WOMEN AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Capabilities Approach

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM
The University of Chicago

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Many countries have a far lower sex ratio: India's, for example, is 92.7 women to 100 men, the lowest sex ratio since the census began early in this century. If we study such ratios and ask the question, "How many more women than are now present in Country C would be there if C had the same sex ratio as sub-Saharan Africa?" we get a figure that economist Amartya Sen has graphically called the number of "missing women." There are many millions of missing women in the world today.[6] Using this rough index, the number of missing women in Southeast Asia is 2.4 million, in Latin America 4.4, in North Africa 2.4, in Iran 1.4, in China 44.0, in Bangladesh 3.7, in India 36.7, in Pakistan 5.2, in West Asia 4.3. If we now consider the ratio of the number of missing women to the number of actual women in a country, we get, for Pakistan 12.9%, India 9.5%, Bangladesh 8.7%, China 8.6%, Iran 8.5%, West Asia 7.8%, North Africa 3.9%, Latin America 2.2%, Southeast Asia 1.2%. In India, not only is the mortality differential especially sharp among children (girls dying in far greater numbers than boys), the higher mortality rate of women compared to men applies to all age groups until the late thirties.[7]

Women, in short, lack essential support for leading lives that are fully human. This lack of support is frequently caused by their being women. Thus, even when they live in a constitutional democracy such as India, where they are equals in theory, they are second-class citizens in reality.

II. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH: AN OVERVIEW

I shall argue that international political and economic thought should be feminist, attentive (among other things) to the special problems women face because of sex in more or less every nation in the world, problems without an understanding of which general issues of poverty and development cannot be well confronted. An approach to interna-

sponses to Boserup's work, see *Persistent Inequalities*, ed. Irene Tinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6 The statistics in this paragraph are taken from Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and Drèze and Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 7. Sen's estimated total number of missing women is one hundred million; the *India* chapter discusses alternative estimates.

7 See Drèze and Sen, *Hunger*, 52.

tional development should be assessed for its ability to recognize these problems and to make recommendations for their solution. I shall propose and defend one such approach, one that seems to me to do better in this area than other prominent alternatives. The approach is philosophical, and I shall try to show why we need philosophical theorizing in order to approach these problems well.[8] It is also based on a universalist account of central human functions, closely allied to a form of political liberalism; one of my primary tasks will be to defend this type of universalism as a valuable basis from which to approach the problems of women in the developing world.

The aim of the project as a whole is to provide the philosophical underpinning for an account of basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires. (Issues of implementation are complex, and I shall give these separate discussion in section VII of this chapter.) I shall argue that the best approach to this idea of a basic social minimum is provided by an approach that focuses on *human capabilities*, that is, what people are actually able to do and to be – in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being. I shall identify a list of *central human capabilities*, setting them in the context of a type of *political liberalism* that makes them specifically political goals and presents them in a manner free of any specific metaphysical grounding. In this way, I argue, the capabilities can be the object of an *overlapping consensus* among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good.[9] And I shall argue that the capabilities in question should be pursued for each and every person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others: thus I adopt a *principle of each person's capability*, based on a *principle of each person as end*. Women have all too often been treated as the supporters of

8 On this see my "Public Philosophy and International Feminism," *Ethics* 108 (1998), 770–804; "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory: Particularism, Principle, and Bad Behavior," forthcoming in *The Path of the Law in the Twentieth Century*, ed. S. Burton, Cambridge University Press; and "Still Worthy of Praise: A Response to Richard A. Posner, The Problematics of Moral and Legal Theory," *Harvard Law Review* 111 (1998), 1776–95.

9 The terms "political liberalism," "overlapping consensus," and "comprehensive conception" are used as by John Rawls in *Political Liberalism* (expanded paperback edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), hereinafter PL.

the ends of others, rather than as ends in their own right; thus this principle has particular critical force with regard to women's lives. Finally, my approach uses the idea of a *threshold level of each capability*, beneath which it is held that truly human functioning is not available to citizens; the social goal should be understood in terms of getting citizens above this capability threshold.

The capabilities approach has another related, and weaker, use. It specifies a space within which *comparisons of life quality* (how well people are doing) are most revealingly made among nations. Used in this way, it is a rival to other standard measures, such as GNP per capita and utility. This role for the conception is significant, since we are not likely to make progress toward a good conception of the social minimum if we do not first get the space of comparison right. And we may use the approach in this weaker way, to compare one nation to another, even when we are unwilling to go further and use the approach as the philosophical basis for fundamental constitutional principles establishing a social minimum or threshold. On the other hand, the comparative use of capabilities is ultimately not much use without a determinate normative conception that will tell us what to make of what we find in our comparative study. Most conceptions of quality of life measurement in development economics are implicitly harnessed to a normative theory of the proper social goal (wealth maximization, utility maximization, etc.), and this one is explicitly so harnessed. The primary task of my argument will be to move beyond the merely comparative use of capabilities to the construction of a normative political proposal that is a partial theory of justice. (The reasons for saying that it is not a complete theory of justice will be presented in section IV.)

The capabilities approach is fully universal: the capabilities in question are important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation, and each is to be treated as an end. Women in developing nations are important to the project in two ways: as people who suffer pervasively from acute capability failure, and also as people whose situation provides an interesting test of this and other approaches, showing us the problems they solve or fail to solve. Defects in standard GNP- and utility-based approaches can be well understood by keeping the problems of such women in view; but of course women's problems are urgent in their own right, and it may be hoped that a focus on them

will help compensate for earlier neglect of sex equality in development economics and in the international human rights movement.

This project is somewhat unusual in feminist political philosophy because of its focus on developing countries. Such a focus, already common in feminist economic thought and feminist activism, is becoming more common in feminist philosophy, and rightly so. Feminist philosophy, I believe, should increasingly focus on the urgent needs and interests of women in the developing world, whose concrete material and social contexts must be well understood, in dialogue with them, before adequate recommendations for improvement can be made. This international focus will not require feminist political philosophy to turn away from its traditional themes, such as employment discrimination, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and the reform of rape law; these are all as central to women in developing countries as to Western women. But feminist philosophy will have to add new topics to its agenda if it is to approach the developing world in a productive way; among these topics are hunger and nutrition, literacy, land rights, the right to seek employment outside the home, child marriage, and child labor. (Some of these topics are also essential in framing a philosophical approach to the lives of poor women in wealthier nations.) In general, it seems right that problems of poor working women in both developing and developed nations should increasingly hold the center of the scene, and that problems peculiar to middle-class women should give way to these.

Feminist philosophy has frequently been skeptical of universal normative approaches. I shall argue that it is possible to describe a framework for such a feminist practice of philosophy that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality, and rights, and at the same time sensitive to local particularity, and to the many ways in which circumstances shape not only options but also beliefs and preferences. I shall argue that a universalist feminism need not be insensitive to difference or imperialistic, and that a particular type of universalism, framed in terms of general human powers and their development, offers us in fact the best framework within which to locate our thoughts about difference.

In the first chapter, I map out and defend an approach to the foundation of basic political principles using the idea of human capability.

I argue that this approach yields a form of universalism that is sensitive to pluralism and cultural difference; in this way it enables us to answer the most powerful objections to cross-cultural universals. I also explain the relationship of my approach to various forms of liberalism and defend a form of political liberalism in connection with the capabilities idea. I then explain the relationship of this approach to the idea of fundamental human rights. And I offer an account of the relationship between political justification and political implementation.

But to display the attractive features of a conception is only one small part of the task of justification. In the second chapter, I take on one further part of that task by arguing that this approach is superior to approaches based on subjective welfarism, the idea that each person's perceived well-being should be the basis for social choice. Welfarist conceptions are ubiquitous and highly influential in economics and therefore in development; so it seems important, both philosophically and practically, to think clearly about the relationship between the capabilities view and welfarism. I shall argue that the problem of preference-deformation makes a welfarist approach unacceptable as the basis for a normative theory of political principles; we need a substantive account of central political goods, of the sort the capabilities approach gives us. Recognizing the phenomenon of adaptive preference-formation does not entail an unacceptable type of paternalism, if this recognition is combined with a version of political liberalism and a focus on capabilities (not actual functions) as political goals. But the welfarist approach, by showing respect for human desire, gets something right: and I shall try to say what that something is, contrasting my capabilities approach with Platonist accounts of the human good.

The third and fourth chapters investigate two specific problem areas that have particular salience for women's lives. There are several such areas that one might fruitfully pursue. Education and property would be obvious choices, as would rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.[10] I have chosen religion and the family, both because of their

10 On education, see Drèze and Sen, *India*, Chapter 6; on land rights, see Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); on sexual harassment, see my "The Modesty of Mrs. Bajaj: India's Problematic Route to Sexual Harassment Law," in a volume on sexual harassment ed. Reva Siegel and Catharine MacKinnon, forthcoming from Yale University Press.

complexity (in a way, they include all the others) and because they raise complicated problems of a distinctively philosophical kind. The chapter on religion analyzes conflicts between religion and sex equality, developing a strategy for dealing politically and legally with such conflicts. I argue that any good approach to this problem must balance recognition of religion's importance in the human search for meaning (including women's search) against a critical scrutiny of religion when it threatens valuable areas of human functioning. Here the tradition of U.S. constitutional law provides helpful insights, which can be suitably adapted to the problems of pluralistic democracies in the developing world; most of the materials for my solution are already present in the Indian Constitution. Chapter 4, finally, tackles the difficult question of family love and care, asking how, if at all, it is possible to retain the idea that women have value as givers of love and care while promoting political goals of full equality and family justice. Tackling this problem requires, first, giving an adequate philosophical account of love (or at least the general outlines of one), and then examining the social and political origins of that apparently "natural" entity, the family.

I focus throughout on the case of India, a nation in which women suffer great inequalities despite a promising constitutional tradition. Some writings about women and development pull in thinly described examples from many different cultures, without setting any of them in a deep or rich context. I feel that this is unwise; we cannot really see the meaning of an incident or a law without setting it in its context and history. By focusing on India, I can write on the basis of personal observation and familiarity, as well as study, and I am able to assess scholarly debates in a way that I could not had I tried to cover a wider area. The best way of thinking about the relationship between the political ideal presented here in connection with India and its wider application was suggested by Jawaharlal Nehru, in these famous words:

> The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over . . . Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and people are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart. Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosper-

ity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.[11]

Similarly, this ideal political proposal takes its orientation from the example of India, but pertains to all nations.

I am doubly an outsider vis-à-vis the places about which I write, that is, both a foreigner and a middle-class person. But most Indian scholarship about India is also the work of foreigners in at least some sense, that is, people who live middle-class lives that are not remotely like the lives about which they write. (So too is most American scholarship about poverty and welfare reform.) I believe that through curiosity and determination one can surmount these hurdles – especially if one listens to what people say. Maybe at times a foreigner can maintain, too, a helpful type of neutrality amid the cultural, religious, and political debates in which any scholar living in India is bound to be enmeshed. Certainly one is sometimes more warmly received as an unimplicated foreigner than as an upper-class person from the person's own culture. I would not find the warm and trusting reception I found in working-class homes in India, were I to walk one block from my office into the Woodlawn area (a poor African-American neighborhood) that borders the prosperous university community. In a situation of entrenched inequality, being a neighbor can be an epistemological problem.

This is a philosophical project, whose aim is to develop a particular type of normative philosophical theory. I am not an empirical social scientist, nor is this book intended as the record of sustained empirical research. But I do attempt to be responsive to empirical facts and to what I have seen. I believe that philosophical theorizing has practical political value, and that its place cannot be filled by other more empirical types of inquiry. Part of theory's practical value lies in its abstract and systematic character. Feminists who disparage abstraction in a global way are, I believe, very unwise to do so. Without abstraction of some sort, there could be no thought or speech; and the type of abstraction characteristic of the tradition of political philosophy has great value, so long as it is tethered in the right way to a sense of what is relevant in reality (something that has not always been the case).[12]

11 Speech delivered in the Constituent Assembly, New Delhi, August 14, 1947, on the eve of Independence.

12 See my "The Feminist Critique of Liberalism," a Lindley Lecture published in pamphlet form by the University of Kansas Press, and in Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice*.

Some feminist philosophy, particularly the type influenced by postmodernist literary theory, has involved a type of abstraction that turns the mind away from reality, and that does not help us see or understand real women's lives better. A focus on real cases and on empirical facts can help us to identify the salient features that a political theory should not efface or ignore. So I have tried to write in a way that is responsive to reality and that helps the reader imagine the relevant reality, however theoretical my ultimate aims. I shall therefore begin my argument, in section IV, by presenting two accounts of particular lives that I have encountered, which should help us to see the salient problems and how they bear on one another. These lives will provide an illustrative focus for many of the concrete discussions in subsequent chapters.[13] In section V I shall set these particular lives against the background of a more general factual account of some of the problems facing women in today's India.

III. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH: SEN AND NUSSBAUM

Before we can begin the argument, however, the capabilities approach must be introduced from a different perspective. For, as will emerge more fully from the concrete discussions in Chapters 1 and 2, an approach based on functioning and capability was pioneered in development economics by Amartya Sen. My own version of the approach derives from a period of collaboration with Sen at the World Institute for Development Economics Research beginning in 1986, when we recognized that ideas I had been pursuing in the context of Aristotle scholarship had a striking resemblance to ideas that he had for some years been pursuing in economics. It might therefore be assumed that we agree on all the matters to be discussed here, and controversial proposals in the present argument might be attributed to Sen, who has enough

13 Different examples will be used in Chapter 3. Vasanti seems little interested in religion; although Jayamma prays regularly, religion has not played a major role in shaping her circumstances. Religious law has played a relatively small role in both lives. Both, moreover, are Hindu, and my aim is to investigate tensions among the religions, as they bear on sex equality. Finally, the religion issue requires a focus on law, and thus a selection of examples from among significant legal cases.

arguments on his hands already. It therefore seems important to try to describe what is and is not common to our respective approaches.

Sen's primary use of the notion of capability is to indicate a space within which comparisons of quality of life (or, as he sometimes says, standard of living) are most fruitfully made. Instead of asking about people's satisfactions, or how much in the way of resources they are able to command, we ask, instead, about what they are actually able to do or to be. Sen has also insisted that it is in the space of capabilities that questions about social equality and inequality are best raised.

I agree wholeheartedly with Sen's claims about the capability space, and with the arguments he has used to support them, many of which will be replicated here. But my goal in this book is to go beyond the merely comparative use of the capability space to articulate an account of how capabilities, together with the idea of a threshold level of capabilities, can provide a basis for central constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments. The notion of a threshold is more important in my account than the notion of full capability equality: as I argue, we may reasonably defer questions about what we shall do when all citizens are above the threshold, given that this already imposes a taxing and nowhere-realized standard. Thus my proposal is intended to be compatible with several different accounts of distribution above the threshold; it is consequently a partial, rather than a complete, theory of just distribution. Sen nowhere uses the idea of a threshold. I do not think he has stated whether he would actually favor complete capability equality; to the extent that his proposal is open-ended on this point, he and I may be in substantial agreement.

Another area of strong agreement is in the important role we both give to the political liberties. Sen has explicitly endorsed the Rawlsian priority of liberty. My view holds that all the capabilities are equally fundamental, and does not announce a lexical ordering among them. But insofar as we both argue strenuously that economic needs should not be met by denying liberty, we are in complete agreement.

Finally, we are in agreement in stressing that the capabilities we strive for should be understood to be valuable for each and every person, and that it is the capability of each that we should consider, when we ask how nations are doing. Sen has never announced anything so explicit as my *principle of each person's capability*, but his criticism of

organic models of the family, for example, makes it perfectly clear that he supports this emphasis on treating each person as an end.

My approach, however, departs from Sen's in several significant ways. First of all, although Sen and I are in strong agreement about the poverty of cultural relativism and the need for universal norms in the development policy arena, he has never produced explicit arguments against relativism, apart from historical arguments about non-Western cultures that show the descriptive inadequacy of many anti-universalist approaches. It is reasonably clear that he agrees with the way in which I would answer what, in Chapter 1, I call the *argument from culture*, by stressing that cultures are scenes of debate and contestation. But it is less clear whether he would endorse the other replies to relativist arguments that I present in Chapter 1, although he is in sympathy with their general spirit.

Nor has Sen ever attempted to ground the capabilities approach in the Marxian/Aristotelian idea of truly human functioning that plays a central role in my argument. Although he occasionally alludes both to Marx and to Aristotle in articulating the approach, it is unclear to me whether those thinkers played a central role in shaping his conception; insofar as they did, it was probably in an indirect way, through their role in shaping a climate of debate on the left in India. Thus the arguments about which lives are worthy of the dignity of the human being, and about the waste and tragedy involved in the blighting of human powers – and, in addition, all discussions of philosophical justification – should be understood to have no assent from him, though that does not mean that he disagrees with them either.

Most importantly, Sen has never made a list of the central capabilities. He gives lots of examples, and the Human Development Reports organize things in ways that correspond to at least some of the items on my list. But the idea of actually making the list and describing its use in generating political principles is not his, and he should not be taken as endorsing either the project or its specific contents.

Other distinctions introduced in my account – for example, the definitions of the three types of capabilities (basic, internal, combined) – have no parallel in Sen, although in his treatment of examples he sometimes makes similar points. The idea that capability, not functioning, is the appropriate political goal is an idea he sometimes supports through examples, but he has never endorsed it as a general theoretical point.

My own treatment of this question is closely linked to my articulation of the list as a basis for a specifically political conception and a specifically political overlapping consensus. Sen has never yet discussed the contrast between comprehensive and political liberalism, and it is unclear which type of liberalism he would actually favor. On religion his position is complex. At times he inclines toward what, in Chapter 3, I identify as secular humanist feminism; but in writing about the Indian situation he has supported the type of secularism that now prevails, which gives the religions a large political role.

One set of distinctions prominently used by Sen is absent in my own version of the capabilities approach. This is the distinction between well-being and agency, which, together with the distinction between freedom and achievement, structures much of his recent writing about capabilities. I agree with Sen that the concepts introduced by these distinctions are important: but I believe that all the important distinctions can be captured as aspects of the capability/function distinction. When we think of health, for example, we should distinguish between the capability or opportunity to be healthy and actual healthy functioning: a society might make the first available and also give individuals the freedom not to choose the relevant functioning. But I am not sure that any extra clarity is added by using a well-being/agency distinction here: healthy functioning is itself a way of being active, not just a passive state of satisfaction. Although Sen would surely agree with this, I fear that the Utilitarian associations of the idea of "well-being" may cause some readers to suppose that he is imagining a way of enjoying well-being that does not involve active doing and being. I would therefore prefer to dissociate my own terminology more strongly from that of the Utilitarian tradition, and I do not think that any important philosophical issues are blurred by sticking to a simpler set of distinctions (along with the distinctions among levels of capability discussed above).

On the relationship between rights and capabilities we have a modest disagreement, connected to a larger one that does not touch the present project. Sen, who defends a complex non-Utilitarian form of consequentialism, has criticized the view that rights should be understood as supplying side-constraints. I defend a version of that view, putting the central capabilities in the place of rights: central capabilities may not be infringed upon to pursue other types of social advantage.

In substance, however, our views are very close, because I also give an analysis of rights that differs from the one he uses in attacking the claim that rights supply side-constraints. (See Chapter 1, section VI.)

Finally, the narrative method I sometimes employ, with its implicit emphasis on the political importance of the imagination and the emotions, is not something about which Sen has ever written one way or another. My own views on that topic, which I have developed at length elsewhere, should certainly not be attributed to him. To that narrative material I now turn.

IV. TWO WOMEN TRYING TO FLOURISH

Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, is the textile mill city where Mahatma Gandhi organized labor in accordance with his principles of nonviolent resistance. Tourists visit it for its textile museum and its Gandhi ashram. But today it attracts attention, too, as the home of another resistance movement: the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), with more than 50,000 members, which for over twenty years has been helping female workers in the informal sector to improve their living conditions through credit, education, and a labor union. (In India a very large proportion of the labor force works in what is called the "informal sector" – meaning cottage industries, agricultural labor, and various types of self-employment. Among working women, 94% are self-employed.)[14] On one side of the polluted river that bisects the city is the shabby old building where SEWA was first established, now used as offices for staff. On the other side are the education offices and the SEWA bank, newly housed in a marble office building. All the customers and all the employees are women. Women like to say, "This bank is like our mother's place" – because, says SEWA's founder Ela Bhatt, a woman's mother takes her seriously, keeps her secrets, and helps her solve her problems.[15]

14 See Kalima Rose, *Where Women Are Leaders: The SEWA Movement in India* (Delhi: Vistaar, 1992), 17, and personal communication, Ela Bhatt, March 1997. SEWA prefers the term "self-employed" to the term "informal sector," on the ground that it gives dignity and positive status to people who might otherwise be regarded as marginal to economic activity. Rose notes that 55% of the work force in Ahmedabad and 50% in Calcutta and Bombay are self-employed.

15 Bhatt, interview, May 1988, reproduced in Rose, *Where Women Are Leaders*, 172–4.

based on utility or on resources turn out to be insensitive to contextual variation, to the way circumstances shape preferences and the ability of individuals to convert resources into meaningful human activity. Only a broad concern for functioning and capability can do justice to the complex interrelationships between human striving and its material and social context.

IV. CENTRAL HUMAN CAPABILITIES

The most interesting worries about universals thus lead us to prefer universals of a particular type. I shall now argue that a reasonable answer to all these concerns, capable of giving good guidance to governments and international agencies, is found in a version of the *capabilities approach* – an approach to quality of life assessment pioneered within economics by Amartya Sen,[65] and by now highly influential through the *Human Development Reports* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[66] My own version of this approach (which began independently of Sen's work through thinking about Aristotle's ideas of human functioning and Marx's use of them)[67] is in several ways different from Sen's, both in its emphasis on the philosophical underpinnings of the approach and in its readiness to take a stand on what the central capabilities are.[68] Sen has focused on the role of capabilities in demarcating the space within which quality of life assessments are made; I use the idea in a more exigent way, as a foundation for basic political principles that should underwrite constitu-

65 The initial statement is in Sen, "Equality of What?" in S. McMurrin, ed., *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), reprinted in Sen, *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell and MIT Press, 1982), hereinafter CWM; see also his various essays in *Resources, Values, and Development* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell and MIT Press, 1984), hereinafter RVD; *Commodities and Capabilities* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985); *Well-Being, Agency, and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984, The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985); "Capability and Well-Being," in QL, 30–53; "Gender Inequality and Theories of Justice," in WCD, 153–98; *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Clarendon Press and Harvard University Press, 1992).

66 *Human Development Reports: 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997* (New York: United Nations Development Programme).

67 See NFC, HN.

68 For a discussion of differences between our approaches, see David Crocker, "Functioning and Capability: The Foundations of Sen's and Nussbaum's Development Ethic, Part I," *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 584–612, and ". . . Part II," in WCD, 153–98.

tional guarantees. I shall not comment on those differences further here, but simply lay out the approach as I would currently defend it. Like any universal approach, it is only valuable if developed in a relevant way: so we need to worry not just about the structure of the approach, but also about how to flesh out its content in a way that focuses appropriately on women's lives. Otherwise promising approaches have frequently gone wrong by ignoring the problems women actually face. But the capabilities approach directs us to examine real lives in their material and social settings; there is thus reason for hope that it may overcome this difficulty.

The central question asked by the capabilities approach is not, "How satisfied is Vasanti?" or even "How much in the way of resources is she able to command?" It is, instead, "What is Vasanti actually able to do and to be?" Taking a stand for political purposes on a working list of functions that would appear to be of central importance in human life, we ask: Is the person capable of this, or not? We ask not only about the person's satisfaction with what she does, but about what she does, and what she is in a position to do (what her opportunities and liberties are). And we ask not just about the resources that are sitting around, but about how those do or do not go to work, enabling Vasanti to function in a fully human way.

Having discovered some answers to these questions, we now put the approach to work in two closely related ways. First, it is in terms of these capabilities to function in certain core areas that we would measure Vasanti's quality of life, comparing her quality of life to that of others. When we aggregate the data from different lives to produce accounts of regional, class, and national differences in quality of life, it is always in the space of the central capabilities that we make those comparisons, defining the least well-off and the adequately well-off in this way. Second, we then argue that in certain core areas of human functioning a necessary condition of justice for a public political arrangement is that it deliver to citizens a certain basic level of capability. If people are systematically falling below the threshold in any of these core areas, this should be seen as a situation both unjust and tragic, in need of urgent attention – even if in other respects things are going well.

The intuitive idea behind the approach is twofold: first, that certain functions are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their

presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life;[69] and second – this is what Marx found in Aristotle – that there is something that it is to do these functions in a truly human way, not a merely animal way. We judge, frequently enough, that a life has been so impoverished that it is not worthy of the dignity of the human being, that it is a life in which one goes on living, but more or less like an animal, unable to develop and exercise one's human powers. In Marx's example, a starving person doesn't use food in a fully human way – by which I think he means a way infused by practical reasoning and sociability. He or she just grabs at the food in order to survive, and the many social and rational ingredients of human feeding can't make their appearance. Similarly, he argues that the senses of a human being can operate at a merely animal level – if they are not cultivated by appropriate education, by leisure for play and self-expression, by valuable associations with others; and we should add to the list some items that Marx probably would not endorse, such as expressive and associational liberty, and the freedom of worship. The core idea is that of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a "flock" or "herd" animal.[70] A life that is really human is one that is shaped throughout by these human powers of practical reason and sociability.

This idea of human dignity has broad cross-cultural resonance and intuitive power. We can think of it as the idea that lies at the heart of tragic artworks, in whatever culture. Think of a tragic character, assailed by fortune. We react to the spectacle of humanity so assailed in a way very different from the way we react to a storm blowing grains

69 For further development of this idea, see HN. For the way in which the capabilities and functionings are individuated, in accordance with an account of distinct spheres of human experience and choice, see NRV.

70 Compare Amartya Sen, "Freedoms and Needs," *The New Republic*, January 10/17, 1994, p. 38: "The importance of political rights for the understanding of economic needs turns ultimately on seeing human beings as people with rights to exercise, not as parts of a 'stock' or a 'population' that passively exists and must be looked after." An excellent treatment of Marx's thought on this issue, with implications for contemporary debates, is in Daniel Brudney, "Community and Completion," in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 388–415, although Brudney defends the Marxian view as the basis for a form of comprehensive, rather than political, liberalism.

of sand in the wind. For we see a human being as having worth as an end, a kind of awe-inspiring something that makes it horrible to see this person beaten down by the currents of chance – and wonderful, at the same time, to witness the way in which chance has not completely eclipsed the humanity of the person.[71] As Aristotle puts it, "the noble shines through." Such responses provide us with strong incentives for protecting that in persons that fills us with awe. We see the person as having activity, goals, and projects – as somehow awe-inspiringly above the mechanical workings of nature, and yet in need of support for the fulfillment of many central projects.[72] This idea has many forms, some religious and some secular. Insofar as we are able to respond to tragic tales from other cultures, we show that this idea of human worth and agency crosses cultural boundaries.

At one extreme, we may judge that the absence of capability for a central function is so acute that the person is not really a human being at all, or any longer – as in the case of certain very severe forms of mental disability, or senile dementia. But I am less interested in that boundary (important though it is for medical ethics) than in a higher threshold, the level at which a person's capability becomes what Marx called "truly human," that is, *worthy* of a human being. Note that this idea contains, thus, a reference to an idea of human worth or dignity. Marx was departing from Kant in some important respects, by stressing (along with Aristotle) that the major powers of a human being need material support and cannot be what they are without it. But he also learned from Kant, and his way of expressing his Aristotelian heritage is distinctively shaped by the Kantian notion of the inviolability and the dignity of the person.

Notice that the approach makes each person a bearer of value, and an end. Marx, like his bourgeois forebears, holds that it is profoundly wrong to subordinate the ends of some individuals to those of others. That is at the core of what exploitation is, to treat a person as a mere object for the use of others. Thus it will be just as repugnant to this

71 See Seneca, *Moral Epistle* 41, comparing the dignity of such a person to the awe-inspiring sublimity of nature. This passage very likely influenced Kant's famous conclusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

72 For elaboration of this part of the idea, see my "Victims and Agents," *The Boston Review* 23 (1998), 21–24, and "Political Animals: Luck, Love, and Dignity," *Metaphilosophy* 29 (1998), 273–87.

Marxian approach as to a bourgeois philosophy to foster a good for society considered as an organic whole, where this does not involve the fostering of the good of persons taken one by one. What this approach is after is a society in which persons are treated as each worthy of regard, and in which each has been put in a position to live really humanly. (That is where the idea of a threshold comes in: we say that beneath a certain level of capability, in each area, a person has not been enabled to live in a truly human way.) We may thus rephrase our *principle of each person as end*, articulating it as a *principle of each person's capability*: the capabilities sought are sought for *each and every person*, not, in the first instance, for groups or families or states or other corporate bodies. Such bodies may be extremely important in promoting human capabilities, and in this way they may deservedly gain our support: but it is because of what they do for people that they are so worthy, and the ultimate political goal is always the promotion of the capabilities of *each person*.

I believe that we can arrive at an enumeration of central elements of truly human functioning that can command a broad cross-cultural consensus. (One way of seeing this is to think about the ways in which tragic plots cross cultural boundaries: certain deprivations are understood to be terrible, despite differences in metaphysical understandings of the world.) Although this list of central capabilities is somewhat different in both structure and substance from Rawls's list of primary goods, it is offered in a similar political-liberal spirit: as a list that can be endorsed for political purposes, as the moral basis of central constitutional guarantees, by people who otherwise have very different views of what a complete good life for a human being would be. (In part, as we shall see, this is because the list is a list of capabilities or opportunities for functioning, rather than of actual functions; in part it is because the list protects spaces for people to pursue other functions that they value.)

The list provides the underpinnings of basic political principles that can be embodied in constitutional guarantees. For this purpose, it isolates those human capabilities that can be convincingly argued to be of central importance in any human life, whatever else the person pursues or chooses. The central capabilities are not just instrumental to further pursuits: they are held to have value in themselves, in making the life that includes them fully human. But they are held to have a particularly

pervasive and central role in everything else people plan and do. In that sense, too, they play a role analogous to that of primary goods in Rawls's recent (political-liberal) theory: they have a special importance in making any choice of a way of life possible, and so they have a special claim to be supported for political purposes in a pluralistic society.[73]

A list of the central capabilities is not a complete theory of justice. Such a list gives us the basis for determining a decent social minimum in a variety of areas.[74] I argue that the structure of social and political institutions should be chosen, at least in part, with a view to promoting at least a threshold level of these human capabilities. But the provision of a threshold level of capability, exigent though that goal is, may not suffice for justice, as I shall elaborate further later, discussing the relationship between the social minimum and our interest in equality. The determination of such additional requirements of justice awaits another inquiry. Moreover, in order to describe how a threshold level of capability might best be secured, much more needs to be said about the appropriate role of the public sphere vis-à-vis incentives to private actors, and also about how far the public sphere is entitled to control the activities of private actors in the pursuit of the capabilities on the list. We could agree that the space of capabilities is the relevant space in which to make such comparisons, and that a basic social minimum in the area of the central capabilities should be secured to all citizens, while disagreeing about the role to be played by government and public planning in their promotion. Since a general answer to this question requires us to answer economic questions that are not in the province of my inquiry, I shall not give a general answer here, although Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss the proper role of law in some particular areas of capability promotion. Many other questions treated by theories of justice are also left undecided by this account of capability.[75]

73 As section VII will show, I also envisage a role for international agencies and international human rights law in implementing these capabilities; but on grounds of accountability, the nation state remains the basic unit.

74 To perform this function in a useful way the list must have a more clearly demarcated account of the threshold level than it does in its present form; I discuss that issue later in this section, and in Chapters 3 and 4.

75 Among these topics are the role of private and public property; the idea of justice between generations; the role of civil disobedience; and – with the exception of some brief remarks in section VII – redistributive justice between nations.

The list represents the result of years of cross-cultural discussion, and comparisons between earlier and later versions will show that the input of other voices has shaped its content in many ways. Thus it already represents what it proposes: a type of *overlapping consensus*[76] on the part of people with otherwise very different views of human life. In Chapter 2 I shall argue that this fact about how the list has evolved helps to justify it in an ancillary way, although the primary weight of justification remains with the intuitive conception of truly human functioning and what that entails. By "overlapping consensus" I mean what John Rawls means: that people may sign on to this conception as the freestanding moral core of a political conception, without accepting any particular metaphysical view of the world, any particular comprehensive ethical or religious view, or even any particular view of the person or of human nature. Indeed, it is to be expected that holders of different views in those areas will even interpret the moral core of the political conception to some extent differently, in keeping with their different starting points.[77] Thus, a Muslim may say, "Women are equal as citizens in the political conception because men and women share a single metaphysical essential nature." Some Jews[78] and Christians could say, by contrast, "Women are equal as citizens despite the fact that they have a different essential nature from that of men." A Catholic Thomist may interpret "practical reason" by thinking about St. Thomas's Aristotelian conception of choice. Others will think of choice in a more informal manner, based on their daily experience of planning and deciding. A Finn may interpret play and recreation in terms of a comprehensive conception of life in which solitary contemplation in the forest plays a large role; a resident of Calcutta is likely to have a different set of comprehensive associations in mind. As I interpret Aristotle, he understood the core of his account of human functioning to be a freestanding moral conception, not one that is deduced from natural teleology or any non-moral source.[79] Whether or not I am correct about Aristotle, however, my own neo-Aristotelian proposal is intended in

76 See Rawls, PL, 133–72.

77 See Rawls, PL, 144–5.

78 Not all, however: see my "Judaism and the Love of Reason," in Marya Bower and Ruth Groenhout, eds., *Among Sophia's Daughters: Philosophy, Feminism, and the Demands of Faith*, forthcoming.

79 See HN.

that spirit – and also (clearly unlike Aristotle's) as a partial, not a comprehensive, conception of the good life, a moral conception selected for political purposes only.

Since the intuitive conception of human functioning and capability demands continued reflection and testing against our intuitions, we should view any given version of the list as a proposal put forward in a Socratic fashion, to be tested against the most secure of our intuitions as we attempt to arrive at a type of reflective equilibrium for political purposes. (I shall discuss this issue of political justification further in section VII.)

Some items on the list may seem to us more fixed than others. For example, it would be astonishing if the right to bodily integrity were to be removed from the list; that seems to be a fixed point in our considered judgments of goodness.[80] On the other hand, one might debate what role is played by literacy in human functioning, and what role is played by our relationship to other species and the world of nature. In this sense, the list remains open-ended and humble; it can always be contested and remade. Nor does it deny that the items on the list are to some extent differently constructed by different societies. Indeed, part of the idea of the list is its *multiple realizability*: its members can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances. It is thus designed to leave room for a reasonable pluralism in specification. The threshold level of each of the central capabilities will need more precise determination, as citizens work toward a consensus for political purposes. This can be envisaged as taking place within each constitutional tradition, as it evolves through interpretation and deliberation. (Most fundamental constitutional rights are initially described at a high level of generality, but this does not mean that they are impractical or non-justiciable: the tradition of interpretation and precedent provides the relevant specifications.) Finally, in its relatively concrete remarks about matters such as literacy and basic scientific education, the list is intended for the modern world, rather than as timeless.[81]

Here is the current version of the list:[82]

80 I borrow the phrasing, of course, from Rawls, TJ, substituting "goodness" for "justice," in keeping with the fact that we are talking about the analogue of "primary goods."

81 Some of the items are more timeless than others, clearly. Literacy is a concrete specifi-

CENTRAL HUMAN FUNCTIONAL CAPABILITIES

1. **Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. **Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health;[83] to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. **Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. **Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but

cation for the modern world of a more general capability that may have been realized without literacy in other times and places. All the large general rubrics appear rather timeless, though I do not claim, or need to claim, that human life exhibits an unchanging essence throughout history.

82 The current version of the list reflects changes made as a result of my discussions with people in India. The primary changes are a greater emphasis on bodily integrity and control over one's environment (including property rights and employment opportunities), and a new emphasis on dignity and non-humiliation. Oddly, these features of human "self-sufficiency" and the dignity of the person are the ones most often criticized by Western feminists as "male" and "Western," one reason for their more muted role in earlier versions of the list. See my "The Feminist Critique of Liberalism."

83 The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) adopted a definition of reproductive health that fits well with the intuitive idea of truly human functioning that guides this list: "Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so." The definition goes on say that it also implies information and access to family planning methods of their choice. A brief summary of the ICPD's recommendations, adopted by the Panel on Reproductive Health of the Committee on Population established by the National Research Council, specifies three requirements of reproductive health: "1. Every sex act should be free of coercion and infection. 2. Every pregnancy should be intended. 3. Every birth should be healthy." See Amy O. Tsui, Judith N. Wasserheit, and John G. Haaga, eds., *Reproductive Health in Developing Countries* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1997), 13–14.

by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.

5. **Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. **Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience.)

7. **Affiliation. A.** Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
   B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin.[84] In work, being able to work as a human being, exer-

84 This provision is based on the Indian Constitution, Article 15, which adds (as I would) that this should not be taken to prevent government from enacting measures to correct the history of discrimination against women and against the scheduled tribes and castes. Nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, and in earlier versions of the list I did not include it, judging that there was so little consensus on this item, especially in India, that its inclusion might seem premature – although at the same time I stressed the fact that I believe it to be

cising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

8. **Other Species.** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.[85]

9. **Play.** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. **Control over One's Environment. A. Political.** Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.
B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), not just formally but in terms of real opportunity; and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.[86]

implied by a right to nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, since I view sexual-orientation discrimination as a means of shoring up binary divisions between the sexes that are implicated in sex discrimination. See the Introduction and Chapter 7 in my *Sex and Social Justice*. This year, however, the controversy over the disruption of the feminist film *Fire* has led to much more discussion of sexual orientation in the Indian media, and to a public recognition by feminists and other liberal thinkers of the important links between these issues and women's full equality. I therefore think it no longer premature to add this item to a cross-cultural list that is expected to command an overlapping consensus. I shall discuss this issue further in Chapter 4.

85 In terms of cross-cultural development, this has been the most controversial item on the list: see Chapter 2 for further discussion. Government can do quite a lot about this capability, through its choices of policy regarding endangered species, the health and life of animals, and the ecology. Norway, for example, places tremendous emphasis on this capability. In Oslo one may build only within five miles of the coast; past that "forest line," the inland mountainous region is kept free of habitation to preserve spaces for people to enjoy solitude in the forest, a central aspect of this capability, as Norwegians specify it.

86 ASD argued that property rights are distinct from, for example, speech rights, in the sense that property is a tool of human functioning and not an end in itself. The current version of the list still insists that more property is not ipso facto better, but it expands the role of property rights, seeing the intimate relationship between property rights and self-definition: see Chapter 2 for further discussion. Most obviously, property rights should not be allocated on a sex-discriminatory basis, as they currently are under some of the systems of personal law in India. But it is also important to think of their absolute value, as supports for other valuable forms of human functioning. Thus all citizens should have some property, real or movable, in their own names. The amount requisite will properly be deliberated by each state in the light of its economic situation. Land is frequently a particularly valuable source of self-definition, bargaining power, and economic sustenance, so one might use the list to justify land reforms that appropriate surplus land from the rich in order to give the poor something to call their own. For example, the reform in West Bengal took wealthy landowners' second homes for this purpose. See also CHR.

The list is, emphatically, a list of *separate components*. We cannot satisfy the need for one of them by giving a larger amount of another one. All are of central importance and all are distinct in quality. The irreducible plurality of the list limits the trade-offs that it will be reasonable to make, and thus limits the applicability of quantitative cost-benefit analysis. One may, of course, always use cost-benefit analysis; but if one does so in connection with this approach, it will be crucial to represent in the weightings the fact that each and every one of a plurality of distinct goods is of central importance, and thus there is a tragic aspect to any choice in which citizens are pushed below the threshold in one of the central areas. That tragic aspect could be represented as simply a huge cost; but it is hard to represent clearly in this way the fact that a *distinctive* good is being slighted. One should not suppose, for example, that the absence of the political liberties would be made up for by tremendous economic growth, although the use of a single measure might easily make one think in this way.[87]

At the same time, the items on the list are related to one another in many complex ways. One of the most effective ways of promoting women's control over their environment, and their effective right of political participation, is to promote women's literacy. Women who can seek employment outside the home have exit options that help them protect their bodily integrity from assaults within it. Reproductive health is related in many complex ways to practical reason and bodily integrity. This gives us still more reason to avoid promoting one at the expense of the others.

Some of the items on the list are, or include, what John Rawls has called "natural goods," goods in whose acquisition luck plays a substantial role. Thus, governments cannot hope to make all citizens healthy, or emotionally balanced, since some of the determinants of those positive states are natural or luck-governed. In these areas, what government can aim to deliver is the *social basis of* these capabilities. The capabilities approach insists that this requires doing a great deal to make up for differences in starting point that are caused by natural endowment or by power, but it is still the social basis of the good, not

87 Thus phrases such as "Singapore success story" might have been harder to use had the measure of quality of life in terms of GNP per capita not been dominant in development policy.

the good itself, that society can reliably provide. Take women's emotional health. Government cannot make all women emotionally healthy; but it can do quite a lot to influence emotional health, through suitable policies in areas such as family law, rape law, and public safety. Something similar will be true of all the natural goods. But factors we cannot control may still interfere to keep some people from full capability. When we use capabilities as a comparative measure of quality of life, we must therefore still inquire about the reasons for the differences we observe. Some differences in health among nations or groups are due to factors public policy can control, and others are not. Basic political principles have done their job if they have provided people with the full social basis of these capabilities. (See section V for further discussion of this point.)

Among the capabilities, two, *practical reason* and *affiliation*, stand out as of special importance, since they both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human. To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and planning is to use them in an incompletely human manner.[88] To plan for one's own life without being able to do so in complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings is, again, to behave in an incompletely human way.[89] To take just one example, work, to be a truly human mode of functioning, must involve the availability of both practical reason and affiliation. It must involve being able to behave as a thinking being, not just a cog in a machine; and it must be capable of being done with and toward others in a way that involves mutual recognition of humanity.[90] Women's work lacks this feature even more often than does men's work.

When we make practical reason and affiliation central in this way, we are not saying that these are two ends to which all the others can be reduced. We are not saying, for example, that health is a mere means to freedom of choice. But we are saying that a government that makes available only a reduced and animal-like mode of an important item such as healthy living, or sensing, has not done enough. All the items on the list should be available in a form that involves reason and affil-

88 See HN, ASD.

89 See HN on the role of this idea in myths of transformation to and from the human.

90 On Marx's view, see Brudney, cited earlier.

iation. This sets constraints on where we set the threshold, for each of the separate capabilities, and also constraints on which specifications of it we will accept.

The basic intuition from which the capability approach begins, in the political arena, is that certain human abilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed. Once again, this must be understood as *a freestanding moral idea*, not one that relies on a particular metaphysical or teleological view. Not all actual human abilities exert a moral claim, only the ones that have been evaluated as valuable from an ethical viewpoint. (The capacity for cruelty, for example, does not figure on the list.) Thus the argument begins from ethical premises and derives ethical conclusions from these alone, not from any further metaphysical premises.[91] Nonetheless, it seems to me that we can get a consensus of the requisite sort, for political purposes, about the core of our moral argument concerning the moral claim of certain human powers. Human beings are creatures such that, provided with the right educational and material support, they can become fully capable of all these human functions. That is, they are creatures with certain lower-level capabilities (which I call "basic capabilities")[92] to perform the functions in question. When these capabilities are deprived of the nourishment that would transform them into the higher-level capabilities that figure on the list, they are fruitless, cut off, in some way but a shadow of themselves. When a turtle is given a life that affords a merely animal level of functioning, we have no indignation, no sense of waste and tragedy. When a human being is given a life that blights powers of human action and expression, that does give us a sense of waste and tragedy – the tragedy expressed, for example, in Mrinal's statement to her husband, in Tagore's story, when she says, "I am not one to die easily." In her view, a life without dignity and choice, a life in which she can be no more than an appendage of someone else, is a type of death, the death of her humanity. "I have just started living," she ends her letter – and signs it, "This is from Mrinal – who is torn off the shelter of your feet." This sense of tragedy crosses cultural boundaries; it does not depend upon any particular metaphysical view of human nature.

91 See HN, with my argument that this is also Aristotle's view.

92 See NFC, with reference to Aristotle's ways of characterizing levels of *dunamis*.

We begin, then, with a sense of the worth and dignity of basic human powers, thinking of them as claims to a chance for functioning, claims that give rise to correlated social and political duties. And in fact there are three different types of capabilities that play a role in the analysis.[93] First, there are *basic capabilities*: the innate equipment of individuals that is the necessary basis for developing the more advanced capabilities, and a ground of moral concern. These capabilities are sometimes more or less ready to function: the capability for seeing and hearing is usually like this. More often, however, they are very rudimentary, and cannot be directly converted into functioning. A newborn child has, in this sense, the capability for speech and language, the capability for love and gratitude, the capability for practical reason, the capacity for work.

Second, there are *internal capabilities*: that is, developed states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions. Unlike the basic capabilities, these states are mature conditions of readiness. Sometimes readiness simply takes time and bodily maturity: one becomes capable of sexual functioning by simply growing, without much external intervention, although one does need to be adequately nourished. Almost all human children learn to speak their native language: all they need is to hear it spoken enough during a critical period. More often, however, internal capabilities develop only with support from the surrounding environment, as when one learns to play with others, to love, to exercise political choice. But at a certain point they are there, and the person can use them. A woman who has not suffered genital mutilation has the *internal capability* for sexual pleasure; most adult human beings everywhere have the *internal capability* for religious freedom and the freedom of speech.

But even when people have developed a power (usually with much support from the material and social world), they may be prevented from functioning in accordance with it. Finally, therefore, there are *combined capabilities*,[94] which may be defined as internal capabilities

93 See NFC, referring to Aristotle's similar distinctions; and, on the basic capabilities, HC. Sen does not use these three levels explicitly, though in practice many of his statements assume related distinctions.

94 Earlier papers called these "external capabilities" (see NFC), but David Crocker per-

combined with suitable external conditions for the exercise of the function. A woman who is not mutilated but who has been widowed as a child and is forbidden to make another marriage has the internal but not the combined capability for sexual expression (and, in most such cases, for employment, and political participation).[95] Citizens of repressive nondemocratic regimes have the internal but not the combined capability to exercise thought and speech in accordance with their consciences.[96] The list, then, is a list of *combined capabilities*. To realize one of the items on the list for citizens of a nation entails not only promoting appropriate development of their internal powers, but also preparing the environment so that it is favorable for the exercise of practical reason and the other major functions.

The distinction between internal and combined capabilities is not a sharp one, because developing an internal capability usually requires favorable external conditions; indeed, it very often requires practicing the actual function. Nonetheless, the distinction does real work, because even a highly trained capability can be thwarted. We see the distinction most sharply when there is an abrupt change in the material and social environment: a person accustomed to exercising religious freedom and freedom of speech is no longer able to do so. Here we feel convinced that the internal capability is fully present, but the combined capability is not. Where there is lifelong deprivation, the distinction is not so easy to draw: persistent deprivation affects the internal readiness to function. A child raised in an environment without freedom of speech or religion does not develop the same political and religious capabilities as a child who is raised in a nation that protects these liberties. (Chapter 2 will discuss this issue at length.) Even in such a case, however, we can observe many instances in which the distinction is salient. Many women who, driven by material need, are eager to work outside the home, and who have skills that they could use to do

suaded me that this misleadingly suggested a focus on external conditions *rather than* on internal fitness. In reality I mean to suggest the appropriate combination of both "internal" and "external."

95 See Martha A. Chen, *The Lives of Widows in Rural India*, forthcoming; and "A Matter of Survival: Women's Right to Employment in India and Bangladesh," in WCD, 37–57.

96 If repression is sufficiently severe and long-lasting, they may also to some degree lack the internal capability for such expression; see the following discussion.

some work, are prevented from working by familial or religious pressures. By insisting that the capabilities on the list are combined capabilities, I insist on the twofold importance of material and social circumstances, both in training internal capabilities and in letting them express themselves once trained; and I establish that the liberties and opportunities recognized by the list are not to be understood in a purely formal manner. They thus correspond to Rawls's ideas of "the equal worth of liberty" and "truly fair equality of opportunity," rather than to the thinner notions of "formally equal liberty" and "formal equality of opportunity."[97]

A focus on capabilities as social goals is closely related to a *focus on human equality*, in the sense that discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, caste, or ethnicity is taken to be itself a failure of associational capability, a type of indignity or humiliation. And making capabilities the goals entails promoting for all citizens a greater measure of material equality than exists in most societies, since we are unlikely to get all citizens above a minimum threshhold of capability for truly human functioning without some redistributive policies. On the other hand, it is possible for supporters of the general capability goal to differ about the degree of material equality a society focused on capability should seek. Complete egalitarianism,[98] a Rawlsian difference principle, and a weaker focus on a (rather ample) social minimum all would be compatible with the proposal as so far advanced. Where women are concerned, almost all world societies are very far from even providing the basic minimum of truly human functioning, where many or even most women are concerned; I therefore leave the debate about levels of equality for a later stage, when the differences become meaningful in practice.

V. FUNCTIONING AND CAPABILITY

I have spoken both of functioning and of capability. How are they related? Becoming clear about this is crucial to defining the relation of

97 See Rawls, TJ, 204–5, 72–75.

98 Notice, however, that capability equality would not necessarily entail equality of resources: that all depends on how resources affect capabilities once we get well above the threshold. Aristotle thought that we reach a point of negative returns: after a certain "limit," wealth becomes counterproductive, a distraction from the things that matter.