Arguments for a Better World: Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen, Volume 2: Society, Institutions, and Development
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Introduction
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Abstract and Keywords
The Introduction outlines the Amartya Sen's career starting in the UK at the London School of Economics and then at Oxford. It also briefly mentions his time at Harvard and Cambridge.
The chapter discusses how he became interested in poverty and basic needs during all this time. It then goes on to outline the content in the first volume and this second volume.

Keywords: Amartya Sen, London School of Economics, Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge, poverty

WHEN Amartya Sen received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998, there was much confusion in popular reportage about which of his contributions were being honored by the prize. Some wrote that he got the prize for his large contributions to development economics, some claimed this was recognition for his pioneering work on the history and causes of famines, and yet others suggested that he got it for the moral causes he espoused.
Sen got the prize for welfare economics. Part of the blame for the confusion in people's minds has to be directed at him, for it is caused by the truly remarkable range of his writings. He has indeed contributed to all the fields people thought he had got the prize for and he has been a relentless campaigner for moral causes, such as human rights, basic freedoms and capabilities and the guarantee of minimum living standards. What is even more remarkable is that he has continued to broaden the areas of his attention and inquiry since 1998. He has worked on Indian history and the politics of identity and violence, and has recently chaired the Commonwealth Commission on “Civil Paths to Peace”. He can lay claim to being a social scientist in a way that few others can.

On 3 November 2008, Amartya Sen will turn 75; and we, as his one-time students and, subsequently, colleagues in the broader sense of the term, felt that it was a fitting occasion to celebrate his remarkable achievements. We wanted to do this by presenting him with a book that tries to push the frontiers further on the full range of academic themes and activist causes with which Sen has been associated. One thing was immediately evident—this would not be a small project. We decided (p.2) to invite prominent economists, philosophers, historians, policy-makers and social scientists in general who have had some association with Sen—as student, colleague, editor, co-author or co-activist—to contribute to what would be a major multi-volume work. Yet so many people have been associated with Amartya Sen in one way or the other and so many have been profoundly influenced by him that there was no way we could accommodate them all. We are aware that this is an idiosyncratic collection of authors, and the list of those who could legitimately make claims to being a part of this project, but had to be left out for reasons of space, is long.

Amartya Sen did not start out in welfare economics. As an undergraduate student at Trinity College, Cambridge University (where he later returned as Master), Sen wrote a dissertation on the choice of technology. That dissertation gained him a Ph.D. and in 1960 was published as a book. Choice of Techniques became a celebrated text, which students of development, planning and growth read, did research on and modified. This work had many spin-offs for Sen himself. He contributed to growth theory, cost—benefit
analysis and development; he became full professor at the Delhi School of Economics in 1963.

During this time his interests were, however, beginning to shift as he became intrigued by the problems of welfare and the conundrums of voting and social choice. There was a small literature on the latter at that time. It had all begun in the early fifties with the publication of Kenneth Arrow's path-breaking “impossibility theorem”. Amartya began working on this seriously after he moved to the Delhi School of Economics and this resulted in his seminal book *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*. With a diverse set of ideas, from mathematical logic through welfare economics to ethics, crowding its pages, the book quickly became a classic. It drew the attention of not just economists, but also professional philosophers.

In the 1970s Amartya Sen moved to England, first as Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics (LSE) and later to Oxford, where he became Drummond Professor. It is at this stage that we, the editors of this book, got to know him. Kaushik Basu did his Ph.D. with him from 1974 to 1976 at the LSE. Ravi Kanbur had him as his D.Phil. adviser at Oxford from 1978 to 1980.

During his stay at the LSE, Amartya Sen's interest moved on to something which had always been there, though somewhat subliminally—the subject of poverty and inequality. He published his celebrated book, *The Economics of Inequality*, and later the seminal paper on poverty measurement in *Econometrica*. After seven years at the LSE, he moved to Oxford in 1977. And his interest in philosophy flourished. The first evidence of Amartya's interest in philosophy was a paper he wrote in 1959 in *Enquiry*. This little-known paper consisted of a lucid elaboration of the conflict between determinism and free will. Sen's philosophical interest continued to grow in Oxford, where he interacted with the philosophers, and his papers appeared in *Philosophical Quarterly, Mind, Philosophy and Public Affairs, Theory and Decision* and the *Journal of Philosophy*. When he moved to Harvard in 1987 his appointment would be in the economics and philosophy departments and he offered a course jointly with Robert Nozick.
His work on poverty and basic needs, coupled with his interest in moral philosophy, led Sen to question the pervasive use of income to measure and compare human welfare. Up until then, the most popular way of ranking the economic performance of countries had been in terms of the per capita incomes of the people. Sen argued repeatedly for the need to bring in other indicators of the standard of living in order to evaluate the overall well-being of societies. This work has had enormous practical implications, ever since the United Nations Development Programme, openly acknowledging Sen's influence, began computing the Human Development Index (HDI) to evaluate societies.

Since moving to Harvard in the 1980s, and during his term as Master of Trinity College, Cambridge in the 1990s before returning to Harvard, Sen's academic reach and popular engagement has continued to broaden. He has written on identity, on history and on culture. He has engaged vigorously in policy debates, advancing an egalitarian, tolerant and pluralistic perspective on the issues of the day. Sen's later work has come under criticism from academic writers for being populist but that is more a reflection on his critics than on him. A large part of his recent work is that of a person with a cause, and he has devoted his considerable analytical power to trying to win over the hearts and minds of the ordinary person, journalists and policy-makers and not simply engaging in debates with other academics. This argumentative Indian, to use the title of one of his recent books, has joined and enriched the arguments for a better world.

It is this full range of Sen that we try to engage with in this rather mammoth project. Our two volumes mirror Amartya Sen's own two-volume collected works—Choice, Welfare and Measurement and Resources, Values and Development—and, in addition, we try to stretch the contours further to accommodate his expanding range of interests since these collected works were published in 1982 and 1984 respectively. We have called our two volumes, respectively, Ethics, Welfare and Measurement and Society, Institutions and Development.

The first volume begins with matters of ethics and moral philosophy—appropriately we feel, given the foundational status of philosophy and given that so much of modern social choice and welfare draws on principles of moral philosophy and the philosophy of human rights. Several essays in this
collection then go into matters of social choice theory and evaluative measurement, matters that were close to Amartya Sen's heart through the seventies and eighties. His influential papers and books on the “capabilities approach” to social evaluation appeared mostly after the publication of his collected works, and this has been enormously influential in the social sciences, perhaps even more outside of economics than within. We felt that this deserves a full subsection and so there is a cluster of eight papers on the subject. The first volume ends with some more applied essays on collective action and also some on Sen's recent interest and an urgent subject of our times—identity.

**(p.4)** Volume II is on the subject of development, on which Amartya Sen has contributed extensively throughout his life, and which, we have noted, was widely (and wrongly) believed to be the work for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. But we decided to place this subject within a much larger social science context than usual. Thus this second volume has contributions from political scientists, sociologists, philosophers and historians, and of course there is the ubiquitous presence of economists. In its first part the second volume picks up from where the first volume left off—the subject of capabilities in actual developmental settings. The second part turns to the topic of gender and the household. Sen is a prominent figure in the field of feminist economics and his contributions on differences in the treatment of the girl child and boy child have been of great influence for both academic research and policy-making. His writing on the millions of “missing girls” in India and China stirred consciences and drew the attention of bureaucrats and politicians. He has also worked, in more academic ways, on the problem of decision-making within the household by applying ideas of Nash bargaining to the nature of “cooperative conflict” among house holders. These interests are reflected in the papers in Part II.

Interestingly, among Amartya Sen's earliest research were several papers on growth theory and a famous edited volume on the subject of growth. The third part of Volume II consists of papers on growth but with special attention to the urgent problems of poverty, climate change and labor standards. The final part of the volume deals with the role of sociology, politics and history in the context of development and economics. While one may debate the end of history as
intellectuals have done in recent times, we for our part wanted to emphasize the importance of this subject for economics by ending with history. Scholars have argued that we need to embed economics in the related social sciences to enrich our understanding of not just the social sciences, but economics itself. The last eight essays try to carry this agenda forward, however slowly.

This sizeable project would not have been possible but for the supportive atmosphere of Cornell University. Our faculty colleagues have been a source of discussion and stimulus, so important for this kind of work. Kiran Gajwani helped greatly with research assistance. Sue Snyder provided excellent administrative support throughout in keeping the volumes on track. Sarah Caro of Oxford University Press has been an enthusiastic backer at each of the many long stages of this project, from inception to production. We thank them all.

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