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JOHN VEIT-WILSON'S BOOK REVIEWS.

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POLLY VIZARD (2006), *POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. SEN'S 'CAPABILITY PERSPECTIVE' EXPLORED*, OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate economist, is known in poverty research for his fruitful concepts of capabilities and functionings as analytical tools for comparative studies of human needs. Historically, the development of poverty paradigms for social research was profoundly influenced by contemporary and localised political, social and intellectual issues in marketised economies. Hence the immediate poverty condition was generally seen statically as a lack of disposable resources-in-exchange (chiefly money) to meet needs. Argument followed whether the causes, condition or consequences of the lack of resources were the 'real' poverty, often identified in the behavioural and material consequences of inadequate purchasing power. However, economic approaches to underdevelopment and global poverty developed different measures, often based on aggregate national statistical indicators (such as GDP per head or income inequalities) devoid of information about individual or sub-group needs in non-marketised societies. Sen's creative insight from an economic standpoint was to ask instead what it is that people, wherever they are in the world, must be able to do (capabilities) to have the freedom to satisfy their needs, as socially and contextually identified, and take a recognised part in their own societies (what he called functionings is comparable to the social researchers' material and behavioural indicators of deprivation and exclusion). Sen's dynamic analytical perspective is as applicable to industrialised as to any other economies and greatly expands the imaginative scope of the productive policy options which could be used to combat poverties on any level from the individual to the global.

At the same time, the status and meaning of human rights to have needs met, and the saying that "there are no rights without remedies", remain contentious, especially to political philosophers and jurists who argue whether an unenforceable 'right' is in principle an oxymoron. The global rhetoric proclaiming human rights to fundamental freedoms from poverty and embodying them in international declarations, conventions and treaties is, as regards poverty, an ethically unsatisfactory compromise since in most countries they are neither juridified nor justiciable. The South African constitution is a beacon exception.

Polly Vizard explores what contribution Sen's body of ideas about poverty, his 'capability perspective', might make to debates about human rights to be protected against poverty. To do this she presents a highly detailed scholarly critique of the discrete but related human rights discourses used by relevant economists, ethicists, jurists, logicians and philosophers, and tentatively suggests the implications of Sen's ideas to each. The book is an abstract theoretical analysis of rarified arguments, reflecting its origins in Vizard's doctoral thesis; it is not, metaphorically, a cookbook of healthy policy recipes spiced with added Sen. Its

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arguments are consequently too dense for fair summarisation. After a general introduction, the second chapter analyses the famous and influential liberal and libertarian political philosophers who fail to acknowledge positive freedoms, or treat poverty and starvation as not being 'freedom-restricting' conditions, without recognition of the real human suffering involved. Next, Vizard suggests Sen's research agenda offers a grounded basis for ethical concerns about outcomes for all, to set against the utopian abstractions of individualistic liberal philosophy within whose 'fair' resource distributions famines could occur; if so, some property rights must ethically be restricted. Chapter four concentrates on Sen's exposure of the narrow inadequacies of abstracted economic analyses which neglect human rights and freedoms in their concern with income and utility. Simplistic asocial models of well-functioning markets which clear and restore equilibrium (naturally, when famine has killed the surplus labour force) are unethical, and in the real world purposive non-marketised intervention is ethically essential. Chapter five reviews the international legal framework of relevant human rights and freedoms, showing through examples of statute and case law how ethical and economic ideas of capabilities can be related to the international 'manifesto' standards, though Vizard's exploration reveals her interest in much wider concerns than Sen's contribution alone. Chapter six discusses these poverty rights issues through formal analysis using deontic logic, to show that Sen's ideas may be useful even here. Finally, Vizard acknowledges that Sen's agenda is incomplete in several respects, particularly linkages with international human rights law and his failure to specify and assign obligations for implementation, but believes it may offer a fruitful approach to real problems.

Vizard's critique engages not only with obvious opponents but in various places with the writings of more sympathetic philosophers, such as Nussbaum and Rawls, and she argues that Sen's use of the idea of 'imperfect rights' allows the continuing failure of most legal systems to juridify treaty rights to be considered as not a denial of rights but their theoretical endorsement by treaty-ratification if governments claim that they aim to implement the rights eventually. However, because she focuses on rights discourses, the book doesn't extend to analysing similarly the discourses of poverty which Sen's ideas could illuminate, both the phenomena of unmet needs in context and the means of meeting them, nor the disparities of power and wealth which drive the problems in the first place.

Social policy readers with an interest in poverty and human rights from any of the disparate perspectives Vizard considers may find her discussions challenging. Her presentation of their arguments reflects their eminently intellectual and scholarly expertise and the high regard in which they are held in some academic and political circles, but it is all rather remote from real human suffering, social responsibility and ideological self-awareness. The sections on jurisprudential approaches to rights implementation are inevitably the most practical, and another book remains to be written on the social policy potential of Sen's ideas for the European poverty industry. But as a wide-ranging and assertive exploration of the fertility of Sen's ideas, it is a useful source of material to dip into for arguments in many contexts.
