

INTRODUCTION

The 1998 winner of the Nobel Prize in Economy and author of the capabilities approach, Amartya Sen, seems to have captivated the imagination and the analytical skills of not only the economic world but also the sometimes far and aloft ivory tower of moral theologians.¹ In terms that immediately pique the interests of those engaged in Catholic social thought, he has been described by one theologian as “the conscience of economics” with the exquisite justification that “it is the richness and insight of his exceptionally humanistic mode of economics which would make him a living reference-point from which not only can technicalities be judged, but also placed in a more human perspective than their own restricted descriptions suggest”.² The fact that Amartya Sen was among the panel of experts consulted by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace previous to the social encyclical *Centesimus Annus*,³ or even more impressively, an implicit recognition of the importance of his work in the October 2011 Note by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which speaks of “[g]lobal economic well-being, traditionally measured by national income and also by levels of *capabilities*,”⁴ have

¹ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. The Infancy Narratives*. trans. by Philip J. Whitmore, Image, New York 2012, 105. Commenting upon the journey of the Magi and Herod’s consultation with the chief priests and scribes, Pope Benedict XVI notes that despite their capacity to determine where the Messiah is to be born, none of these theological experts decide to accompany the Magi on their journey. He inquires, “Does this, perhaps, furnish us with the image of a theology that exhausts itself in academic disputes?” Moral theology particularly, in its concern with human acts, should seek to avoid such a danger.

² Edward Booth, “Amartya Sen: ‘The Conscience of Economics’, A Brief Outline of His Thought,” *New Blackfriars* 83 (2002) 460.

³ See his chapter, Amartya Sen, “Some Contemporary Economic and Social Issues,” in *Social and Ethical Aspects of Economics. A Colloquium in the Vatican*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican City 1992, 99-106.

⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority,” October 24, 2011, Section 1, cfr. Bibliography, Online Resources, n. 1. In italics here in the English version, the original Italian emphasized the word by keeping it in English.

only added to his glamour in the world of Catholic social teaching. Not surprisingly, articles comparing his thought with that of Catholic social doctrine have been hastened to publication,⁵ and his work has additionally been mentioned in the recent and much-heralded *Dizionario di economia civile*, co-edited by Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, under the entries of both “*Sviluppo*” (“Development”) and “*Povertà*” (“Poverty”).⁶ Although a full-length book by an established academic has yet to be written, doctoral students at the Pontifical Universities in Rome have been joining the fray since 2002, interrogating specifically his ideas of liberty and development,⁷ his idea of the common good,⁸ or even his economic theory in light of its critique of neoclassical

⁵ See, for example, Aloysius Fonseca, “Etica ed economia in A. Sen,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3343 (1989) 30-41, James J. Spillane, “Amartya Sen: Premio “Nobel” 1998 per l’economia,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3574 (1999) 362-371, and two by Domenico Santangelo at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, “Amartya K. Sen e la globalizzazione: analisi etica e confronto con la Dottrina sociale della Chiesa,” *Bollettino di Dottrina sociale della Chiesa* 7.3 (2011) 77-85 and “Amartya Kumar Sen e la povertà globale. Analisi etica e linee essenziali di confronto con la *Caritas in veritate*,” *Studia Moralia* 48.2 (2010) 415-440.

⁶ Cfr. Gianni Vaggi, “Sviluppo,” in *Dizionario di economia civile*, Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni (eds.), Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 2009, 752-764, and Vera Araujo, “Povertà,” in *Dizionario di economia civile*, Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni (eds.), Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 2009, 641-647.

⁷ See Marco Tommaso Reali, *La libertà umana e morale: il personalismo di Amartya Kumar Sen e il personalismo teologico cristiano, thesis ad doctoratum*, Pontificia Università San Tommaso, Roma 2002, Peter Gerard Fitzsimons, *Development and Liberty in Amartya Sen: An Examination of the Compatibility of Amartya Sen’s Approach to Social Development and Liberty with Catholic Social Doctrine, thesis ad doctoratum*, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Roma 2005, Fabrizio Casazza, *Sviluppo e libertà in Amartya Sen: provocazioni per la teologia morale, thesis ad doctoratum*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 2007, and Mangalam David Arockia Dass, *The compatibility of development in the writings of Amartya Sen and in the social teachings of the Church, thesis ad doctoratum*, Accademia Alfonsiana, Roma 2009.

⁸ Richard Britto, *The concept of the common good in the social thought of John Paul II: an appraisal in comparison with Michael Novak and Amartya Sen, thesis ad doctoratum*, Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma 2009.

anthropology.⁹

Despite much lament in these and other works regarding his methodological individualism,¹⁰ and some reference to a missing regard for the family, a great lacuna in Sen's work,¹¹ none of these texts have yet profoundly investigated his specific approach to development, or resolution to poverty, the capabilities approach, by asking whether it could be better formulated by taking into account the social nature of the human person and its natural home in the family, or how such a re-formulation would proceed. Hence, serious discussion of the family as the focus of the capabilities approach or the necessity of structuring such an approach according to the principle of subsidiarity, the principle respecting and promoting the liberty of the social being, is lacking. Although it seems that economists in the United States did at one time propose ascertaining the presence or absence of the capa-

⁹ José Maria Guirao Martínez, *Teoría económica y doctrina social de la Iglesia: crítica de Rafael Rubio de Urquía y de Amartya Sen a la doctrina neoclásica y sus implicaciones, thesis ad doctoratum*, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Rome 2006.

¹⁰ Some of the more well-known secular studies of the capabilities approach which attempt to resolve the difficulty of its methodological individualism are James E. Foster and Christopher Handy, "External Capabilities," OPHI Working Paper Series, Vanderbilt University, January 2008, cfr. Bibliography, Online Resources, n. 2, Séverine Deneulin and J. Allister McGregor, "The capability approach and the politics of a social conception of wellbeing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 13.4 (2010) 501-519, and Francis Stewart, "Groups and capabilities," *Journal of Human Development* 6.2 (2005) 185-204.

¹¹ See, in the realm of moral theology, Edward Booth's comments that Sen's work "merits correlation with the Church's teaching on the family," Edward Booth, "Amartya Sen: 'The Conscience of Economics'," 462-463 and the development of Fabrizio Casazza of the family as the place of the moral decision, Fabrizio Casazza, *Sviluppo e libertà in Amartya Sen*, 267-271. The closest approximation to a true appreciation of the family in the capabilities approach, is found in Séverine Deneulin and Frances Stewart's "Amartya Sen's contribution to development thinking," *Studies in Comparative Development* 37.2 (2002) 61-70, which elaborates the concept of "valuable structures of living together". They write, "flourishing individuals generally need and depend on functional families, co-operative and high-trust societies, and ones which contribute to the development of individuals who choose 'valuable' capabilities". Deneulin and Stewart, "Amartya Sen's contribution to development thinking," 68.

bilities of a family as an alternative to delineating poverty in terms of annual income, these capabilities, contrary to Sen's characterization, were seen as mere means to obtaining a certain economic position and not simultaneously the human ends of "the good life".¹²

Our work then, takes upon itself the task of filling such a gap. Intrigued by the "human perspective" of his capabilities approach, it intends to investigate whether or not this "human perspective," or the "good life" proposed by Sen as the underlying reason for the capabilities approach, is compatible with authentic human development,¹³ paying special attention to the aforementioned lacunae in regard to the family and the principle of subsidiarity. Obviously, such a task cannot be undertaken without a full understanding of the bases of Sen's work, his influences, and his predispositions to treat certain themes as well as his particular proposal springing from such personal and academic experience. Hence, the first two chapters of this work shall be engaged

¹² The statement reads thus: "it may be possible to devise a measure that is superior to annual cash income as an indicator of economic position or family well-being over the long term or on a permanent basis. [N.B. There is a note here, in which other economists are also mentioned, to Amartya Sen's "Issues in the Measurement of Poverty," *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 81.2 (February 1979) 285-307 and his "Poverty: An Ordinal Approach to Measurement," *Econometrica* 44.2 (March 1976) 219-231.] One such measure would attempt to answer the question, 'Does a family have the skills and capabilities to earn its way out of poverty were it fully to use them?' Such a question would get at the permanent characteristics of families: their education, their age and experience, and their occupation, and tie an assessment of whether or not they were poor to these attributes". Robert Haveman, "Changing the poverty measure: Pitfalls and potential gains," *Focus* 14.3 (1992/1993) 26.

¹³ Scattered throughout his works, a short summary of the history of this underlying idea in economics can be found in the section entitled, "Freedom, Capability and the Quality of Life," in Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, New York 1999, 24-25. He notes that "the origin of economics was significantly motivated by the need to study the assessment of, and causal influences on, the opportunities that people have for good living," 24, and then goes on to list a number of economists, Aristotle, William Petty, Gregory King, François Quesnay, Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier, and Joseph-Louis Lagrange, who saw income as merely instrumental to economic analysis. For example, Lagrange, French *par excellence*, converted commodities into their functional equivalents: all meat was converted into units of beef and all beverages into units of wine.

in identifying the foundation and the specific characteristics of the capabilities approach, which seems to ally itself with the following indications given in order to realize authentic human progress: “the goal of rescuing peoples, first and foremost, from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases and illiteracy”.¹⁴ This means treating and investigating not only the childhood experiences of the now 80 year-old Sen but also briefly sketching the Impossibility Theorem of Kenneth Arrow, published while Sen was still in university,¹⁵ as well as the “theory of justice” of John Rawls, with whom he had the occasion of teaching. These economic and philosophical roots are present in his own mature proposal, both as development and as reaction. Studying the answer of the capabilities approach to certain problems in the work of these two authors will then allow us to more fully understand this proposition in regard to its theoretical foundation and practical implications.

Having fully grasped the relevance of the capabilities approach for a human *modus operandi* in the field of development, we will then take upon ourselves the task of its critique or an analysis of the way it “measures up” against the idea of authentic human development, a “progress ‘from less human conditions to those which are more human’”,¹⁶ involving every person and all aspects of the human person. Analyzing Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach in this light, not only are those merits of his proposal more evident: its recognition of the dynamism of the human person and its attempt to escape from the “exclusively binary model of market-plus-State... corrosive of society,”¹⁷ but its defects are also much more visible: a lack of an idea of the “good” in “the good life;” a methodological individualism which denies the social nature of the human person, in a particular way incisive for the family and its common good; a neglect of the principle of subsidiarity, the principle of liberty for natural societies; and a disregard, almost disrespect, for the search for truth undertaken by individuals and religions within society.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009) 21 in AAS 101 (2009) 655.

¹⁵ Amartya Sen, “Autobiography,” in *Les Prix Nobel. The Nobel Prizes 1998*, T. Grängsmyr (ed.), Nobel Foundation, Stockholm 1999.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009) 8 in AAS 101 (2009) 646.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 39 in AAS 101 (2009) 674.

Thus, while the capabilities approach does valiantly present a “human perspective,” this perspective is less than complete. Recognizing the futility of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, we will therefore attempt to delineate a method by which the merits of the capabilities approach can be assumed within a framework more coherent with the human person. To this end, we will formulate an adequate anthropology, based upon chapter 8 of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, which, like the rest of the letter, is central to Pauline moral theology¹⁸ and, moreover, to Christian theological anthropology as a whole.¹⁹ The inevitable result, a theocentric humanism synonymous with filial liberty, will indicate those three characteristics of humanity whose recognition is essential for any human proposal for the resolution of poverty: the theocentric, social, and dynamic nature of the human person. If filial liberty is the realization of authentic human development, this filial liberty can best be fundamentally learned and then primarily actualized in the family and in that civil society which tends, in a subsidiary manner, to support it. Consequently, this work will conclude by offering a theoretical basis for a practical re-elaboration of the capabilities approach, hopefully giving birth to a “family capabilities approach”. I invite you to join me upon the voyage of its conception.

¹⁸ Ángel Rodríguez Luño, “Introduzione allo studio della morale di San Paolo,” *Annales Theologici* 21 (2007) 428.

¹⁹ Antonio Aranda, “Imagen de Dios en Cristo – Hijos de Dios en Cristo. Una Relectura de la doctrina antropológica paulina,” *Scripta Theologica* 38.2 (2006) 605.