

Propositions

1. Amartya Sen is an accomplished social scientist as well as a philosopher. This should be kept in mind when reading his work, since otherwise his terminology, methodology, and arguments may seem rather puzzling.
2. Any particular application of the capability approach to judging individual advantage and social welfare requires, as part of the evaluation, working out which concepts, definitions, and weights are appropriate. Formulating the capability approach as a theory of justice with a canonical list of the capabilities that matter would limit the informational basis of evaluation in advance by ruling out many aspects of human life from ever being considered.
3. In thinking about development, the 'Golden Rule' - do unto others as you would that they should do unto you - is bad ethics. It implies that development is a matter of bringing it about that other people have lives like yours. But other people may have reason to want to live quite different lives.
4. The conception of human development derived from the capability approach requires that the people concerned be authors in the transformation of their lives. Transformative policies that do not respect this, whether justified by the wider national interest (such as dams) or the unrecognised best interests of the people concerned (paternalism), should not be called development, but something else.
5. In contemporary political philosophy, politics has largely been displaced by moral theory. Amartya Sen's refusal to follow this path is not an evasion of his responsibilities as a philosopher citizen. Rather, it follows from his empirically and theoretically grounded belief in the scope and capacities of democratic practise to advance social justice and democracy itself.
6. These days the only good arguments for monarchy are republican ones.
7. Jane Austen is an important virtue ethicist whose work remains relevant today. Her romantic comedies are a moral education masquerading as entertainment.
8. Democracy is not a truth machine. The truth is not a matter of opinion and the popularity or unpopularity of truth claims is no guide to their epistemic status. Public deliberation should focus less on determining truth or falsity (such as whether or not human activities are causing global warming) and more on what we should make of inconvenient truths.
9. Adam Smith saw the material economy as a byproduct of the fundamental economy of attention in which individuals operate. The fundamental concern of humans is to command the admiration of others, and we engage in economic activity, beyond the provisioning of the necessities of life, because that is a domain in which our successes will be visible and easily recognised and admired by others.
10. Freedom of the press is quite different from freedom of speech. Since it involves media corporations rather than individuals, the freedom of the press is not justified by the intrinsic value of free expression as an aspect of moral autonomy, but only by its instrumental contributions to the public good.
11. The personal is not political.