Amartya Sen

Amartya Sen was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 1998 “for his contributions to welfare economics.” Although his primary academic appointments have been mostly in economics, Sen is also a prominent social theorist and philosopher. His work on social choice theory is seminal, and his writings on poverty, famine, and development, as well as his contributions to moral and political philosophy, are important and influential. Sen’s views about the nature and primacy of liberty also make him a major contemporary liberal thinker.

This volume of essays on aspects of Sen’s work is aimed at a broad audience of readers interested in social theory, political philosophy, ethics, public policy, welfare economics, the theory of rational choice, poverty, and development. Written by a team of well-known experts, each chapter provides an overview of Sen’s work in a particular area and a critical assessment of his contributions to the field.

Christopher W. Morris is professor of philosophy at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of *An Essay on the Modern State* and coeditor, with Arthur Ripstein, of *Practical Rationality and Preference: Essays for David Gauthier*. 
Contemporary Philosophy in Focus

Contemporary Philosophy in Focus offers a series of introductory volumes to many of the dominant philosophical thinkers of the current age. Each volume consists of newly commissioned essays that cover major contributions of a preeminent philosopher in a systematic and accessible manner. Comparable in scope and rationale to the highly successful series Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, the volumes do not presuppose that readers are already intimately familiar with the details of each philosopher’s work. They thus combine exposition and critical analysis in a manner that will appeal to students of philosophy and to professionals, as well as to students across the humanities and social sciences.

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For Terence Moore, in memoriam
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CHRISTOPHER W. MORRIS is a professor of philosophy at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of “The Trouble with Justice” in *Morality and Self-Interest*, edited by Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2008); “The Very Idea of Popular Sovereignty: ‘We the People’

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KEVIN ROBERTS is the Sir John Hicks Professor of Economics at Oxford University and a Fellow of Nuffield College. He has previously taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science, MIT, and Warwick University. His main research interests are in microeconomic theory, broadly conceived, and he has a particular interest in the theoretical foundations of welfare and public economics, including social choice theory. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Econometric Society.

INGRID ROBEYNS is a professor of practical philosophy at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, Netherlands. She studied philosophy and economics
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The Cambridge University Press series *Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, founded by my late editor Terence Moore, is meant to provide an introduction to the work of important living philosophers. The volumes in this series are to be, in good part, expository, as well as accessible to nonspecialists and to readers outside of philosophy. Terence invited me to put together a volume on the work of Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel laureate in economics. An economist by training, Sen is an important social and political theorist, and his work is very influential in contemporary moral and political philosophy.

My own interest in Sen’s work initially was limited to social choice theory, to which I was introduced by Howard Sobel and David Gauthier while in graduate school in philosophy. In the early eighties, while a visiting assistant professor in government at the University of Texas at Austin, I sat in on Thomas Schwartz’s eye-opening seminar on social choice theory and came to appreciate the importance of the field for the study of political institutions, as well as for moral theory. In the fall of 1986, I sat in on Sen’s masterful (and breathless) lectures on social choice at Oxford and gained a broader appreciation of the field. Sen’s critical thoughts about the theory of rational choice influenced me later. Sen’s well-known studies of famine also interested me for a number of reasons, one being the revelation of an unambiguous virtue of democracy. Having absorbed a number of the pessimistic lessons about democratic institutions taught by contemporary political science and public choice theory, I was cheered by Sen’s account of the importance of democracy for famine relief. And, much later, in part through the influence of David Crocker, I became interested in Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s accounts of capabilities and well-being.

Many people have offered me advice. I owe special thanks to Philippe Mongin early on and to Ingrid Robeyns for numerous matters along the way. A number of anonymous readers have offered helpful suggestions at different stages.
I am grateful to Terence Moore for the opportunity to work on this volume and to think more systematically about Sen’s work. As can happen, it took longer to complete than anticipated, and Terence did not live to see the volume completed. Beatrice Rehl took over the project, and I am grateful for her patience and support.

With Terence’s passing we have lost one of the great academic editors of our time. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

C.W.M.