

## **Sen's capability approach and Aristotle's theory of habit.**

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The classic economic analysis traditionally relates to the material or quantitative human issues. Aristotle, and Sen have both an empirical starting point as well, but grasp human action as holistic, either on terms of virtue the first, or of capabilities the latter. I will hereby intend to show that both notions are the two sides of the same coin. An attempt to broaden the scope of human action, namely freedom in its optimal sense, may only succeed within the growth of the individual. This growth, understood as a dynamic balance is the source of human development at many levels some of which are not quite measurable since some factors exceed empirical methods but do reflect at larger scales and its outcomes can be valued and compared. The link between them is virtue or capability. The widest valuation method, the only one in which Man is authentically sizable is ethics, so development issues broadly approached are ethical.

### **Ethics, the starting link.**

Man is someone who has to solve problems inherent to his existence, he holds his own being in his hands. He does not end in a determinate finitude but tends to infinitude or openness. We carry our existence on our shoulders, we have to bring it out. We do not have any previous supply to rest our temporality on, like an animal has its instincts or a star its orbit. Existence is myself in my hands. In this sense I am beyond the laws of mere happening. I am open to another scope and precisely because Man acts freely what is due ethically comes about. Originally, good and bad alternatives are ethical. And ethics appears because Man ought to be capable to manage his own existence. This management or capability is subject to alternative or choice and it can only come from freedom. Therefore, a kind of norm system appears: morality; that holds a peculiar difference that we call good and bad, and a specific modification within the agent takes place which are precisely virtue and vice.

### **To have and to give.**

Man is capable of having, but this has to be well understood under the human peculiar nature. The eagerness to have is considered a vice and it could be so if it is exaggerated or only one dimension of having is considered: that is, the mere having of things other than ourselves, being exclusively proprietor of external things<sup>1</sup>. This would be chrematistics which is the science of earning money. From the greek *xrema* and *xrao* which means to have at hand. In the primitive sense of its ethymology, which is the way it is used by Aristotle he alludes that Man is someone with hands, which is quite meaningful to understand that the human

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<sup>1</sup> "The excessive eagerness to possess external things is a vice". Eth. Nic., IV, I, 1122a 14 ss.

body has to consider seriously its technical procedure, his work with tools and their entire production scope.

Bodily possession is not the only nor the most intense way of possessing which Man is capable of; there is another dimension of having that is spiritual: knowledge. Intellectual knowledge is also another way of possessing, a mode of having substantially different from the bodily one which is circumscribed to adscription of external things. While the way of having actions or intellectual operations is precisely immanent: obtaining ideas. Knowing is the act of obtaining ideas. And this is an intense way of having above the bodily external adscription. And besides this two ways of having there is a third mode that completes Mans spiritual operative principles: intelligence and will. This third mode is what Aristotle calls habit. Habitual possession is precisely tenancy by virtue (or vice)<sup>2</sup>.

This is the *ubi* of the capability to grow within ourselves choosing how to, in which way (alternatives). Etc.

All three ways (studied each by particular sciences closely but fragmentarily) are different, but the three are indeed types of having. Each one supports a peculiar scope of Mans' capabilities and for development to run smoothly all the realms of human reality must be considered holistically. The growth of just one would decrease the others' potential. It is a matter of synthetic comprehension. Human having is only thoroughly understood under this triple modality and the support among them. Having is peculiar to human nature that ethics –the science (or art) of alternatives it has to deal with it thoroughly in an attempt to link the human capability of balanced growth or development.

Ethics branches out from the core of spirituality (intelligence and will) in Man. Each person is capable of virtue and vice because his own humanity should be developed. This development happens through acts. If these acts would not influence his way of being, if they did not modify the self or complete the humanity in each of us, Man could not be opened to its own personal development. This makes Man a person and this enables him to go beyond having, exactly to its opposite: to give or contribute. This will be elaborated below, for the moment, let it mark the other extreme of the scope in which alternative choice takes place: to have and to give.

Aristotle approaches corporeal having when he talks about Protagoras<sup>3</sup>. Man is the measure of the things he produces and of the ones he possess, of that which he has "at hand". He is capable of having with his body, in the sense of adscription and production. In this sense<sup>4</sup>, the protagorean *dictum* means that, to have is *exein*, and its corporeal tenancy is *exis*. This *exis* is not habit in the sense of virtue as he rigorously distinguishes saying it is an accident exclusive of

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<sup>2</sup> In Cat., 4, 1b, 25-27.

<sup>3</sup> "Panton metron anthropos". About Truth. Diels 80b, 1; Teetetes 151e-152a.

<sup>4</sup> Epistemologically focused in Metaph. 1053a 35 ss and 1062b 11-15.

the human body<sup>5</sup>. The human substance is capable of the accident of corporeal habit, the adscription of things to its body. Aristotle states that Man is the measure because, being the body capable of possessing, it is the model or paradigm of the thing possessed, and that accident, the categorial *exis* of the corporeal, is a relation between an external thing and the human body. Of this relationship the reference point is the body. The body is the end of the thing, which is the means. The categorial habit is the concordance relationship of those things possessed by the human body in subordination to it, as it is clear that having exterior things would be in detriment of the body if these did not adapt to it. Man must adapt material things to his material nature, that is, the body. And he adds, for the human body to have external things it is necessary for it not to be ended, if it were altogether completed, it could not be the center of adscriptions<sup>6</sup>. Only a body in potency may be completed by external tendencies: what that body has of potentiality is the measure in as much as it actualizes the completive valor of the things it adscribes in order to itself.

Setting this linguistically, we could say that Man inhabits. To inhabit means being in a place possessing it. And Man inhabits to the extent that he establishes things in reference to his body accordingly as it has them. Every inhabitation is a kind of possession and if Man inhabits it is because he is a *haber*, precisely because he possesses in the ways of the body. A body with the capability of adscribing in a progressive manner; Each time, he can adscribe more things of the external world and also of the world he produces. In this sense Man is capable of producing "worlds". Seen in this way, a lived house, a cultivated field, property, cities, sailing, all are ways of having the external, the human or technical world<sup>7</sup>.

Taking forward Mans' ways of possessing, he can relate to the things which he is the measure of and open up the world of instrumentality. This relationship structures a plexus (*Ganzheit*<sup>8</sup>). The plexus of tools conforms an interrelated totality and cannot be fragmented: an isolated tool is no tool at all, it's the nullification of its instrumentality: It is intrinsically referential, it is tool for something. The human world is characteristically a plexus. And to the human world private property is referred to. Therefore, a virtuous or vicious use of private property is possible, understanding it as an institution stabilized by the law. In this sense, private property is a natural right but it cannot be absolute or unpreferential because what each of us may have belongs to a plexus. If private property is such that works against the totality or against the opening of instrumental usage, if it is an adscription that diminishes the medial or instrumental completeness, then it is unjust and vicious in its use, if property is ascribed to a few only, it is an attempt against its natural ethical sense because it tends to close instead of opening alternatives.

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<sup>5</sup> Cat. 15b 17-33.

<sup>6</sup> ..."because the body is potency"... Cfr. De Anima, II, I, 413<sup>a</sup> 2.

<sup>7</sup> Marx glosses deeply into this particular way of having. Manuscrito Económico-Filosófico 1948. El Capital. 1867.

<sup>8</sup> *Ganzheit* is for Heidegger what categorial *exis* is for Aristotle.

Society is correspondent to the human world. Social relationships are possible due to adscriptions and interrelationships. This is why we call our position in society role. A social role can be defined as the fulfillment of certain functionings that relate to the maintenance of the medial or instrumental plexus. That is the way human crafts and trades are structured<sup>9</sup>. This duty is not only legal but moral as well. Even though it is not the only one, it is a moral obligation to complete the medial plexus. Or at least support it, not to let it pauperize or decay. Much energy is used in the maintenance of the human world, which is a common one because it is formed by a great deal of interrelated instrumentalities. These belong to the people, for whom the world is common, so it is part of the common good. Many human things are held in common, even though for practical reasons they may be adscribed to certain individuals or others. That is property. And property is relative, rigorously it is institutional. Many malfunctions occur inside the social organization, this judgment is primarily ethical, but it rests on the complexity of the human world. Many antithetical phenomena can appear as discrimination: someone set out of the common plexus. Human rights, formulated as they presently are, refer to this<sup>10</sup>. Our modern world tends to be more complicated, interrelations multiply and densify, to organizing it, becomes difficult. It could be analyzed as a technical problem, but it is more than that, it is mainly ethical. Rigorously it is strictly human, it could be solved better or worse and thus is ethical. Good economic functioning implies ethics necessarily, and when something malfunctions we have to admit that someone has not done his job, or there has been bribery or abuse, or someone has taken it all, or there has been despotic treatment. All this is disorganization but moreover an ethical matter. The great reason to try to organize the human habitat is ethical. Error and antithesis have a lot to do with it, the error about Man, the false appreciation toward the end of his activity many times opens the way to antithetic behavior. Man is weak and many times gives up to hedonistic solitudes which are not right; But errors in ethical formulation are due to errors in his way of being. vgr, is it an error that Man is an inhabitant? No it is not. Is it true that Man is only an inhabitant? It is a severe ontological reductionism.

Man is not only an inhabitant according to his corporeal having. He also has to follow his having intimate operation: knowledge. In the act of knowledge what is known is intrinsic to knowledge. It is possessed in it. A human world could not be built without this other possession. It is a superior way of having, a more intimate way. Because what is known to the extent that it is known is in the act of knowing. Therefore it is not a mere adscription as is the corporeal having, knowledge does not adscribe things. The fact that ideas are in mind means that they are obtained by the act of knowing. Man could not possess corporeally if he did not know, or would possess in a very precarious way. Acting is the execution of activities in order to build an inhabitable world. The first thing we need to ask from the one who acts, is that he knows. Because blindly nothing gets done. If

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<sup>9</sup> Or the classic meaning of Officium was coined.

<sup>10</sup> This lack of opportunity to grow in a certain aspect can take many forms, any of which is a privation of a due good, which is another definition of injustice.

we did not possess ideas, we could not possess things either. In strict sense, for something to be a true possession it is imperative that it is known that way, if not it would be an unconscious possession, and could neither be increased nor sustained. Therefore knowledge is also susceptible to ethical consideration. There are intellectual vices and virtues, the former are curiosity and error and that is ethical. Curiosity is described as the eagerness for knowing unimportant things. A vicious employment of the intellect, concerning insignificant things. The intellect has such nobility, that opens itself to the knowledge of many things therefore, restricting it to knowing insignificance is a vice. It is an inappropriate use of the mind and of language. On the contrary, the fondness of knowing is deeply human. "Every Man naturally seeks to know"<sup>11</sup>. So the tendency to knowing is a human virtue. Error is a vice defined as daring to sustain what is not known. It is being dogmatic and induces others to error. So it is misuse of intelligence in the sense that is capable of theorize, as well as its practical application. But the ethical relevance of knowledge is more clearly seen on its practical application. If someone is capable, but does not act as he knows is failing by laziness. He is wasting his talent. This announces moral consciousness.

As with error, to act with wrong consciousness.

Therefore, knowledge is a necessary ingredient for acting.

### **Man: an open system.**

Closed systems are those which have only one balance situation, therefore, they are capable of reacting to stimuli and come back to balance. They are mechanic.

Open systems are those capable of learning, and therefore, have more than one balance situation. This learning feature has an ascending sense. All its balance situations are correct, nevertheless some situations are better than others.

Free systems are those capable of positive and negative learning. These are more complex. This could be firstly conformed by each of us, and secondly and accordingly by human organizations and societies. Free people are capable of positive (virtues) and negative (vices) learning. These capabilities interact to form societies, which means that Man is not only an individual who belongs to a species and neither exhausts it. But this is why the plurality of individuals, of persons interacting open up the ways to society. Societies are free systems as well, and thus capable of doing better or worse, of prospering or decaying.

These three types of systems are not excluding, within Man the three of them function together. But it would be an error to confine all human capabilities into one of them, these would lessen its dynamism leaving some processes without explanation and moreover, the entire practical process unlinked.

If Man were incapable of getting worse, ethics would not be necessary. A human being as well as a society can fall into negative learning processes, but, although through great effort, this may be overcome. Nevertheless, this is not necessary it is just a possibility of a free system, an eventuality.

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<sup>11</sup> Metaph. 980a.

### **Balancing free systems: Happiness.**

Balance situations within a free system can be multiple, and even more than those of an open system. Because they may be affected by intensive learning processes and moreover by the fact that it can be either positive or negative. From this, the issue of happiness can be raised. Accordingly, happiness can be understood as the preferred state of balance. Nonetheless, the preferred state of a system if it is free, could be erroneous: it is the same thing as saying that the notion of happiness depends on the same characteristics of the system. A free system does not have –in time– a permanent state of balance: it is the most dynamic system possible, and therefore open to the future: it can always do better or it can always do worse. It is mainly, vital insecurity. Ethics is concerned with diminishing such insecurity by making the evaluation of the positive balance situations a better capability. This improvement is necessary for the consistency of the free system. Some classic authors defined happiness as the psychological situation of possessing the desired good.

That good is desired above anything else, therefore it is clear that it is parallel to the preferred balance situation. If it were a good that implied its loss (which happens to all material goods<sup>12</sup>) happiness could not be complete. A happiness in which the final term can fail, that is the good, is not complete so those who set it or make in consist in the ascription of material things do not understand it. The only thing that can make Man happy is the supreme good<sup>13</sup>. So happiness leads us to the notion of good. If Man could not attain happiness, if the good did not exist, ethics would be senseless. Good can be considered as something external to the free system that can be attained, and therefore can be possessed. But if this possession is of the first type, that is, a corporeal ascription, it is not enough, because it cannot be said that we attain and have the good if this is not known; a corporeal good is only subject of instrumental tenancy, not exactly finalistic. But the psychological good is an end.

The scientific consideration of ethics has three dimensions: goods, virtues and norms. A complete ethical treatment must conform the three aspects.

Life should be managed in order to attain the supreme good. So moral norms are introduced this way: from the psychological intention to attain the supreme good that grants happiness. The spiritual good is the end of life, ethics, under this aspect would consist in fulfilling a set of rules: if someone acts accordingly, he attains the good, if on the contrary, he acts against them he does not. Even though this framing is correct, is too brief and inclines us to think Man cannot be entirely happy since he has to follow a list of bothersome norms<sup>14</sup>. To strictly fulfill rules does not make Man happy because they are only means to attain the good without being completely coherent with it. The relationship between the dimension of norms and goods or virtue must not be arbitrary. Human will cannot be fully understood if all the plexus is not thoroughly clear.

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<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Eth Nic. VII 1095b 25.

<sup>13</sup> Eth. Nic. VII 1097b 9.

<sup>14</sup> "*Mala quia prohibita*" said Occam, G., IV Sent., III Sent., 12.

### **Good and Virtues.**

Virtues strengthen the human capability of possessing the good, and in this sense, virtues are part of the good, they are good; therefore an essential part to complete the psychological consideration of happiness. The good must not fail, if it is supreme it must satisfy all the spiritual aspirations of Man, which are potentially infinite. But with all this, the good might be splendid, absolutely attractive, but if we are dealing with a free system that he might say "I want it, but not completely", remains always a possibility; The good is desirable, but one may be desirable and much other is that it is actually desired. Therefore this free system needs to have the guarantee that his adhesion to the good is sufficiently strong, otherwise he cannot be happy. And not because of the good, but because of himself. This means it is not enough that what makes Man happy does exist, it is also necessary that Man is capable of being happy. Both considerations must be coherent, one is simply not enough. The free system must be capable of attaining, without oscillation, its state of supreme balance. From the side of the free system, desiring the good is not enough either, it is imperative that at its presence the conjunction occurs without fear to desist, unsay, detach, or get bored of it. Therefore, to say that Man can be happy is the same thing to say that he is capable of loving. It is not only to possess the good, or reach it, or that it gives to me without inconvenience on its part, it is imperative that my possession is as well total. Such unmovable possession is peculiar of the third dimension of having: virtue.

### **Ethics and Virtue.**

Moral virtues strengthen human will. They are perfectible habits of the will and being so, they strengthen it, that is to say the order the capability to love. On the contrary, vices diminish will, they spoil it and therefore decrease its ability to love. That is why the one who has vices cannot be happy, or he is so very poorly just as he loves poorly.

As I have said, ethics is not one-sidedly ethics of good, neither it is instrumentally ethic of norms; ethics also has to deal with love, that is adhesion to good. Norms can be not only desirable but lovable but this can only be discovered under the possession of virtue.

The Man who is not virtuous fulfills norms with difficulty instead, the virtuous Man fulfills them easily because in strict terms, norms are for freedom. Virtues increase the capability of exercising freedom –here it is clearly seen why a free system is better than an open one-. Love is entirely free, it does not consist only in being attracted to an immense overwhelming good that pulls us irremediably, this would make Man an open system<sup>15</sup>.

### **Good and Norms.**

I have said earlier that ethics has three unitary dimensions: virtue, good and norms. If any of these is isolated or is considered separately, ethics is spoiled, even that separated part. Making the link between them impossible. When virtues are separated from human growth, and from the acquisition of good, they

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<sup>15</sup> Metaph. XII, 1072b 3. Freedom has to do with means. Eth Nic. III.

turn rigid becoming an exclusive way of defense from external influences giving way to an isolated individuality without passions<sup>16</sup>.

The second way of reducing ethics is to consider norms only. This is a modern approach condensed when Man discovers rules by his reason, and admits that these laws or rational rules are the only thing true and therefore must follow them justly because they are rational and therefore free him from ignorance or irrationality. In the modern age there is a total change in the idea of cosmos which now turns out to be a rational mechanism that works “perfectly” under the regularity of the laws Man can discover within his mind.

After Kant there is a scientific idea of life in which Man can be demanded to have a strictly rational behavior, according to a decreased rationality because scientific reason is not the entire reason. Now a days, pretty disputed. Then, there is no place for virtue either. In any case the virtuous Man is a rational norm follower: an austere path. When the normative sense of ethics was created in the occidental world, an austere sense of life prevailed. The business Bourgeoisie as a social class which held economic activities mainly, in those days had a severe way of life. No longer it is so.

It is characteristic of the modern days to contract the notion of virtue to the decision to follow rational rules and nothing more. So goods are unlinked to norms and are transformed in what is called vital values (Modern Man does not renounce to goods but his action is trapped by his idea of rationality). Therefore a divorce is opened with the appraisal of goods which is more emotional. The notion of value comes forward, and as long as it is said that ethics consists in norms and nothing more, vital goods will be no longer coherent as they do not follow the laws of reason, on the contrary they appear in human life what Husserl called *Lebenswelt*<sup>17</sup>.

To the extent that the austerity of the primitive bourgeoisie weakens as a consequence of its success in the economic activity, that is, the increase of consumption goods, the rationalized ethics of norms weakens as well in favor of the preponderancy of the values of life, in other words, goods of immediate enjoyment.

So an ethic of only-goods appears, a demoralized ethic –from the normative point of view- which reacts against an only-norm rationalistic ethic that could not take care of goods at service of the satisfaction of needs.

In Plato we can find a prefiguration of this step from a rigorous ethic to a hedonistic one: the distinction between the timocratic regime and the plutocratic one, that ends up in what he calls democracy<sup>18</sup>.

Plato calls democracy “the great bazaar”, where all that human concupiscency can feed. As concupiscency covers it all, there is not only pleasurable material goods; there is also an intellectual concupiscency: curiositas, or the eagerness for novelty.

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<sup>16</sup> This is the stoic proposal.

<sup>17</sup> Die Crisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie, (Husserliana, IV), La Haya, M. Nijhoff, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> Plato; Rep, 545<sup>a</sup> ss.

