

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*.

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Edited by

CHRISTOPHER W. MORRIS

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For Terence Moore, in memoriam

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Contributors

SABINA ALKIRE directs the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative at the University of Oxford. Her publications include *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and numerous articles. She is the secretary of the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) and holds a DPhil in economics from Oxford (Magdalen College).

DAVID A. CROCKER is a senior research scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy and the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. He directs the school's specialization in international development and the undergraduate College Park Scholars program in public leadership. Crocker specializes in sociopolitical philosophy, international development ethics, transitional justice, and democratic theory. He was twice a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Costa Rica and held the UNESCO Chair in Development at the University of Valencia. He is the author of *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

SHATAKSHEE DHONGDE is an assistant professor of economics at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. She received her PhD from the University of California, Riverside, where she won the best graduate research award. Her research interests are in the fields of microeconomics and development economics and include topics such as inequality, growth, trade liberalization, poverty, and segregation. She has contributed essays to *Spatial Disparities in Human Development* (United Nations University Press, 2006) and *International Studies Association Compendium on Global Development* (Blackwell, forthcoming).

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'

Reconsidered,” in *Social Philosophy & Policy* (2000); and *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and coeditor, with Arthur Ripstein, of *Practical Rationality and Preference: Essays for David Gauthier* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

PRASANTA K. PATTANAIK is an emeritus professor of economics at the University of California, Riverside, and is currently working on welfare economics and the theory of social choice, the measurement of deprivation and living standards, and the theory of stochastic preference and choice. Some of his recent publications are “On the Mean of Squared Deprivation Gaps” (with A. Chakraborty and Y. Xu) in *Economic Theory* (2008); “Minimal Relativism, Dominance, and Standard of Living Comparisons Based on Functionings” (with Y. Xu) in *Oxford Economic Papers* (2007); and “‘Regular Choice’ and the Weak Axiom of Stochastic Revealed Preference” (with I. Dasgupta) in *Economic Theory* (2007). He is a Fellow of the Econometric Society and of the Public Choice Society.

PHILIP PETTIT teaches political theory and philosophy at Princeton University, where he is the L. S. Rockefeller University Professor of Politics and Human Values. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds fellowships in the Humanities and Social Sciences Academies in Australia. Among his books are *Republicanism* (Oxford University Press, 1997); *A Theory of Freedom* (Polity, 2001); *Rules, Reasons and Norms* (Oxford University Press, 2004); and *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind and Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2007). He has also coauthored a number of books, including *Mind, Morality and Explanation* with F. Jackson and M. Smith (Oxford University Press, 2004) and *The Economy of Esteem* with G. Brennan (Oxford University Press, 2004). A volume of essays on his work has appeared under the title *Common Minds: Themes from the Philosophy of Philip Pettit* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

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

and received her doctorate from Cambridge University for a dissertation on gender inequality and the capability approach. In 2006, she was awarded a prestigious five-year Vidi grant for research on theories of justice by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. She coedited *Amartya Sen's Work and Ideas: A Gender Perspective* with Bina Agarwal and Jane Humphries (Routledge, 2005) and *Measuring Justice: Primary Goods and Capabilities* with Harry Brighouse (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

STEVEN SCALET is an associate professor of philosophy and economics and director of the Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Law at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is currently writing a book about the ethics of markets and economics for Prentice Hall and has authored articles in business ethics and corporate responsibility. He is also the coeditor with John Arthur of *Morality and Moral Controversies* (8th ed., Prentice Hall, 2009).

DAVID SCHMIDTZ is the Kendrick Professor of Philosophy, joint professor of economics, and director of the Program in Philosophy of Freedom at the University of Arizona, and recently has taught property law at Florida State University College of Law. He is the author of *Rational Choice and Moral Agency* (Princeton University Press, 1995); *Elements of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and *Person, Polis, Planet* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and coauthor with Robert Goodin of *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). He and Jason Brennan are working on a history of liberty for Blackwell's Brief History series.

PETER VALLENTYNE is the Florence G. Kline Professor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri, Columbia. He writes on issues of liberty and equality – and left-libertarianism in particular. He edited *Equality and Justice* (6 vols., Routledge, 2003) and *Contractarianism and Rational Choice: Essays on David Gauthier's "Morals by Agreement"* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), and he coedited, with Hillel Steiner, *The Origins of Left Libertarianism: An Anthology of Historical Writings* (Palgrave, 2000) and *Left-Libertarianism and Its Critics: The Contemporary Debate* (Palgrave, 2000). He was coeditor of *Economics and Philosophy* from 2003 to 2008.

Preface

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.

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Preface

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.