as choice-making individuals. There is no external world of structures and social relations or of natural laws open to discovery. We have globalised our own world, consigning the world of the Enlightenment or of liberal modernity to the history books. The liberal world presupposed an external world open to our understanding and therefore to our manipulation and control. There can be no Cartesian subject without an outside and no Cartesian teleology of progress. Giddens describes the disappearance of the external world in terms of 'disappearance of nature, where "nature" refers to environments and events given independently of human action' (1994: 6). Nothing exists outside our actions and consequently our actions are everything. If there is a problem to be addressed the only sphere of engagement can be with the sphere of human action, understood as the decisional choices of individuals.

As Giddens states: 'Manufactured uncertainty intrudes into all the arenas of life thus opened up to decision-making'. (1994: 6) The world is reduced to individual decision-making and at the same time individual decision-making becomes the sphere of policy-making activity. The reason for this is that we discover that there are major problems with the individual decision-makers, human beings. We are not equipped to exist in a world which is dependent on our decision-making capacities. Where the fixed structures and certainties no longer operate we are forced to pay particular attention to how we make decisions, as we increasingly shape our own lives, we deploy 'social reflexivity' and are in danger of increasing the problems which we ourselves are confronted with. 'The growth of social reflexivity is a major factor introducing a dislocation between knowledge and control – a prime source of manufactured uncertainty.' (1994: 7)

For Giddens, the problem is that at a time when we have to make more decisions than ever before and the consequences of our individual decision-making are of global consequence we come up against a major barrier. This barrier is an internal one – the way in which our brains work. We are not well equipped to deal with complex autonomy and so we need external assistance. This is where the work of Giddens chimes in with the institutionalism of North, Hayek and others. The development of government interventions to assist us in our autonomous choice-making, Giddens calls 'generative politics'. The state can no longer do things for us in a directive and controlling way and so must confront the urgent and complex task of empowering the subject to make better life choices:

Generative politics is a politics which seeks to allow individuals and groups to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them, in the context of overall social concerns and goals... it does not situate itself in the old opposition between state and market. It works through providing material conditions, and organisational frameworks, for the life-political decisions taken by individuals and groups in the wider social order. (1994: 15)
This focus on the inner life of the subject rather than on the state as a director of society, as Giddens himself notes, owes much to the work of Friedrich Hayek, who similarly critiqued the ‘cybernetic model’ of a controlling and knowing state. In fact, it is the lack of knowledge of a complex and globalised world which necessitates the focus on the individual rather than the state. For Giddens, this shift takes on full force only in late modernity with the complexity of society, while top-down decision-making might work for early modernising states, in a world of globalisation and high-reflexivity only bottom-up decision-making enables the high level of reflexivity and adaptability required.

Giddens, it could be argued, assists us in understanding Sen’s conception of ‘development as freedom’, for he clearly articulates the project of individual empowerment as the development of the autonomy of the individual. The enhancement of ‘autonomy’ understood as the capacity to make better and more informed decisions is seen to be not a matter merely of material goods, but also life skills, such as communicative abilities, and psychological and emotional learning (1994: 119). The internalisation of the project of Giddens, expressed in the language of Beyond Left and Right and The Third Way is clear in the emphasis upon the modern subject’s need for ‘self-help’ and ‘self-construction’:

The advance of social reflexivity means that individuals have no choice but to make choices; and these choices define who they are. People have to ‘construct their own biographies’ in order to sustain a coherent sense of self-identity. (1994: 126)

Humans may not be able to ‘master their own destiny’ but, for Giddens, they need to ‘construct their own biographies’. Giddens’ work is very important for understanding and drawing out the consequences of an internalised conception of development within late-liberalism and its relationship to our understanding of the subject. One way in which he illustrates the shift is in our understanding of the barriers to development or negative outcomes. In the pre-liberal age, or pre-Enlightenment era, the main conceptual framework was that of fate or nature or God – setbacks could not be prevented merely accepted. In the liberal era, the dominant framework of understanding was that of ‘risk’ or ‘accident’, something that highlighted the borders of control and could be calculated, minimised or insured against. The key point being that ‘accident’ or ‘risk’ were conceptualised as external factors, outside control. Giddens argues that today there is no outside, no external area, no external risk. Today, in the late-liberal world, he suggests that the key problem is manufactured risk, setbacks and damage as a consequence of the decisions we take ourselves. This suggests that work on the self is the key area for resolving problems. A key example Giddens gives to demonstrate the difference between an external risk and an internal one is the changing nature of health care, shifting from intervention to prevention. In the liberal world, we understood that there was a risk of getting cancer or other ailments in old age and the attempt to address the problem was in the development of medicine and forms of diagnosis and interventionist treatment. In the late-liberal world, Giddens advocates a different approach of prevention based on work on the self, changing attitudes and social norms to empower individuals to make better life-choices and adopt better life-style habits.
Giddens suggests that our understanding of development should also fit into this positive and empowering approach, which he states is a challenge to liberal modernity rather than an attempt to generalise it successfully everywhere; starting from the basis of ‘putting in question the very notion of development as economic growth, while still recognising the enormous problems that global poverty presents’ (1994: 158). Here we have the late liberal approach to development: one which recognises that poverty is a problem but that does not see the external approach to development as the solution, but the internal approach of individual empowerment and capacity-building. Giddens’ articulates his alternative as one which:

...would regard life-political questions as central to emancipatory politics, rather than simply working the other way around. Emancipation can no longer be equated with simple modernization, but demands the confronting of questions of lifestyle and ethics. To speak of ‘lifestyle’ with regard to the poor and hungry of the world initially sounds odd; but a response to poverty today can no longer be regarded as purely economic. The question of ‘how to live’ in a globalizing milieu where local culture and environmental resources are being squandered has in fact a particular significance for the poor. A battle for autonomy, for self-reliance, is also a struggle to reconstitute the local as a prime way, sometimes the only way, of avoiding endemic deprivation and despair. (1994: 160)

For Giddens, the material world is much less significant than the inner world. ‘Poverty alone isn’t necessarily to be feared or abominated; the key condition of the good life is what Murray, following Maslow, calls self-actualization.’ (1994: 166) Alluding to the ‘happiness agenda’, Giddens argues that modernist conceptions of progress, of productivism, of more is better, have reduced our human autonomy and freedom as choice-makers: ‘the need to make life choices is expressed only in a distorted and narrow way as the purchase of goods and services’ (1994: 169). Instead, the focus on the inner world is liberating. Another classic example is Giddens’ view of old-age. He argues that old age is a conception of productivism and imposed retirement merely creates welfare dependency: ‘Aging is treated as “external”, as something that happens to one, not as a phenomenon actively constructed and negotiated’ (1994: 170). Giddens seeks to argue that old age is a matter of individual choice, even aging: ‘many of the physical difficulties of old age are not to do with aging at all, but rather with lifestyle practices’ (1994: 170). Where the more idealist of Enlightenment philosophers such as Condorcet imagined that the external-orientated growth of science and technology could lead to expansions of the human life-span well beyond 100 years, Giddens asserts that the same can be achieved through internal growth and care of the self.

Giddens (like Hayek and North) locates difference not in the external context but in the inner world of the subject, in the shift from the material external world to the psychic inner world:
Happiness ‘does not depend on outside events, but rather on how we interpret them’; it is ‘a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated’. It depends less on controlling the outer world than controlling the inner one. ‘People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy. (1994: 181)

Productivism – seeking to engage with and transform the external world – is no longer held to be decisive at the level of states directing society and managing the social collectivity or at the level of the individual where risks were externalised and insured against through welfare. The key point Giddens makes is that risk has to be dealt with at the psychic level rather than the material level. He asks:

Objections at this juncture are likely to abound. Can people change their psychological outlook in the face of material deprivations they are powerless to control? And are individuals’ psychic states something which governments can or should influence? The answer to these questions is: yes, they can – and do... If good government, among other objectives, is about facilitating the pursuit of happiness, it certainly has to be concerned with the psychic states of its citizenry, and not only with its level of material prosperity. (1994: 187)

Self-realization is about transforming the inner life of the citizen. This transformation occurs through welcoming risk and owning risk:

Schemes of positive welfare, orientated to manufactured rather than external risk, would be directed to fostering the autotelic self. The autotelic self is one with an inner confidence which comes from self-respect, and one where a sense of ontological security, originating in basic trust, allows for a positive appreciation of social difference. It refers to a person able to translate potential threats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience. The autotelic self does not seek to neutralize risk or to suppose that ‘someone else will take care of the problem’; risk is confronted as the active challenge which generates self-actualization. (1994: 192, emphasis added)

**Sen’s Framework**

In Amartya Sen’s agent-centred world there are no universals and therefore no framework for external measurement. The transformative project is reduced down to that of enlarging individual agency – choice-making capacity – adaptivity. The individual making choices is all that there is – clearly there can be no ‘objective’ or external measure of development. As Sen states, starting from the viewpoint of the individual is not entirely value-free: ‘There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements.’ (1999: xii). In this Sen is echoing Hayek and North et al – open societies are best because they provide the best opportunity for adaptive choice-making (see also
North, Wallis and Weingast, 2009). Starting from the viewpoint of individuals as agents and choice-makers clearly undermines any view of sovereign social collectivity as agency as in the socialist or liberal-interventionist conceptions of the Keynesian state, capable of problem-solving through policy intervention and redistributive approaches.

Freedom is not conceived as presupposing an external agency of transformation as in the colonial framework, neither is freedom understood to be achieved with independence as in the early post-colonial perspectives. 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. (1999: xii)

Individuals have to be freed from ‘unfreedoms’ which can take both material and immaterial or ideological forms. 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.

It is not so much that development is degraded to a subjective level of the material resources which are considered necessary or desirable for the sustainability of poverty, maintaining the ‘bare life’ of the ‘uninsured’ (Duffield 2007) but that the subject and object of development is entirely internalised. Development is judged on the basis of the individual’s use of ‘reasoned agency’. Development is the project of giving the individual the choice-making capacity necessary to adapt efficiently in today’s globalised world. Development is the task of all stakeholders but can only be measured in the individual’s inner achievement of ‘freedom’. Freedom is thereby not autonomy, self-government, democracy – ‘freedom’ is no longer conceptualised in the 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. 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 both 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 freedoms of individuals, seen as active agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of dispensed benefits. (1999: xii-xiii)

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.

We begin to see here that Sen’s framework is doing a lot more than merely downplaying the need for material development or taking the social struggle out of the process of freeing individuals from oppression. Sen’s framing takes the understanding of socio-economic and political processes out of the framing of liberal modernity. There is no teleology of progress, there is no universalist framing, there is no longer the understanding of the liberal subject – as either a rights- or an interest-bearing rational and autonomous actor.

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-liberalism. 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.

For Sen there is no divide between the West and the non-West as there are no social or economic collectivities – the level of development in terms of GDP is no longer relevant, nor is the type of political regime in itself. There is no universal content to freedom in the economic or political realm. The lack of freedom can exist in a wealthy liberal democracy as the concern is not an ‘exclusionary’ understanding of freedom. Any individual can become unfree if Sen’s conception of ‘the more inclusive idea of capability deprivation’ is taken up (1999: 20).

In this conception, political freedom and 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 institutions which shape our capacities and capabilities for free choices.

In this understanding of freedom, there can be no assumption of originatory 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 counterposits a ‘realization-focused
understanding of justice’ (2009: 10). 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... (2009: 68, emphasis added)

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 ‘realization’ comes first. On the basis of injustice, or ‘unfreedoms’ then justice (like development) becomes a process of realization ‘aimed at guiding social choice towards social justice’ (2009: 69). Justice aims at enlarging justice as freedom in the say way as development aims at enlarging development as freedom. Justice is a continuous process not an end or a goal.

**Sen’s Displacement of the External World with the Inner World**

For Sen, there are no external frames of reference. It is not liberal institutions or economic development which serve to gauge the problematic of the subject but the ‘realization of the individual’s capabilities’ – this as an ongoing process not a measurement against a fixed point. Sen, in his work on *Justice*, is keen to highlight the importance of difference over universality: the embeddedness of the human subject, in doing so he is happy quoting Gramsci:

> 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. (2009: 119)

Sen suggests that it is our social embeddedness which restricts our capacities for transition. That we need an ‘anthropological way’ (2009: 120, 121) of understanding the ways in which our subjectivities may constitute a barrier to the development of public reason. He expands on how our ‘local conventions of thought’ (2009: 125) may limit our ability to reflect and to adapt, that individual and collective world views and understandings may be partial and one-sided. However, this is not just a call for more information or greater material equality. 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’ (2009: 235).

It is vital to draw out that ‘capability to choose’ is very different from the ‘freedom to choose’. The later 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 not measured in external outputs but internal processes of valuation and decision-making. It is not an outcome, not even a non-material outcome, such as ‘well-being’ or ‘happiness’ (2009: 271). It is an internal outcome – it is a ‘way of living’ (2009: 273).

Sen’s work, in fact, recaptures some of the elitist theorising of Plato in focusing on the inner world rather than the outer world. Sen, in a footnote, states (2009: 301):

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.

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’. This very much follows the pre-liberal framing of Plato in Gorgias, when Socrates famously argues with Polus that tyrants lack power because they lack a true understanding of their ends, of what would do them good (Plato 1960: 35-39). In other words, the late-liberal subjects of development are not able to autonomously or rationally judge what is in their own interests. For Sen, the subject of development is one who lacks the capacity to answer the Socratic question: ‘How should one live?’ (Sen. 1987: 2) For Sen, development – the task of good governance – it to enable individuals to answer this question correctly. 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 (2009: 404-407). People choosing to live badly – the limits of human reason – 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 enabling the empowering of this subject - of fulfilling 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 process of development, justice, democracy etc – 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 transformative agency (2010: 359).

This shift to work on the inner self rather than external enables us to understand development as a process of freedom. Those who most need to be freed are the poor and marginal who need ‘enabling’: those who lack the means to adapt; those who are vulnerable need to be empowered, capability-built and secured through resilience (WRI 2008). Wherever there is a decision to be made, this is the nexus for interventionist/regulatory nexus of ‘development’: how can this decision or this choice be better made? How can the institutions of governance help enable a better ‘choice environment’? What capabilities do the poor and marginalised need to enable this choice? The human-centred logic of late liberalism, so well articulated by Sen, sets out a framework of understanding and of policy-making, which focuses on the internal life of individuals as shaped by the immediate context of family and child-rearing, especially the transition to the decision-making subject. The 2007 World Development Report, Development and the Next Generation, articulates the consequences:

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. (World Bank 2006: 2)

Development as freedom means capability-building starts with the young as a way of transforming society through reshaping the internal world. 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... (2006: 8)

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. The problem is not the material circumstances, but the post-colonial subject’s lack of freedom: their lack of capability to respond efficiently to their circumstances.

The post-colonial subject may be at the centre of development discourse, but it is their lack of capability which is highlighted. This human-centred approach replicates that of Kant’s call for enlightenment. The lack of material development is read as evidence of the lack of the post-colonial subject’s capabilities. In a globalised world, with access to information and resources, it appears that the post-colonial subject is exercising agency in choosing poorly and, in effect, is the object of its own subjection and lack of self-realization. The subject’s difference or Otherness is understood and confirmed by the economic and social inequalities. The fact that we accept the universal understanding of the autonomous liberal subject now becomes an apologia for difference rather than a call for its transcendence. The source of this difference is then located in the post-colonial subject itself, in the inner world of the subject. The problems of development or the barriers to the eradication of difference are then searched for in terms of the difficulty of changing the post-colonial mind.

**Conclusion: Choice and the Human Subject**

The exclusion of the external world in the subject- or agent-centred world of Sen, results in and reflects the removal of development from a transformative or ‘human’ project. Hannah Arendt so acutely warned of just a shift to the private realm, where the emphasis is on the transformation of behaviour rather than a focus on the active transformation of the external world. She argued that this perspective would abolish the world of political contestation and reduce the state and government purely to administration (1958: 45). Perhaps more importantly, Arendt, like Nietzsche and Althusser, powerfully challenged the ideological implication of choice-based theorisation, that, in the words of Giddens, we can ‘be authors of our own biographies’:

> Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author. (1958: 184)

In the transition away from the external to the inner world, what humanity has in common is no longer the external world (to which we individually and collectively subordinate to our conscious will) but the inner world, the structure of our minds (1958: 283). For Arendt, the essence of institutionalist or behaviouralist approaches is their reduction of the public or social world to the inner world of the psychological processes. The social, collective, plural mediation of the world (as human artifact) no longer acts as a ‘table’, relating
and separating us, enabling us to constitute the human as a collective, plural, active and transformative subject (1958: 52-3).

The key point for a critique informed from a Foucauldian perspective is that ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ are entirely degraded once the world is reduced to the inner life of the individual. In making choice- and decision-making the moment of understanding and of policy-intervention, that moment – the moment of decision - is taken away: its subjective sovereign freedom is denied. When North or Giddens or Sen or human development programmes talk of ‘choices’ they are not referring to choices as human freedoms. They are not referring to choices as freely willed by the sovereign subject. Genuine sovereign choices are free from external judgement. Here choice – freedom, or autonomy - is reduced to responsibility. There is no genuine freedom, merely the allocation of blame, on the basis that as we have universal inner lives, Western subjects can understand post-colonial subjects on the basis of the higher developed inner capacities compared to lower developed capacities for ‘choice’.

As much as Sen and Giddens set out to dismiss the limited freedoms and choices of productivist modernity – the understanding of freedom or choice-making as superficial and limited by consumption choices or passive electoral voting – these choices are, in fact, freely made and not open to external judgement. It is only when one argues that individually and collectively, humans author their own lives or their own world that the capacity for freedom or for choice disappears – as then their choices need to be reflective of their boundless and unintended consequences – choice needs to become resilient – judged on outcomes. The telos of tracing authorship of the world to individual choice-making removes the freedom to make choices. What, for Arendt, made the human creative and transformative: the fact that our actions are unbounded as other autonomous humans react to them and others to their acts, becomes an argument of apologia; an argument to explain and rationalise difference and to justify the imposition of regulatory control. For Althusser, as for Arendt:

That human, i.e. social individuals are active in history – as agents… - that is a fact. But, considered as agents, human individuals are not ‘free’ and ‘constitutive subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. They work in and through the determinations of the forms of historical existence of the social relations of production and reproduction (labour process, division and organization of labour, process of production and reproduction, class struggle, etc.). (2008: 134)

We struggle to constitute ourselves as legal and political subjects, with equal rights under the law or at the ballot box, but this does not make as sovereigns of our economic and social lives. The subject-form of the agent-individual is a constitutive feature of liberal modernity and is not problematic per se. We are held responsible for our acts in the political and legal sphere – we can be put in jail for crimes or judged by others ethically – but these judgements are based on our intentionality – in legal terms – our mens rea. Without intention there is no crime, in the former world of the modern liberal subject.
In essence, Sen seeks to extend the responsibility of individuals to the consequences of their unbounded actions, to the social relations in which they act and decide. Here the subject is no longer located in the external world. Althusser is right on this button in this suggestion that for the purposes of apologia, ‘the legal-ideational notion of the subject’ is transformed into a ‘philosophical category’ which is then posed questions in relations to ‘the Subject of knowledge’ and ‘the Subject of History’ (2008: 135):

To be dialectical-materialist, Marxist philosophy must break with the idealist category of the ‘Subject’ as Origin, Essence and Cause, responsible in its internality for all the determinations of the external ‘Object’, of which it is said to be the internal ‘Subject’. For Marxist philosophy there can be no Subject as Absolute-Centre, as a Radical Origin, as a Unique Cause. (2008: 135)

It is human interaction – social relations, class struggle - which provides the context in which the action or decision of individuals becomes unbounded but that does not mean that humans individually or collectively are the subjects (or authors) of history: how those social relations are constructed enables us to understand how social relations provide the dynamic or ‘motor’ of what we retrospectively narrate as history (Althusser 2008: 139). The only human author of history is the biographer or historian, someone who comes after the fact, rather than being active in it, like the chorus in a Greek tragedy (Arendt 1958: 187).

Sen, in describing ‘development as freedom’, in fact, defers freedom to the impossible future through asserting that our limited ‘free choices’ are constrained by our incapacities and incapacibilities. His programme is based on the transformation of the inner life of the subject to facilitate better choice-making but this denies the autonomy of the subject (within the constraints of social relations). Our freedom to autonomously decide is taken away at the same time as the constraints of our social relations become essentialised as the internal barriers of the mind. Capitalism is naturalised and normalised at the same time as human rationality is degraded and denied. The problem is the human rather than the social relations in which the human is embedded.

While, for many critical theorists this inversion of the human subject can be politically described or understood as apologia or an ideological discourse of power, Foucault seeks to get away from a purely contingent economic or politically opportunist understanding of the inversion of the classical understanding of the human subject. For Sen, as for Giddens, the task of governance is to transform the inner world of the subject through the indirect shaping of the context in which choices are made. Foucault more than any other author, sought to explore this shift – to the active production of the subject as the sphere of governance. For liberal modernity, there was always an ambiguous relationship between the Enlightenment framework of the human subject as a rational creative subject and the need for apologia and discourses of individual responsibility. In his work on the Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault suggests that the disappearance of the external world today undermines the very basis upon
which liberal modernity was constructed. Once the individual as choice-maker becomes all that there is, then all the binaries upon which the liberal assumptions of the human subject enabled the subjection of the subject begin to dissolve.

References