

## **Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach**

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I found myself beautiful as a free human mind.

Mrinal, in Rabindranath Tagore's "Letter from a Wife"

All over the world, people are struggling for a life that is fully human, a life worthy of human dignity. Countries and states are often focused on economic growth alone, but their people, meanwhile, are striving for something different: they want meaningful human lives. They need theoretical approaches that can be the ally of their struggles, not approaches that keep these struggles from view. As the late Mahbub Ul Haq wrote in 1990: "The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth."

Consider Vasanti, a woman in her thirties, in the Indian state of Gujarat. Vasanti's husband was a gambler and an alcoholic. He used the household money to get drunk, and when he ran out of that money he got a vasectomy in order to take the cash incentive payment offered by local government. So Vasanti had no children to help her. Eventually, as her husband became more abusive, she could no longer live with him, and returned to her own family. Her father, who used to make Singer sewing machine parts, had died, but her brothers were running an auto parts business in what was once his shop. Using one of his old machines, and living in the shop itself, she earned a small income making eyeholes for the hooks on sari tops. Meanwhile, her brothers gave her a loan to get another machine, one that rolls the edges of the sari. She took the money, but she didn't like being dependent on them -- they were married and had children, and their support could have stopped at any time. With the help of the Self-Employed Women's Organization (SEWA), a fine nongovernmental organization founded by the world-renowned women's advocate Ela Bhatt, she got a bank loan of her own and paid back the brothers. Now

she has paid back almost all of the SEWA loan itself. She can also enroll in SEWA's educational programs, where she will learn to read and write and will acquire skills that promote greater independence and participation.

What theoretical approach could direct attention to the salient features of Vasanti's situation, promote an adequate analysis of it, and make pertinent recommendations for action? Such an approach would need to focus on education and political participation, on health and bodily integrity, and on the importance of meaningful freedom to fashion one's life.

But the dominant theoretical approaches in development economics, approaches used all over the world, are not allies of Vasanti's struggle. They do not have an adequate conception of the human goal, equating doing well with an increase in Gross National Product per capita. In other words, Gujarat is pursuing the right policies in case its economy is growing.

First of all, even if we want an average measure that is a single number, a strategy I'll shortly call into question – it's far from obvious that average GDP is the right number. The recent influential Sakozy Commission on the measurement of welfare argues that average household income would get us closer to seeing how people are really doing. GDP doesn't as adequately capture the daily perspective, because the profits of foreign investment can be repatriated by the foreign country in ways that don't necessarily change the lives of the people in the nation in which they invest.

Furthermore, a crude measure like average GDP tells us nothing about distribution. It can thus give high marks to nations that contain alarming inequalities. For example, South Africa under apartheid used to shoot to the top of the development tables, despite the fact that a large majority of its people were unable to enjoy the fruits of the nation's overall prosperity. So too in Vasanti's case: Gujarat is a rich state, but the benefits of foreign investment do not reach the poor, and they particularly do not reach women. Thus the standard approaches do not direct our attention to the reasons for Vasanti's inability to enjoy the fruits of her region's general prosperity. Indeed, they positively distract attention from her problems.

Another shortcoming of approaches based on economic growth is that, even when distribution is factored in, they fail to examine aspects of the quality of a human life that are not very well correlated with growth, even when distribution is factored in. Research shows clearly that promoting growth does not automatically improve people's health, their education, their opportunities for political participation, or the opportunities of women to protect their bodily integrity from rape and domestic violence. Evidence of this independence of key parts of human life from GDP is given in the study by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen that compared the achievements of the various Indian states. They found dramatic evidence that overall economic growth does not translate into achievements in health care and education (two issues that the Indian Constitution leaves to be handled by the states). States such as Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, which have aggressively pursued policies of foreign investment, had high growth without good achievements in these other areas; meanwhile Kerala, a state whose economy has not grown well, in part on account of high labor costs that have driven the labor market to other states, nonetheless has such impressive achievements in health and education that it is the gold star of the development literature – 99 percent adolescent literacy in both boys and girls, against a background of 65 percent for men and 50 percent for women in the nation as a whole; in health, a balanced sex ratio, contrasting with the excessive female mortality of many other states, and basic health achievements similar to those of inner city New York, which is bad for New York, but excellent for a poor state in India.

So, in short, if we want to ask about how Vasanti is doing in an insightful way, we need to determine what she is actually able to do and to be, and the answer to this question simply is not in the GDP number. How have her circumstances, familial, social, and political, affected her ability to enjoy good health? To protect her bodily integrity? To attain an adequate education? To work on terms of mutual respect and equality with other workers? To participate in politics? To achieve self-respect and a sense of her own worth as a person and a citizen? Developing policies that are truly pertinent to her situation means asking all of these questions, and others like them. It means crafting policies that do not simply raise the total or average GDP, but

promote a wide range of human capabilities, opportunities that people have when, and only when, policy choices put them in a position to function effectively in a wide range of areas that are fundamental to a fully human life.

Today there is a new theoretical paradigm in the development world. Known as the “Human Development” paradigm, and also as the “capability approach” or “capabilities approach,” it begins with a very simple question: What are people actually able to do and to be? This question, though simple, is also complex, since the quality of a human life involves multiple elements whose relationship to one another needs close study.

This new paradigm has had increasing impact on international agencies discussing welfare, from the World Bank to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Through the influence of the Human Development Reports published by the UNDP, it also now affects most contemporary nations, who have been inspired by the use of the capability framework in those reports to produce their own capability-based studies of the well-being of different regions and groups in their own societies. Few nations today do not regularly produce such a report. (Even the U. S. joined the group this year.) There are also regional Human Development Reports, such as the Arab Human Development Report. In addition, the Human Development and Capability Association, of which Amartya Sen and I are the two Founding Presidents, with membership drawn from seventy countries, promotes high-quality research across a broad range of topics. Melanie Walker has been a leading contributor to this work. Finally, France’s recent Sarkozy Commission Report made a major commitment to the capabilities approach in its account of the measurement of welfare and quality of life.

What I’ll now do is to say a little more about the approach in relation to its primary rivals, and then address the delicate issue of relativism and universalism.

Why capabilities, then? We’ve already seen two failure of the GDP approach: a failure to look at issues of distribution and equality, and a failure to disaggregate and separately consider the different elements of a human being’s quality of life.

One step up in adequacy, we have utility based approaches, which measure the quality of life by looking at the satisfaction of preferences, and viewing the aim as that of maximizing satisfaction. This approach has the advantage of focusing on people and asking each of them about their lives. But four major defects prevent it from being fully adequate.

First, like the GDP approach, it neglects distribution: all satisfactions are simply funneled together, so that the exceeding satisfaction of a lot of rich and middle class people can justify misery at the bottom. The poor, in effect, are used as means to the happiness of the rich.

Second, again like the GDP approach, it neglects the diverse elements of a human life, funneling all satisfactions together. All are assumed to be commensurable on a single quantitative scale. This problem was already noticed by John Stuart Mill, reviewing the work of Utilitarianism's founder, Jeremy Bentham. (Bentham thought of the item to be maximized as pleasure, not satisfaction, but in other respects his views are just the same as those of more recent utilitarians.) Although Mill considered himself a defender of a type of utilitarianism, he insisted that it had to make room for qualitative differences: for example, the pleasure of eating and drinking is just qualitatively different from the pleasure of reading a book. To reduce them to different quantities of the same thing is to leave out the specific qualities that make people choose them. Mill's subtle arguments have been widely accepted by philosophers, but are less often heeded by economists – one reason why a partnership between philosophy and economics is crucial in making progress on these difficult issues.

Third, Utilitarianism neglects the issue of what Sen and other economists have called "adaptive preferences": people tailor their satisfactions to the level they think they can actually achieve, and so they often teach themselves to be content with an unjust state of affairs, because the dissonance of unrealizable longing is too painful. But that means that the utilitarian approach is often the ally of an unjust status quo: if women don't report dissatisfaction with their educational level, for example, there is no motivation in the approach to expand women's educational opportunities. Sen finds that adaptive preferences exist even with respect to bodily health.

Finally, being based on satisfaction, the approach omits the value of striving and agency, which is a particularly important part of the struggles of the poor, and of women. People don't want to be taken care of, they want a future in which they are able to be active and to participate in their own lives.

One step further up, we have resource-based approaches that think of quality of life in terms of the distribution of some basic all-purpose resources, such as wealth and income. This is a lot better, because distribution is factored in, but there are still grave problems. Although wealth and income are good things to have, they are not good proxies for all the diverse aspects of development (for example political liberty and participation). Moreover, people have varying needs for resources if they are to come up to the same level of capability to function. They also have differing abilities to convert resources into functioning. Some of these differences are straightforwardly physical: a child needs more protein than an adult to achieve a similar level of healthy functioning. But the differences that most interest Sen are social, and connected with entrenched discrimination of various types. Thus, in a nation where women are traditionally discouraged from pursuing an education it will usually take more resources to produce female literacy than male literacy. Or, to cite Sen's famous example, a person in a wheelchair will require more resources connected with mobility than will the person with "normal" mobility, if the two are to attain a similar level of ability to get around.

Taking stock of the defects of these other approaches, the capabilities approach begins with a very simple, yet at the same time highly complex question: what are people really able to do and to be? The answer to that question is the set of capabilities, or real opportunities, this person has.

Capabilities can be used in a primarily comparative manner, to give a richer account of the space of comparison between regions or nations. But we can also go further, and this has been my project: to use the idea of capabilities to develop a partial account of basic social justice, which could become the basis for constitution making. The idea of my version of the capabilities approach is that we begin with a conception of the dignity of the human being, and of a life that is

worthy of that dignity. With this basic idea as a starting point, I then attempt to justify a list of ten capabilities as central requirements of a life with dignity. These ten capabilities are supposed to be general goals that can be further specified by the society in question, as it works on the account of fundamental entitlements it wishes to endorse, whether in a written constitution or in some other way. But in some form all are part of a minimum account of social justice: a society that does not guarantee these to all its citizens, at some appropriate **threshold** level, falls short of being a fully just society, whatever its level of opulence. Moreover, the capabilities are held to be important for each and every person: each person is treated as an end, and none as a mere adjunct or means to the ends of others. And although in practical terms priorities may have to be set temporarily, the capabilities are understood as both mutually supportive and all of central relevance to social justice. Thus a society that neglects one of them to promote the others has fallen short of social justice. So the central capabilities are closely related to rights; like rights they include the idea of entitlement. But rights can be understood in a thin and negative way: rights are preserved so long as the government keeps its hands off. Capabilities, by contrast, are positive: they require affirmative government support for their creation and preservation.

Here is the current list.

### **The Central Human Capabilities**

- 1. Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
- 2. Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
- 3. Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
- 4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason - and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate

education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

**5. Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

**6. Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

**7. Affiliation. A.** Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

**B.** Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

**8. Other Species.** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

**9. Play.** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

**10. Control over one's Environment.**

**A. Political.** Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.



**B. Material.** Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

One part of my philosophical work has been to articulate and defend this conception; but another closely related part is to try to show that it is superior to other approaches. In Women and Human Development, I focus on Utilitarianism. In Frontiers of Justice I focus on the theory of the social contract, in the very subtle and powerful form given it by John Rawls. In both cases I try to show that at least for a range of important cases, the Capabilities Approach gives better results than its opponents.

The list is, emphatically, a list of separate components. We cannot satisfy the need for one of them by giving a larger amount of another one. All are of central importance and all are distinct in quality. I accept Mill's claim about qualitative differences, and build on it. The irreducible plurality of the list limits the trade-offs that it will be reasonable to make, and thus limits the applicability of quantitative cost-benefit analysis. At the same time, the items on the list are related to one another in many complex ways. One of the most effective ways of promoting women's control over their environment, and their effective right of political participation, is to promote women's education. Women who can seek employment outside the home have more resources in protecting their bodily integrity from assaults within it. Again, important research by Bina Agarwal shows that women who have land rights can stand up to domestic violence much more adequately than landless women. Such connections give us still more reason not to promote one capability at the expense of the others.

Among the capabilities, two, practical reason and affiliation, stand out as of special importance, since they both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human. To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and

planning is to use them in a manner not worthy of the equal human dignity we all possess.

Tagore's heroine describes herself as "a free human mind" -- and this idea of oneself infuses all her other functions. Political principles and public policies play a large part in determining whether people have the opportunity to function in accordance with practical reason and choice, as we can see by comparing the situation of women in different nations around the world.

Tagore's heroine basically has to leave society to get any chance to choose at all. Vasanti was similarly limited -- until the loan from SEWA gave her opportunities. Similarly, political principles also shape the types of affiliations and associations people are able to form, and the extent to which they have a range of affiliations open to them that are worthy of their human dignity. When women were able only to occupy positions of dependency and inferiority, for example, their societies did not give them affiliation opportunities worthy of their human dignity.

The basic intuition from which my version of the capability approach begins, in the political arena, is that human abilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed. Human beings are creatures such that, provided with the right educational and material support, they can become fully capable of these human functions. That is, they are creatures with certain lower-level capabilities (which I call "basic capabilities"<sup>1</sup>) to perform the functions in question. When these capabilities are deprived of the nourishment that would transform them into the high-level capabilities that figure on my list, they are fruitless, cut off, in some way but a shadow of themselves. If a turtle were given a life that afforded a merely animal level of functioning, we would have no indignation, no sense of waste and tragedy. When a human being is given a life that blights powers of human action and expression, that does give us a sense of waste and tragedy -- the tragedy expressed, for example, in Tagore's character Mrinal's statement to her husband, in the story, when she says, "I am not one to die easily." In her view, a life without choice, a life in which she was a mere appendage, was a type of death.

The Capabilities Approach has recently been enriched by Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit's important book Disadvantage. In addition to providing support for the list of the ten Central Capabilities, and in addition to developing strong arguments in favor of recognizing

irreducibly heterogeneous goods, Wolff and De-Shalit introduce some new concepts that enrich the theoretical apparatus of the Capabilities Approach. The first is that of **capability security**. They argue, plausibly, that what is crucial is that public policy not simply give people a capability, but give it to them in such a way that they can count on it for the future. Consider Vasanti: when she had a loan from her brothers, she had a range of health and employment-related capabilities, but they were not secure, since her brothers could call in the loan at any point, or turn her out of the house. The SEWA loan gave her security: so long as she worked regularly, she could make the payments, and even build up some savings.

Working with new immigrant groups in their respective countries (Britain and Israel) Wolff and De-Shalit find that security about the future is of overwhelming importance in these people's ability to use and enjoy all the capabilities on the list. (Notice that a feeling of security is one aspect of the capability of "Emotional Health," but they are speaking of both emotions and reasonable expectations – capability security is an objective matter, and has not been satisfied if government bewitches people into believing they are secure when they are not.) The security perspective means that for each capability one must ask how far it has been protected from the whims of the market, or power politics. One way nations often promote capability security is through a written constitution that cannot be amended but by a laborious supra-majoritarian process. But a constitution does not enforce itself, and a constitution contributes to security only in the presence of adequate access to the courts and justified confidence in the behavior of judges.

Wolff and De-Shalit introduce two further concepts of great interest: **fertile functioning** and **corrosive disadvantage**. A fertile functioning is one that tends to promote other related capabilities. (At this point they do not distinguish as clearly as they might between functioning and capability, and I fear that alliteration has superceded theoretical clarity.) They argue plausibly that affiliation is a fertile functioning, supporting capability-formation in many areas. (Do they really mean that it is the functioning associated with affiliation, or is it the capability to form

affiliations that has the good effect? This is insufficiently clear in their analysis.) Fertile functionings are of many types, and which functionings (or capabilities) are fertile may vary from context to context. In Vasanti's story, we can see that access to credit is a fertile capability: for the loan enabled her to protect her bodily integrity (not returning to her abusive husband), to have employment options, to participate in politics, to have a sense of emotional well-being, to form valuable affiliations, and to enjoy enhanced self-respect. In other contexts, education plays a fertile role, opening up options of many kinds across the board. Land ownership can sometimes have a fertile role, protecting a woman from domestic violence, giving her exit options, and generally enhancing her status. **Corrosive disadvantage** is the flip side of fertile capability: it is a deprivation that has particularly large effects elsewhere. In Vasanti's story, subjection to domestic violence was a corrosive disadvantage: this absence of protection for her bodily integrity jeopardized health, emotional well-being, affiliations, practical reasoning, and no doubt other capabilities as well.

The point of looking for fertile capabilities/functionings and corrosive disadvantages is to pinpoint the best intervention points for public policy. Each capability has importance on its own, and all citizens should be raised above the threshold on all ten capabilities, but there are some capabilities that may justly take priority, and one reason to assign priority would be the fertility of the item in question, or its tendency to remove a corrosive disadvantage. This idea helps us think about tragic choices: for often the best way of preparing a tragedy-free future will be to select an especially fertile functioning, devoting our scarce resources to that.

Let's return to Vasanti now, and see how the lens of the capabilities approach illuminates her situation. The script of Vasanti's life has been largely written by men on whom she has been dependent: her father, her husband, the brothers who helped her out when her marriage collapsed. This dependency put her at risk with respect to life and health, denied her the education that would have developed her powers of thought, and prevented her from thinking of herself as a person who has a plan of life to shape and choices to make. In the marriage itself

she fared worst of all, losing her bodily integrity to domestic violence, her emotional equanimity to fear, and being cut off from meaningful forms of affiliation, familial, friendly, and civic. For these reasons, she did not really have the conception of herself as a free and dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. Mundane matters of property, employment and credit play a large role here: the fact that she held no property in her own name, no literacy and no employment-related skills, and no access to a loan except from male relatives, all this cemented her dependent status and kept her in an abusive relationship far longer than she would otherwise have chosen. We see here how closely all the capabilities are linked to one another, how the absence of one, bad in itself, also erodes others. Vasanti also had some good luck: she had no abusive in-laws to put up with, and she had brothers who were more than usually solicitous of her well-being. Thus she could and did leave the marriage without turning to any physically dangerous or degrading occupation. But this good luck created new forms of dependency; Vasanti thus remained highly vulnerable, and lacking in confidence.

The SEWA loan changed this picture. Vasanti now had not only an income, but also independent control over her livelihood. Even when she still owed a lot of money, it was better to owe it to SEWA than to her brothers: being part of a mutually supportive community of women was crucially different, in respect of both practical reason and affiliation, from being a poor relation being given a handout. Her sense of her dignity increased as she paid off the loan and began saving. By the time I saw her, she had achieved considerable self-confidence and sense of worth; and her affiliations with other women, in both groups and personal friendships, were a new source of both pleasure and pride to her. Her participation in political life had also gone way up, as she joined in Kokila's project to prod the police to investigate more cases of domestic violence. Interestingly, she now felt that she had the capacity to be a good person by giving to others, something that the narrow focus on survival had not permitted her to do.

Reflecting on her situation, we notice how little the public sector did for her, and how lucky she was that one of the best women's NGO's in the world was right in her back yard. Gujarat has pursued a growth-focused agenda; the results of that growth do not reliably trickle down to help

the worse off. Government failed to ensure her an education; it failed to prosecute her husband for abuse, or to offer her shelter from that abuse<sup>ii</sup>; it failed to secure her equal property rights in her own family; it failed to offer her access to credit. Indeed, the only strong role government played in Vasanti's life was negative, the cash payment for her husband's vasectomy, which made her vulnerable position still more so.

We can see that the pertinent features of Vasanti's situation are much more fully opened up for diagnosis and treatment by the capabilities approach than by its rivals. This diagnostic and remedial value derives directly from the interdisciplinarity of the approach: economics has been infused by a humanistic understanding of life deriving from philosophy, from gender studies, and from the study of history.

But what about cooperation between nations? It's clear that the approach has been created by a multi-national team, whose primary members come from South Asia, Europe, and the U. S. But that does not assuage worries one might have about cultural universalism. Wouldn't any prescription for all nations be almost certain to be too dictatorial, or perhaps even a covert form of imperialism? The first thing to be said is that this is an important question that must be continually discussed, another role for the partnership between economics and philosophy that I have outlined. But let me at least say how I would answer it.

Because considerations of pluralism have been on my mind since the beginning, I have worked a sensitivity to cultural difference into my understanding of the list in several ways. First, I consider the list as open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking, in the way that any society's account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (or deletion).

I also insist, second, that the items on the list ought to be specified in a somewhat abstract and general way, precisely in order to leave room for the activities of specifying and deliberating by citizens and their legislatures and courts. It's really a blueprint for nation-based action, and nations should always act with an eye to their own particular histories. Within certain parameters it is perfectly appropriate that different nations should do this somewhat differently, taking their

histories and special circumstances into account. Thus, for example, a free speech right that suits Germany (allowing the banning of all anti-Semitic speech and political organizing) is probably too restrictive in the different climate of the United States, which has protected the right of neo-Nazis to demonstrate.

Third, I consider the list to be a free-standing "partial moral conception," to use John Rawls's phrase: that is, it is explicitly introduced for political purposes only, and without any grounding in metaphysical ideas of the sort that divide people along lines of culture and religion.<sup>iii</sup> As Rawls says: we can view this list as a "module" that can be endorsed by people who have very different conceptions of the ultimate meaning and purpose of life; they will connect it to their religious or secular comprehensive doctrines in many ways. People who are religious may understand the key notion of human dignity in terms of the notion of a soul or spirit; atheists and materialists will not. Still, all can endorse the basic idea that human beings should be treated as ends and not means.

Fourth, if we insist that the appropriate political target is capability and not functioning, we protect pluralism here again.<sup>iv</sup> Many people who are willing to support a given capability as a fundamental entitlement would feel violated were the associated functioning made basic. Thus, the right to vote can be endorsed by believing citizens, such as the Amish, who would feel deeply violated by mandatory voting, because it goes against their religious conception. The free expression of religion can be endorsed by people who would totally object to any establishment of religion that would dragoon all citizens into religious functioning. Vasanti, a religious person, will use the freedom of religion given her by India's constitution; her friend Kokila, an atheist, will not. Both, however, support this basic constitutional value, since they want to live in a society in which others have the space to live according to their conscience. Similarly, if Vasanti chooses to fast for religious reasons, she can always choose not to be well-nourished for a time. There is, however, a huge difference between fasting and starving, and it is this difference that the approach wishes to capture.

Fifth, the major liberties that protect pluralism are central items on the list: the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, the freedom of conscience. By placing them on the list we give them a central and non-negotiable place.

Sixth and finally, I insist on a rather strong separation between issues of justification and issues of implementation. I believe that we can justify this list as a good basis for political principles all round the world. But this does not mean that we thereby license intervention with the affairs of a state that does not recognize them. It is a basis for persuasion, but I hold that military and economic sanctions are justified only in certain very grave circumstances involving traditionally recognized crimes against humanity. So it seems less objectionable to recommend something to everyone, once we point out that it is part of the view that state sovereignty, grounded in the consent of the people, is a very important part of the whole package.

Now, before I conclude, I want to add a note about current and future work. As you can see, the capabilities approach recognizes emotional health as a human capability deserving of protection. But it is also true that a nation that supports human capabilities requires the cultivation of many emotions for its sustenance and stability: fellow-feeling, compassion for human vulnerability, the diminution of envy and disgust, and a range of emotions connected to reconciliation and forgiveness. This whole topic has been somewhat neglected in political philosophy of late, and it is the subject of my forthcoming book, Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice, and also of a work in progress on forgiveness and mercy. I'm happy to address these topics in the question period.

Let's think again of that small determined woman who showed up in the office of SEWA one afternoon in March 1998. The struggle for opportunity, for capability, is one that is being waged by millions of poor people all over the world. Some, disgracefully, are in rich and developed countries. My own nation should hang its head in shame at the notorious fact that the health status of inner-city New Yorkers in Harlem is less robust than the average in Kerala, a



rather poor Indian state, but one with a demonstrated concern for equality in health care and education. Nor is Vasanti's struggle to escape domestic violence foreign to the rich nations. In my own nation, the national Violence Against Women survey published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that eighteen percent of U. S. women have experienced rape or attempted rape, usually from an intimate partner, and the rate of physical violence is approximately double that. So all nations have a lot of work to do if they want to secure the capabilities of all their people; India has made heroic strides in recent years to address some problems that face all nations. How can nations help one another in fighting this good struggle?

One way, surely, is financial aid, and I believe the richer nations of the world owe a lot to the poorer nations in connection with economic and educational development. But another aid in this struggle is good intellectual work. Theories influence the way things happen. The old development theories were used by the IMF and the World Bank. They affected the way aid was doled out, the way data was gathered. In many ways they deflected attention away from the struggles of the poorest. The capabilities approach is not exactly telling Vasanti anything that – by now, after years of education in SEWA – she does not know. But it is able to combat the defective theoretical approaches in the corridors of power, in that way serving as an ally of the poor and the excluded, a kind of advocate arguing their case.

People matter, and ideas matter only because people matter. But ideas do matter for people, and we all need to put our heads together, across the boundaries of discipline and geography that divide us, if the world's pressing problems of exclusion and inequality are to be solved.



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<sup>i</sup> See NFC, with reference to Aristotle's ways of characterizing levels of dunamis.

<sup>ii</sup> The number of women's shelters in India is extremely small, indeed close to zero.

<sup>iii</sup> For the relation of this idea to objectivity, see Nussbaum (2001c).

<sup>iv</sup> See my discussion of this issue in Nussbaum (2000a), ch. 1; and for a rejoinder to perfectionist critics, see Nussbaum (2000c),