

Amartya Sen

encyclopedia of social theory

Social theory is the central terrain of ideas that links research in sociology to key problems in the philosophy of the human sciences. At the start of the twentieth century, social theory was the body of thought that sought to ground sociology as an independent discipline. At the start of the twenty-first century, social theory is the dynamic nexus of concepts and ideas that informs sociology's dialogue with a protean variety of approaches in neighbouring disciplines. In recent years social theory has stood at the forefront of the most exciting debates in fields ranging across sociology and anthropology, political theory and political economy, media and cultural studies, feminist theory and post-colonial studies.

The *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* provides a unique reference source for students and academics, embracing all major aspects of the field. Written by more than 200 internationally distinguished scholars, almost 500 entries cover core contemporary topics,

concepts, schools, debates, and personalities in the history of the discipline. Special attention is paid to leading schools and debates, with shorter entries reserved for biographies of key theorists and definitions of key terms. Entries are fully cross-referenced and contain concise listings for further reading. A comprehensive index guides the reader to further divisions of content.

Austin Harrington is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK, and Research Fellow at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Study at the University of Erfurt, Germany.

Barbara L. Marshall is Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Trent University, Canada.

Hans-Peter Müller is Professor of Sociology at the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany.

encyclopedia of social theory

edited by
austin harrington
barbara l. marshall
hans-peter müller

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
By Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 2006 Routledge

Typeset in Bembo and Helvetica by Taylor & Francis Books
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

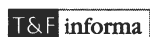
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN10: 0-415-29046-5
ISBN13: 978-0-415-29046-3



Taylor & Francis Group is the Academic Division of T&F Informa plc.

contents

introduction	vii
acknowledgements	xi
board of advisers	xiii
contributors	xv
list of entries	xxi
entries A to Z	1
index	687

SEN, AMARTYA K. (1933–)

Indian economist and philosopher, Nobel Prize Winner in Economics 1998. Sen's principal concerns are the nature and distribution of welfare. He starts out from the classical theory of social choice that puts individual **preferences** centre-stage. Preferences, Sen argues, may fail to be transitive, reflexive, and complete, but they come in different intensities. Any attempt to do justice to this fact will face the problem of interpersonal comparability. Sen shares and expands on the view that the problem can be solved by extended sympathy. However, a fundamental doubt remains: if individual preferences themselves can be shaped by unfair conditions (for instance, by a culture of oppression), how can they serve as our guides to what is fair and right? Sen therefore submits an alternative proposal, focusing on capabilities to achieve valuable functionings. Functionings are beings and doings, such as avoiding premature **death** or taking part in communal life; capabilities are the **freedom** to choose among various functionings.

While both functionings and capabilities constitute individual welfare, only capabilities determine social welfare: a good **society** is a society of freedom. Using social choice theory and, in his later writings, welding it to the capability approach, Sen also discusses a variety of more applied questions: how to address economic **inequality**, **deprivation and relative deprivation**, **poverty** (including famines), **class** and **gender** disparities, and the violation of basic **rights**.

Major works

- (1970) *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*. Amsterdam: North-Holland.
- (1973) *On Economic Inequality*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- (1981) *Poverty and Famines*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- (1982) *Choice, Welfare and Measurement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- (1987) *On Ethics and Economics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1992) *Inequality Reexamined*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Further reading

- Basu, K. (ed.) (1995) *Choice, Welfare and Development*. Oxford: Clarendon.

ULLA WESSELS