I first found Amartya Sen long time ago initiating my studies about Development Economics, in a book of readings edited by Penguin in 1971, organized by Sen and titled Growth Economics. Today some may see the book a little forgotten but for the moment it was an important reference in the field. Not only contained the seminal papers of Roy Harrod, Evsey Domar, Robert Solow, Nicholas Kaldor, Joan Robinson and many others on economic growth (21 papers including one of Sen himself), but also included a clear introduction that guided the lecture of the book. It is an evidence of the importance given by Sen to growth and formal models of growth. Economic Growth is essential everywhere, but especially in poor societies for reducing or eliminating poverty.

II

However, the first net contribution of Sen to my understanding of Economics came from the debate about Development. The main reference in 1970 and 1980 was the paper written by another eminent scholar named Dudley Seers and published in the International Development Review by 1969 with title “The Meaning of Development”. Seers, who like Sen considered neoclassical economics a flawed paradigm and Dependence Theory (very popular for the moment) a theory with lack of policy realism, was impressed by the stress of the UN’s first development decade (1960-70) on LDC’s economic growth, which many alleged did not spread to the poor half of the population. And in 1969 Seers’ paper signalled the shift away from the goal of growth by asking the following three questions about a country’s development: “What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?” And he answered: “If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result ‘development’, even if per capita income has soared” (SEERS, 1969: 3-4).
Thirty years later Sen published the influential book *Development as Freedom* (1999) where he demonstrated that freedom (and not development) is the ultimate goal of economic life as well as the most efficient means of realizing general welfare, advancing that the means of satisfactory human living are not the ends of good living. It was a revolution in the way of thinking Economics, with generalized consequences on the way of seeing not only Development (and poverty and inequality) but also Welfare Economics. The changing focus from means to ends of well-being, from income to life. Life is constituted by a vector of interrelated functions and freedom is real opportunity to choose and achieve things and functions persons have reason to value. The opportunity aspect of freedom is the idea of capabilities or the real opportunity to achieve valuable functionings. “The various attainments in human functioning that we may value are very diverse, varying from being well nourished or avoiding premature mortality to taking part in the life of the community and developing the skill to pursue one’s work-related plans and ambitions” (The Idea of Justice: 233). So the idea of capability is linked with the idea of *substantive freedom*, because it gives a central role to a person’s actual ability to do the different things she values doing.

Income is important but it is an indirect measure of life because conversion of revenue into functionings (or capabilities) is not automatic, it depends on economic, social, political and cultural framework. Using Sen’s words “freedom from premature mortality is helped by having a higher income, but depends particularly of social organization, including public healthcare, the assurance of medical care, the nature of schooling and education, the extent of social cohesion and harmony and so on” (The Idea of Justice: 226). Consequently we must conceive poverty in a different way: 1) as a continuous function of varying gradation joining to the Headcount Approach *H* an Income –Gap Approach *I* measuring additional income needed to bring poor up to the level of poverty line, and the Gini coefficient *G* measuring inequality among the poor; combining *G*, *I* and *H* satisfies the Sen’s three axioms for a poverty line: the focus axiom, “the measure of poverty depends only on the incomes of the poor”, the
monotonicity axiom, “poverty index increases when the incomes of the poor decrease”, and the weaker transfer axiom, “poverty measure must be sensitive to changes in income distribution of the poor” (Poverty and Famines, 1981); and 2) poverty it is not only a shortfall of income from a poverty line (as is usually defended by the World Bank advisors or Headcount Approach H) but a global deprivation in the basic dimensions of human development such as a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

III

Another important subject I learned with Sen is the relationship between political freedom and development, because some still argue that in certain circumstances we must sacrifice freedom to obtain economic growth and development. Sen’s answer to that question is: “Even though the question has often been asked whether political freedom is ‘conducive to development’, we must not miss the crucial recognition that political liberties and democratic rights are among ‘constituent components’ of development” (The Idea of Justice: 347). The objective of development, like with the movement on Human Rights, is to secure an adequate level of agency and morally basic capabilities for everyone in the world regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, sex or sexual preference. We can see Development as a particular process in which all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized as is stated in the UN Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986. The Right to Development emerged as a Human Right which integrated economic, social, and cultural rights with civil and political rights in the manner that was envisaged at the beginning of the post-World War II human rights movement.

However, as we know, during the Cold War the world became divided between those who denied that economic, social, and cultural rights could be regarded as human rights, and those who considered that economic, social and cultural rights are the essential human rights. Finally a new consensus emerged in Vienna at the Second UN World Conference on Human Rights in
1993, reaffirming “the right to development, as established in the Declaration on the Right to Development, as universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights”. As Sen would have put it even a prosperous community of slaves who do not have civil and political rights cannot be regarded as a community with well-being. Meanwhile, from all points of view the essence of Sen’s message and work still continues to be decisive, not only for critical approach to the contemporary path of countries like China or Cuba, but also, on the other side, to a critical appraisal of market pressures all over the world for mitigation of economic, social and cultural rights of people in name of the blind interests of the financial sector. That is why, according to the Nobel Prize committee, Sen “restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of economic problems”.

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