



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PERUGIA

Prof. **AMARTYA SEN**

Invited Lecture on
“Ethics and Economics”

Aula magna (sede centrale)
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Con il sostegno della



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Hanno inoltre contribuito:

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Amartya Sen

Professor of Economics and Philosophy

Harvard University, Department of Economics

SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Amartya Sen is Thomas W. Lamont University Professor, and Professor of Economics and Philosophy, at Harvard University and was until 2004 the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. He is also Senior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows. Earlier on he was Professor of Economics at Jadavpur University Calcutta, the Delhi School of Economics, and the London School of Economics, and Drummond Professor of Political Economy at Oxford University.

Amartya Sen has served as President of the Econometric Society, the American Economic Association, the Indian Economic Association, and the International Economic Association. He was formerly Honorary President of OXFAM and is now its Honorary Advisor. His research has ranged over social choice theory, economic theory, ethics and political philosophy, welfare economics, theory of measurement, decision theory, development economics, public health, and gender studies. Amartya Sen's books have been translated into more than thirty languages, and include *Choice of Techniques* (1960), *Growth Economics* (1970), *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (1970), *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (1982), *Commodities and Capabilities* (1987), *The Standard of Living* (1987), *Development as Freedom* (1999), *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2006), *The Idea of Justice* (2009), and (jointly with Jean Dreze) *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (2013).

Amartya Sen's awards include Bharat Ratna (India); Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur (France); the National Humanities Medal (USA); Ordem do Merito Cientifico (Brazil); Honorary Companion of Honour (UK); Aztec Eagle (Mexico); Edinburgh Medal (UK); the George Marshall Award (USA); the Eisenhower Medal (USA); and the Nobel Prize in Economics.

ETHICS & ECONOMICS

Amartya Sen

While the fortunes of some opulent persons have suffered sharp declines, the most affected have, in general, been people who are at the bottom of the pyramid in the respective countries - and in the world. Families who were already worst placed to face any further adversity have often suffered most from still greater deprivation, in the form of lasting unemployment, loss of housing and shelter, loss of medical care, and other deprivations that have reduced the lives of hundreds of millions of poor people.

We can appreciate the severity of the current global crisis by examining what is happening to the lives of human beings, especially the less privileged people - their well-being and their freedom to lead decent human lives. We cannot assess the severity of the problems by looking only at the gross national products and other indicators that focus on inanimate objects of convenience, rather than on human freedom - its extent and tangibility, and of course its deprivation and decline and decimation. Ethical ideas, in particular those concerned with global justice, are inescapably involved, even if the powerful relevance of ethics in economic analysis is often implicit - and frequently missed.

Not all of Europe's problems are endogenous. There is a very distressing issue to be faced right now concerning the waves of attempted immigration and asylum seeking by precarious people in North Africa and the Middle East, trying to get refuge in Europe. There is clearly a dilemma here, since allowing endangered people to drown in the sea is morally

unacceptable, and yet admitting into European residence large and growing numbers of people from elsewhere can also be seen as problematic for Europe's economic stability.

It might be tempting to think that the problems of African people are not Europe's concern. But that separatist view is hard to defend, partly for ethical reasons (for example, because human rights are matters of moral demand across national borders), but also for practical reasons, in particular because Africa's problems, if left unaddressed, can ultimately affect and disrupt the lives of people elsewhere – even in Europe – as violence, terrorism and social chaos travel across borders. The solution may not be large-scale immigration into Europe (though some of that will undoubtedly have to occur), but finding solutions within Africa itself which may need resources as well as global attention. What cannot be sensibly done is to shut one's eyes to problems across the borders of one's own nation. Indeed, issues of global justice influence people's lives everywhere in the world, since we no longer live in self-contained little boxes.

Turning to problems generated entirely within Europe (rather than coming from elsewhere), there is need to scrutinize carefully the imposition by European financial leadership of a general regime of economic austerity as a solution of too high a burden of debts, which has badly affected the living standards of many countries in Europe, particularly in the south. Many European countries require important institutional reforms, including those related to tax collection, retirement age, work flexibility, and others. But the need for specific institutional reform is not the same thing as a need for across-the-board general austerity.

The policy package demanded by the financial leadership of Europe

has been, despite its rhetoric, severely anti-growth. The economic growth of the Euro zone has been faltering over many years now. While the economies and the people involved have suffered, the deficits have been quite resistant. There is, in fact, plenty of evidence in the history of the world that indicates that the most effective way of cutting deficits is to resist recession and to combine deficit reduction with rapid economic growth. The policy package demanded by the financial leadership of Europe has been, despite its rhetoric, severely anti-growth. There has been some appreciation very recently of the policy mistakes made in crisis management in Europe, but the acknowledgment has been only partial, and the policy change far from adequate.

Austerity has even prevented the effective pursuit of institutional reform. The pursuit of the reforms that are needed in Europe has, in fact, been hampered, rather than aided, by the confounding of the distinction between (1) reform of bad administrative arrangements, and (2) austerity in the form of ruthless cuts in public services and basic social security. Europe does need many economic reforms of different types, such as the stopping of the evasion of taxes, preventing government servants from using favouritism in the exercise of the power that the society gives them, regulating banks that are tempted to work irresponsibly – or worse – in unrestrained pursuit of their own gains (sometimes biased heavily towards short-run profits), and changing unviable conventions about early retiring age that are economically hard to sustain and morally difficult to defend. The requirements for alleged financial discipline have tended, in unclear thinking, to merge together the two distinct issues (reform and austerity), even though any scrutiny of the demands of social justice would view policies for necessary reform in an altogether different way from

indiscriminate cuts in important public services.

Perhaps the biggest problem in European policy making has been the lack of democratic practice, especially the denial of public reasoning preceding policy choices, relying instead on authoritarian prioritization of the demands of the financial leaders of Europe. Even when elementary distinctions have been overlooked by the financial bosses through crude and narrow thinking, opportunities for adequate public discussion – through the practice of democracy seen as "government by discussion" (as John Stuart Mill did)– could have remedied that narrow unilateral thinking. But that is not how European decisions have largely been taken. Even though government after government has later fallen in post hoc voting and electoral debacles, that is no substitute for the important need for public discussion before making major decisions that affect the lives of people. What is needed is an ex ante role of public discussion in public choice, and not just an ex post role in voicing disagreement and disapproval.

The pursuit of justice – and a commitment to reduce social injustice – demand that we ask the right questions about what is to be done, and seek answers through open public discussion.

Much in Europe and in the world will depend on how effectively Europe deals with its predicament and challenges.

Amartya Sen

PROFESSIONAL ELECTIONS AND (SELECTED) AWARDS

President, The Econometric Society, 1984

President, The International Economic Association, 1986-89

President, The Indian Economic Association, 1989

President, The American Economic Association, 1994

Fellow of the British Academy

Honorary Fellow, The Academy of Medical Science

Honorary Fellow of The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Honorary Member, The Royal Irish Academy

Member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

Foreign Honorary Member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Member of the American Philosophical Association

Frances Perkins Fellow of The American Academy of Political & Social Science

Fellow of the Econometric Society

Fellow, Trinity College, Cambridge

Honorary Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford

Honorary Fellow, Nuffield College, Oxford

Honorary Fellow, St Edmund's College, Cambridge

Honorary Fellow, School of Oriental & African Studies, London

Honorary Fellow, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands

Honorary Professor, Delhi University, India

Honorary Fellow, London School of Economics

Honorary Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University

Honorary Fellow, Darwin College, Cambridge, UK

Member of the Universal Academy of Cultures

Honorary Fellow, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, University of London

Honorary D. Litt., University of Saskatchewan, Canada, 1979

Honorary D. Litt., Visva-Bharati University, India, 1983

Honorary D. U., Essex University, UK, 1984

Honorary D. Sc., University of Bath, UK, 1984

Doctor Honoris Causa (in Economics, Philosophy, Laws, Social Science, Letters, etc.) in more than 100 Universities around the World.

President, The Development Studies Association, 1980-82

Honorary President, The International Economic Association, since 1989

Honorary President, Oxfam, 2000-02; Honorary Advisor, 2002-

Chairman, Commonwealth Commission, On Respect and Understanding, 2007-08

Chair Adviser, Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2007-2009

Chairman, Nalanda Mentor Group for re-establishing the Nalanda University, 2007-present

Chancellor, Nalanda University, 2012-present

Mahalanobis Prize, 1976

Frank E. Seidman Distinguished Award in Political Economy, 1986

Senator Giovanni Agnelli International Prize in Ethics, 1990

Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Award, 1990
 Jean Mayer Global Citizenship Award, 1993
 Indira Gandhi Gold Medal Award of the Asiatic Society, 1994
 Edinburgh Medal, 1997
 Catalonia International Prize, 1997
 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, 1998
 Bharat Ratna, 1999
 Leontief Prize, 2000
 Brazilian Ordem do Merito Cientifico, Grã-Cruz, 2000
 Eisenhower Medal, 2000
 Presidency of the Italian Republic Medal, 2000
 Honorary Companion of Honour, UK, 2000
 Bruno-Kreisky Award for the Political Book of the Year, 2001
 Electricité de France European Economics Book Prize, 2002
 Ayrton Senna Grand Prix of Journalism, 2002
 Barnard College, Medal of Distinction, 2005
 Silver Banner, Florence, Italy, 2005
 George C. Marshall Award, 2005
 Sidhartha Maitra Memorial Lecture Award, 2006
 NASSCOM Global Indian Award, 2007
 United Nations Life Time Achievement Award, UNESCAP, 2007
 Global Economy Prize, University of Kiel, 2007
 Meister Eckhart Prize, Identity Foundation, Germany 2007
 Annual Best Book Award, North American Society for Social Philosophy, 2009
 National Humanities Medal, USA, 2012
 Thomas C. Schelling Award, Harvard University, 2012
 International Edgar de Picciotto Prize, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies,
 Switzerland, 2012
 Légion d'Honneur, France, 2012
 Aztec Eagle, Mexico, 2012
 Shigemitsu Award, Shigemitsu Global Cultural Center, Japan, 2012

BOOKS

Choice of Techniques, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960, 1962, 1968; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1962, 1968.
 Spanish translation, Mexico City, 1969.
Collective Choice and Social Welfare, San Francisco: Holden Day, 1970; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1971;
 Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1979, 1984. Swedish translation: Bokforlaget Thales, 1988.
Growth Economics, editor, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960.
Guidelines for Project Evaluation, UNIDO, United Nations, New York, 1972. Jointly with P. Dasgupta and S. A.
 Marglin.
On Economic Inequality, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973; New York: Norton, 1975. German translation:
 Campus, 1975; Japanese translation: 1977; Spanish translation: Editorial Critica, 1979; Yugoslav translation:
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 with James Foster], Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
Employment, Technology, and Development, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; New York: Oxford University Press,
 1975; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976.
Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981; New York: Oxford
 University Press, 1981; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.
Utilitarianism and Beyond, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; New York: Cambridge University
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- Choice, Welfare and Measurement*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983; Italian translation: Il Mulino, 1986; Japanese translation: Iwanami, 1988.
- Resources, Values and Development*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1984; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985; Italian translation: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992.
- Commodities and Capabilities*, Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987; Italian translation: Giuffrè Editore, 1988; Japanese translation: Iwanami, 1988.
- The Standard of Living*, Tanner Lectures with rejoinders by Bernard Williams and others, edited by G. Hawthorne, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Italian translation: Marsilio, 1993.
- On Ethics and Economics*, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990; Italian translation: Editori Laterza, 1988; Spanish translation, Alianza Editorial, 1987; French translation (with other selected essays), Presses Universitaires de France, 1993.
- Hunger and Public Action*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Jointly with Jean Drèze.
- The Political Economy of Hunger*, in 3 volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990 and 1991. Jointly edited with Jean Drèze.
- Inequality Reexamined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992; Italian translation: Il Mulino, 1994; French translation: Seuil, 2000.
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- India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Jointly with Jean Drèze.
- Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997. Jointly edited with Jean Drèze.
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- “On the Foundations of Welfare Economics: Utility, Capability and Practical Reason,” in F. H. Hahn, et al., eds., *Ethics, Rationality and Economic Behavior*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- “Democracy and Social Justice,” presented at the Seoul Conference on Democracy, Market Economy and Development, February 26-27, 1999; published in *World Bank Development Outlook* (Summer 1999).
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(III) ECONOMIC MEASUREMENT

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- “The Welfare Basis of Real Income Comparisons: A Reply,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, 18 (December 1980).

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- “Life Expectancy and Inequality: Some Conceptual Issues,” in P. Bardhan et al., eds., *Development and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
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- “Should Inequality and Poverty Measures be Decomposable?” A Report on the Second Kumar Chakravarti Memorial Lecture, *Calcutta Statistical Association Bulletin*, 48 (March-June 1998).
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(IV) AXIOMATIC CHOICE THEORY

- “Quasi-transitivity, Rational Choice and Collective Decisions,” *Review of Economic Studies*, 36 (July 1969).
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(V) RATIONALITY AND ECONOMIC BEHAVIOUR

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