democratic reasoning and epistemic violence

insights from amartya sen

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Abstract

Much of the criticisms pertaining to the ineffectiveness of democracy result from a reductive interpretation of democracy as solely referring to periodic elections. I submit that in order to better appreciate its value, one must understand democracy within the context of rational scrutiny and public discussion. Particularly, the value of democracy can be understood in light of its ability to prevent the epistemic violence frequently criticized by post-developmental scholarship in the formulation, justification, and evaluation of a collective's valued goals and the means through which such goals may be attained. Amartya Sen's version of the Capabilities Approach would serve as a good starting framework to interpret democracy in light of the substantive freedoms it provides to individuals. Specifically, democracy's importance lies in its ability to secure the three roles of freedom for individuals, namely: (1) intrinsic, (2) instrumental, and (3) constructive. This threefold importance of freedom, in turn, enables individuals to be active agents of change on an individual and societal level rather than remain passive recipients of benevolent development professionals.

Keywords

Amartya Sen, democratic reasoning, epistemic violence, philosophy of development

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Introduction

While Amartya Sen originally gained recognition in the academe when he won a Nobel Prize in the field of economics, a sustained reading of his works would show how he has surpassed from merely dabbling in philosophy towards presenting what is a more coherent albeit organically developed partial theory of justice.[1] In fact, his meta-epistemological critique of the informational bases of income, utilities, and even Rawlsian primary goods commonly employed by mainstream economics and development studies in works such as *Equality of What* (1980), *Justice: Means vs Freedoms* (1990), and Development as Freedom (1999) would serve as the key concepts to what would later be referred to as the Capability Approach.[2] In my opinion, this approach, which has sustainably gathered increased interest from scholars and practitioners from a wide variety of disciplines, should receive more attention in academic circles within the country as it presents us with an alternative framework for ethics and political philosophy. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of Sen's work, several scholars have tended to thoroughly dismiss his statements as his works continue to be read from a monodisciplinary lens.[3] One reason, perhaps, why interest in his works are confined to the field of development studies is because development studies, in addition to the influence that Sen's work has had in the creation and expansion of the Human Development Index (HDI)[4], is an inherently multidisciplinary field unlike economics or (political) philosophy which remain, in some quarters, tied down to their classical concerns. It is therefore in light of this context that I would want to present Sen's work as (1) a theory that deserves hearing from the stand point of ethics and political philosophy without discounting (2) its practical significance as a framework that can serve to guide policy creation and development intervention design. This work, together with those I have written and presented beforehand, is an attempt to contribute to what I would refer to as "philosophy of development."

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[1] Ingrid Robeyns, *An Unworkable Idea or a Promising Alternative? Sen's Capability Approach Re-Examined,* Discussions Paper Series, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Econometrics, Center for Economic Studies, 2000, 1-32; 2.

[2] Martha Nussbaum has developed her own version of the capabilities approach that follows a more thorough philosophical method than Sen's work. See Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[3] Robeyns, *An Unworkable Idea or a Promising Alternative?,* 2.

[4] Jointly developed by Sen with his friend and colleague Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq which is annually published by the United Nations Development Programme.

Two Types of Justice and its Effects on Defining Democracy

In the *Idea of Justice* (2009), Sen presents a typology of two frameworks for understanding justice. The first, which is strongly linked to the social contract tradition, he traces to the work initiated by Hobbes, furthered by Locke, Rousseau and Kant, and which has gained dominance in contemporary political philosophy primarily through the Rawls, Dworkin, Gauthier, Nozick, Pogge, and others.[5] He calls this "transcendental institutionalism" which he defines as a theory that identifies "the perfectly just society" which is defined primarily in terms of setting up "just institutions."[6] The second tradition, which he identifies his work with in terms of its *point of their departure for understanding justice* rather than the deeply divergent conclusions which these "other" authors arrived at, he traces to the works of 17th and 18th century philosophers, economists, and mathematicians such as Smith, Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, Bentham, Marx, Mill, among others.[7] The works of these "other" Enlightenment authors have found hearing been recast in its present day form under Social Choice Theory pioneered by Nobel Laureate Economist Kenneth Arrow.[8] Unlike transcendental institutionalism, this second approach emphasizes a comparative perspective that goes beyond the institutional arrangements that govern society but would rather focus on the actual outcomes that occur in people's lives and what people can do to reduce the manifest injustices they experience.[9] While there are cases where the former would dabble on the "territory" of the latter, their points of departure largely differ from one another. Whereas the former would ask the more abstract question of "[W]hat would be perfectly just institutions?", the latter would ask the more practical question of "[H]ow would justice be advanced?"[10]

As a supplement to his typology that draws largely from what he identifies to be two camps that originated from the Enlightenment period, Sen also makes reference to two words that correspond to two distinct ideas of justice within ancient Indian jurisprudence – *niti* and *nyaya*. The former, *niti*, stands closer to transcendental institutionalism as *niti* concerns itself with "organizational propriety and behavioural correctness" which would emphasize setting up just institutions without sufficient reference to actual outcomes. On the other hand, *nyaya* "stands for a comprehensive concept of realized justice" where justice "is inescapably linked with the world that actually

[5] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 8. Henceforth IJ.

[6] Ibid., 5-6.

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid., 17.

[9] Ibid., 7.

[10] Ibid., 9.

emerges, [and] not just the institutions or rules we happen to have."[11] A brief summary of the two perspectives can be seen in the following table:

Typology	Indian Jurisprudence	Point of Departure	Focus of Justice	Approach to Justice
Transcendental Institutionalism	*Niti-justice*	What is a perfectly just society?	Arrangement-focused justice	Transcendental Justice
	Nyaya-justice	How to reduce injustice? How to advance justice?	Realization-focused justice	Comparative Justice

Table 1: Two Typologies of Justice

In order to justify his use of the second approach, Sen goes to great lengths in expounding on what he takes to be the key ideas and the inherent limitations of what is arguable the pre-eminent theory of justice that has shaped the landscape of political philosophy into what it is at present – namely, the work of his friend and colleague John Rawls.[12] The following is a summary of Sen's appraisal of Rawls' theory of justice:

Foundational Ideas:

a) *Fairness/Impartiality* – "a demand to avoid bias in our evaluations, taking note of the interest and concerns of others as well, and in particular the need to avoid being influenced by our respective vested interests, or by our personal priorities or eccentricities or prejudices."[13]
b) *Objectivity in Practical Reasoning* – "objectivity is linked, directly or indirectly, by each of them to the ability to survive challenges from informed scrutiny coming from diverse quarters."[14]

[11] Ibid., 20.

[12] While Sen has serious disagreements with Rawls' work in terms of its methods and conclusions, he clearly recognizes his debt to Rawls for the impact that he has made on him as well as on political philosophy. He writes, "I will discuss my dissensions presently, but first I must take the opportunity to acknowledge the firm footing on which Rawls placed the whole subject of the theory of justice. Some of the basic concepts that Rawls identified as essential continue to inform my own understanding of justice, despite the different direction and conclusions of my own work" (53).

[13] Ibid., 54.

[14] Ibid., 45.

c) *Innate Moral Powers for Reasoning of All* – contrary to what is proclaimed by "rational choice theory", all people possess the capacity for rationality where rationality goes beyond the exclusive and clever pursuit of self-interest but also entails the capacity to seriously reflect upon "what we owe to each other."[15]
d) *(Absolute) Priority of Liberty* – liberty is not just a means (among others like income and commodities) for improving a person's quality of life but is also intrinsically and constructively important.[16]
e) *Procedural Fairness* – assessments of inequality have often emphasized (economic) outcomes ("culmination outcomes") without paying sufficient attention to the processes involved the (non-)attainment of such outcomes ("comprehensive outcomes").[17]
f) *Emphasis on the worst-off* – by paying attention to people who are most deprived, policies and intervention for poverty removal are re-oriented in terms of their purpose.[18]
g) *Primary goods and substantive freedoms* – focusing on primary goods rather than incomes or utilities shows a certain sensitivity and importance for the plurality of ends that an individual may choose to pursue and that this act of choice goes beyond merely formal opportunity.[19]

Limitations that can be addressed without a radical departure:

a) *(Relative) Priority of Liberty* – an absolutist stance on the priority of liberty that disregards actual consequences has to be qualified and be made less extreme, a project that even Rawls himself has engaged in his later works. A general pre-eminence for liberty rather than its absolute prioritization will suffice to capture its threefold importance – intrinsic, instrumental, and constructive – while at the same time being sensitive enough to the reality that manifest injustices such as famines may occur despite the non-violation of liberties.[20]
b) *Going Beyond Primary Goods and Concentrating on Substantive Freedoms* – despite Rawlsian primary goods being the most inclusive characterization of

[15] Ibid., 32.
[16] Ibid., 63; this will be discussed further in section V of this paper.
[17] Ibid., 21-22.
[18] Ibid., 64.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 65; see also Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 160-188. Henceforth DF.

means, concentrating on them may lead to a confounding of means and ends which may blind us to a form of injustice which Sen calls as a 'coupling of disadvantages' wherein a handicapped person may have difficulty (1) obtaining such primary goods and (2) converting them into substantive freedoms.[21] As such, practical reason would necessitate a shift from such all-purpose means towards the actual ends.

Limitations that require a radical departure:

a) *Actual Behavior and Institutionalism* – as Rawls concentrates on just institutions, it is assumed that people would *necessarily* behave in accordance with such institutions because these institutions were arrived at through a unanimous choice of principles by people choosing from the *original position*.[22]
b) *Limitations of the Contractarian Approach*[23] – Sen identifies the following concerns as something which Adam Smith's *impartial spectator* can help address but which lie beyond the capacity of the social contract approach to accommodate: a) comparative assessment, b) social realizations, c) incomplete/partial ranking of priorities, d) parochialism of values[24] The last two will be discussed further in the next section.
c) *Relevance of Global Priorities* – as Rawls is still bound by the social contract model and focuses on institutional arrangement, its reach is still limited to collectivities that span up to the level of a nation-state. Any attempts at incorporating voices from beyond one's nation-state would necessarily require a global institution that

[21] Ibid., 87-88.

[22] Ibid., 68-69, 79.

[23] Nussbaum presents another line of critique aimed at the contractarian nature of Rawlsian justice by denouncing its inability to accommodate people in a situation of "asymmetrical dependency." People who are in their infancy, early childhood, or in the later years of their life cannot realistically claim the status of contracting parties who are in a roughly equal position with others which would serve to marginalize them despite their heightened vulnerability and dependency. See Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities and Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice," *Feminist Economics* 9 nos. 2-3 (2003): 33-59.

[24] Sen, *IJ*, 10-15, 70.

would go beyond what currently exists in the form of the United Nations, the European Union, (and ASEAN).[25]

For Sen, the last three limitations raise important concerns that need to be resolved in order for a theory of justice to have relevance in the world that we live in. He argues that for as long as we remain fixated in our attempts at identifying what a perfectly just society would look like, then these concerns will remain unaddressed as they are necessary consequences of such an approach. In terms of democracy, this fixation will limit the reach and effectiveness of any proposals for democracy as discussions will remain centered in establishing formal democratic institutions with the implicit assumption that establishing such institutions would serve as a panacea for solving poverty, inequality and other forms of deprivation. In addition, an exclusive concentration on setting up formal democratic institutions would tie us to the nation-state at least for the foreseeable future which has, in recent decades, increasingly cracked under the pressure of increasing interaction by people from different nation-states. Furthermore, this institutional approach serves to reinforce the critique of cultural imposition of "Western" political arrangements on "non-Western cultures" which has merit, especially with the prevalence of the "democratization" conditionalities attached to World Bank and IMF loans. Indeed, even the US led invasion of Iraq was justified using the rhetoric of promoting democracy understood as institutional democracy. For countries such as the Philippines who have a post-colonial background, the existence of our democratic institutions may either be a boon or a bane depending on the particular historiography that one subscribes to. What all of these criticisms, however, are ultimately based on is an exclusive understanding of democracy in terms of political institutions which for Sen muddles all discussions on democracy as notions of imposition pre-supposes the exclusivity of such in one culture or another.[26] This mode of thinking, I would argue, is continually reinforced by the dominance in political philosophy and political science of the *niti*-focused framework. Thus, if we are to hope to have a better and more responsive understanding of democracy, we must first do away with this fixation. Rather, we must look for a new perspective within which such democratic institutions would make better sense as integral but not exclusive aspects of democracy.

In light of these concerns, Sen proposes that a more fruitful way of understanding democracy would be from the perspective of *nyaya* in which the political arrangements previously understood to consist the entirety of democracy are put in their proper place as an important aspect that affects what people are able to do and be. In this more

[25] Ibid., 70. Thomas Pogge has attempted to provide a blueprint of what this would look like. See Thomas W. Pogge, "Eradicating Systemic Poverty: Brief for a Global Resource Dividend," *Journal of Human Development* 2, no.1 (2001): 59-77.

[26] Sen, *IJ*, 322.

encompassing perspective, political arrangements and other determinants of individual and social behavior such as education, culture, religion, among others are in constant play with the actions of individuals.[27] Sen (1999) describes this two-way relationship between individuals and institutional arrangements in a constructive manner wherein "(1) social arrangements expand individual freedoms and (2) the use of individual freedoms not only … improve the respective lives [of said individuals] but also … make the social arrangements more appropriate and effective.[28] This would refer primarily to the instrumental role of freedom. While this particular role is important, its full implications will be seen in the succeeding sections when I delve deeper into the constructive role of freedom. What I want to emphasize in this section, however, is the inherent limitations that an exclusive definition of democracy in terms of political arrangements doubly constrains any hope of improving people's lives in so far as it (a) suffers from the same theoretical (heuristic) limitations resulting from a *niti*-focused perspective and (b) the histori-socio-politi-cultural events that constitute the baggage that marginalized peoples have associated with democracy. What Sen suggests, in light of his radical departure from the *niti*-focused conception of justice, is to understand democracy in terms of what Mill calls 'government by discussion.' To quote Sen,

> But democracy must also be seen more generally in terms of the capacity to enrich reasoned engagement through enhancing informational availability and the feasibility of interactive discussions. Democracy has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the people can actually be heard.[29]

As will be seen in the next section, this interpretation of 'government by discussion' will be better equipped to accommodate the foundational aspects of Rawlsian justice while responding to the inherent limitations resulting from its *niti*-focused perspective.

Public Reasoning as a Safeguard against Epistemic Violence

In a world marked by unprecedented opulence *and* remarkable *and* persistent deprivation of one form or another,[30] it would be easy to understand the skepticism that even the most well-meaning development theorists and practitioners who proclaim reasoning to be a necessary aspect of 'development' are met with. Indeed, the prevalence

[27] Ibid., xii.
[28] Sen, *DF*, 31.
[29] Sen, *IJ*, xiii.
30 Sen, *DF* xi.

of what can be called "unreasoning" is easy to justify whether in our personal experiences, in traditional media outlets, as well as in social media with the rise of what can be called "keyboard warriors." There is, it would seem, no shortage of the use of fallacies nor the seemingly definite abandonment of the use of reason in much of today's conversations. Sen summarizes this critique against the reality of reasoned argument as he quotes Anthony Kwame-Appiah's firm and gentle critique of his own work where he argues,

> however much you extend your understanding of reason in the sorts of ways Sen would like to do – and this is a project whose interest I celebrate – it isn't going to take you the whole way. In adopting the perspective of the individual reasonable person, Sen has to turn his face from the *pervasiveness of unreason*.[31]

While there is great truth in Appiah's words as a description of reality, I believe, following Sen, that hope is yet to be lost for the capacity for sustained and reasoned scrutiny is an innate potential for all that needs to be nurtured than altogether be done away with. In as much as what Appiah calls as the *pervasiveness of unreason* exists, it does not preclude the existence of *reasoned scrutiny* which is practiced by numerous people in manifold forms. Of course, these practices rarely get the proper attention that they do in traditional and social media as they do not feed on the belligerent impulses that each of us have and would not reach the viral stature of what is considered news-worthy nowadays (this in itself deserves special attention in media ethics and literacy as it is taught in school and actually practiced).[32] Nonetheless, even when media promotes the practice of *unreason*, it is important to take a step back and consider what we actually mean when we refer to as *unreason* as it is only through such self-reflection that we stop being prey to the often subtle but sometimes overt machinations of the powers that be and start seeing things from a broader horizon.

The Non-universality of Common Sense and Politico-Epistemic Violence

In our day-to-day experiences, what we often understand to be instances of *unreason* are not *primarily* cases where others would use one fallacy after another to back up their claim for it is, after all, possible even for those who have not taken courses in logic to claim that what his/her friend said is unreasonable. For the most part, I think that what we label *unreasonable* are statements or actions which do not coincide with what we believe, often with full conviction, to be true. This would include beliefs that span things

31 Cited in Sen *IJ*, xvii. Italics mine.

32 This fact of course contributes to the increased skepticism against the possibility of reasoned discussion to effect change.

such as but are not limited to the way the world is (ontology), the right perspective in which we ought to see the world (epistemology), what we consider to be right or wrong (morality), the existence of a Transcendent and its relation to how we act (religion), the actions that we take on the socio-political level (politics), etc. Modifying the dominant epistemology of *correspondence* between ideas to reality, the criteria that we now use for the truth and falsity of statements which we often readily equate with a person's being reasonable or not is the *correspondence of their statements to ours rather than to some external world*. The implicit assumption here, of course, is that the things that we believe (or have been taught, explicitly or subliminally to believe in) is able to capture reality in its entirety in which case the correspondence of other people's belief to one's own is also correspondence to reality as such. Put simply, another person is wrong and unreasonable when they do not agree with us, period.

Clearly, this is problematic. The assumption of absolute correctness of one's understanding of the world and the statements one makes resulting from it is one of dangerous bigotry. Whether the reasons informing this absolutist perspective results from a conviction in cosmo-theistic beliefs (broadly referred to as the ancient-medieval perspective) or from a conviction in the absolute capacity of reason to capture objective truths from a transcendental vantage point (broadly referred to as the modern perspective) or from some other certifying source, the point remains that both of them oversells their reach and disregards their perspectival nature of reasoning.

Here, I would like to make reference to Rodriguez's interpretation of rationality that I believe is able to capture its perspectival nature (broadly referred to as the post-modern perspective). In his synthesis of Gadamer, Scheler, and Parasuraman et. al., he refers to rationality as the organizing schema that guides his interpretation of the world (common sense or *metis*) and directs his willed response to it (*ordo amoris*).[33]This rationality is not *a priori* but is a result of the constant interaction of a person's facticity *(thrownness*, *embodiment*, *historicity)* and the choices that he continually makes in response to the call of value within a social setting.[34] As a direct consequence of the perspectival nature of rationality, any claims of universality with regard to our rationality must be tempered as what we have taken to be *common sensical* may not in fact *common sensical* to others due to the differences in one or more of the aforementioned aspects of our facticity and our willed choices. In other words, when another person does not agree with us, it does not mean that they are wrong or are unreasonable people because what we take to be common sensical differs depending on where we are, sometimes literally, coming from.

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[33] Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014), 116.

[34] Ibid., 77-82.

In actual practice, this issue of epistemic violence has resulted in manifest injustices that stem from an epistemological level but translate not only in ethical violence on an individual level but also into political violence on a communal level. The history of political economy is replete with examples of polities ruled by people subscribing to a specific rationality and who mobilize resources in order to effect projects and policies aimed at concretely imposing their supposed "correct and benevolent" rationality in order to cure the "backwards and child-like" rationalities of others. Rodriguez makes striking use of several examples within the Philippine context in his books such as the conflict between the Philippine Government and the Indigenous People's fighting for their ancestral lands, unrestrained consumerism and industrialization and its effects on climate change, and the phenomenon of violence against sidewalk vendors.[35] Aside from Rodriguez, Sen, in *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*,[36] talks in great length about the issues concerning identity-based violence that stems from a solitary interpretation of identity and the supposedly belligerent demands it makes on us. I have argued elsewhere that Sen's take on this issue is of great relevance in the Philippine setting given the ever-tenuous peace in our multi-ethnic and predominantly-religious country.[37] Finally, the post-developmentalist author Arturo Escobar (1995) has provided what to me is the fullest expression of the political ramifications resulting from this epistemic violence on the level of rationalities. For the sake of brevity (at the risk of oversimplification), Escobar's work can be understood as a staunch critique of the entire history of development theory and practice Post-World War II to be the primary reason why the Third World exists and continues to exist in so far as the epistemic violence of the Anglo-American, scientific, technocratic rationality has been institutionalized through the development of development as a discourse. While these works are certainly not exhaustive, what I want to emphasize is that something as seemingly mundane as a difference in beliefs can, if pushed to the extremes of absolute bigotry and intolerance, lead to manifest injustices on a local and global level. Epistemic violence is therefore not something that ought to be taken lightly as when this is supplemented by the mobilization of resources those

[35] See Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *Governing the Other: Exploring the Discourse of Democracy in a Multiverse of Reason* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009) and his *May Laro and Diskurso ng Katarungan*.

[36] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

[37] "Rethinking Identity in a Multicultural World: Amartya Sen's Proposal for Peace." This paper was presented in the Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP) National Conference 2015 with the theme "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the 21st Century Crises of the Time" held on May 8-10, 2015 at Casa San Pablo, Laguna.

belonging to one rationality then epistemic violence takes on a concretely political form and becomes politico-epistemic violence.

Still reason?

In light of the dangers discussed, we may then ask, is reason really the right path to pursue? First of all, I think that our reasoned scrutiny of what constitutes *unreason* deserves merit in itself as we are able to bracket our own convictions and reflect as to what it is that we really mean when we say *unreason*. Once we accept, albeit with much difficulty, that the divergences of other people's opinions with ours does not necessarily equate to our being more reasonable nor their incorrectness, we allow ourselves to open up to the fallibility of our beliefs or the potential correctness of both of our beliefs without contradiction. In as much as the desire for certainty is something we all share albeit in varying degrees, the recognition of fallibility of our perspectival convictions provides the space for much needed humility in our beliefs and corresponding actions – what in philosophy we would often refer to as "wonder." Likewise, this opens up the space for open dialogue with others as we become better able to bracket our initial prejudices that what they would always say is wrong and to actually engage them in dialogue. By bracketing prejudices, we become more sensitive to the contexts where they are coming from which in turn gives us an idea of the reasoning behind their beliefs. At the same time, we become able to acknowledge the factors and the processes that were critical in forming our own beliefs which allows us to ask the difficult questions such as "Would I believe the same things if I were in the same position?" What the reasoned scrutiny of the nature of *unreason* ultimately opens up is the space to truly put ourselves in the space of the other not just in a particular moment but in light of the myriad effects of their facticity. It is only when we arrive at this level of sensitivity and humility that we truly understand the complexities of the structures that influence our beliefs and which also conditions our choices, To wit, the very real effects of social positioning. As a case in point, I believe that much of the wanton hate pertaining to the recently concluded elections would have been avoided had more people been sensitive to the positions which supporters and denouncers occupied. It is no surprise that people would vehemently argue about the veracity of statements made by candidates or their supporters (or denouncers) regardless if an appeal to "objective facts" was made as these facts (often measured in terms of inputs or outputs expressed in gross amounts or averages which is itself problematic for many reasons) remain abstract figures unless it was translated into a concrete outcome for them. It is, after all, easy to proclaim this or that when one is sitting in the comfort of one's air-conditioned home.

The second point I would like to make about the reach of reason stems directly from the first. As we now recognize that what we label *unreason* is not actually the

absence of reasoning but is actually the unconstrained expression of prejudices as absolute truths which are in turn grounded on very rudimentary reasoning. To quote Sen,

> [P]rejudices typically ride on the back of some kind of reasoning – weak and arbitrary though it might be. Indeed, even very dogmatic persons tend to have some kind of reasons, possibly very crude ones, in support of their dogmas (racist, sexist, classist and caste-based prejudices belong there, among varieties of other kinds of bigotry based on coarse reasoning). Unreason is no the practice of doing without reasoning altogether, but of relying on very primitive and very defective reasoning. There is hope in this, since bad reasoning can be confronted by better reasoning.[38]

Before proceeding to what this "better reasoning" may look like, I would like to highlight an important point on the need for reason and its implications on a broader understanding of democracy. As mentioned in the previous section, Sen's understanding of democracy, following Mill, is that of 'government by discussion.' In the chapter entitled "Democracy and Public Reason," he reinforces his chosen stance by means of reference to several authors who have made great strides (without necessarily being in agreement with one another) in advancing a shift in interpretation of democracy such as Rawls, Habermas, Ackerman, Benhabib, Cohen, Dworkin, Buchanan, among others.[39] What he ultimately derives from these authors is the conviction that the nature of government by discussion is rooted in discussion between individuals who exercise their capacity for reasoning in light of their potentials. Certainly, it is not claimed here that this would always lead to the "correct" outcomes (regardless of the criteria used for measuring correctness).[40] What is being claimed, however, is that 'government by discussion' is one that is governed by what the Mughal Emperor of India, Akbar refers to as 'the path of reason' or ''the rule of the intellect' (*rahi aql*).[41] To qualify, *rahi aql* does not, contrary to what some Enlightenment authors have tended to claim, dispense with the importance of passions and sentiments. Indeed, Sen, following Adam Smith in his less-known book, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, recognizes the importance of such sentiments in informing people's decisions. However, what *rahi aql* implies is the possibility of and the necessity of scrutinizing our deeply-felt sentiments and the traditional customs and beliefs in light of their effects in actual people's lives. The decision to keep esteemed traditions, for example, has to be decided upon by the people who are to actually experience its

[38] Sen, *IJ* ,xviii.
[39] Ibid., 324.
[40] Ibid., 40.
[41] Ibid., 39.

consequences rather than interested outsiders or local authorities.[42] The same is true for our knee-jerk reactions. The dismissal of great thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche resulting from a knee-jerk response by devout Catholics to his statement regarding the "Death of God" has served to stifle the rejuvenation of a clergy that would greatly benefit from his reading his work as presenting an "ethics of affirmation."[43]

Additionally, Sen's synthesis of great thinkers from the great Eastern traditions and those from the Enlightenment is an attempt to show that the reductionism of democracy as a "quintessentially Western phenomenon" is a result of poor, limited, and parochial reading of the deep intellectual history and exchanges that occurred between these vastly different civilizations. While it is true that the institutionalized forms of democracy practice in most nation-states today can be traced to Ancient Greece and eventually to the Anglo-American tradition, democracy understood as 'government by discussion' is something that has existed in various cultures the world over (likewise, authoritarianism is not a quintessentially Eastern nor Western phenomenon but has traces from both civilizations). Thus, the reductive renderings of the "East" and the "West" as has been strongly argued for by Samuel Huntington must be dislodged from the intellectual hold it currently has if we are to have any hopes of attaining true and lasting peace.[44] After all, the capacity for reasoning and public discussion is an intellectual capacity that all individuals (except those who suffer from severe medical conditions) have regardless of their gender, class, culture or caste and it is high time to break free from the shackles of so-called benevolent leaders whose hold on power rests in proclaiming otherwise.

Nature of Reasoning Involved

As mentioned, the reason for *rahi aql* is not because it would always lead to the right conclusions but because it guarantees a degree of reasonable objectivity. Put briefly, *rahi aql* was justified as disputing reason entails the use of reasoning.[45] What form should this reasoning be if it were to yield a degree of reasonable objectivity? As objectivity in itself is a term loaded with baggage, I propose to interpret objectivity in light of the fact of the epistemic violence mentioned in the preceding section. Particularly, the existence of epistemic violence should be understood in light of the two-fold criticism of *niti*-focused perspectives on justices pertaining to (1) incomplete/partial ranking of priorities and (2) parochialism of values.

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[42] Sen, *DF*, 31-33.

[43] See Paolo Bolanos, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

[44] See Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 40-58; Sen IJ, 324-335.

[45] Sen, *IJ*, 39.

To guide our investigation, the minimum requirement for objectivity has to do with "the ability to survive challenges from informed scrutiny coming from diverse quarters."[46] Let us turn first to the question of diversity. How diverse is diverse? From a *niti*-focused perspective, the extent of diversity is limited by the boundaries of the nation-state as the contracting parties even in the Rawlsian system are limited to a given 'people'. Sen refers to this as "closed impartiality" which he defines as the situation where "the procedure of making impartial judgements invoke only the members of a given society or nation for whom the judgments are being made."[47] Aside from the institutional inability of closed impartiality to deal with questions of justice that apply to more than one nation-state (and often leads to proposals of cultural relativism), closed impartiality cannot reasonably deal with parochialism. Suppose for example that institutional processes are set in place and that people engage in reasoned discussion with one another regarding a social custom that entails the continued discrimination of one sect by all others, it is entirely possible that such a manifest injustice would ensue while the demands of institutional democracy and government by discussion are fulfilled. The reason for this would have to do with the extreme similarity, bordering on sameness, of the participants involved in the reasoning exercise. Because of the limitations of closed impartiality, it is possible that certain acts of injustice have become integrated into their life-world and become rationally acceptable by individuals belonging to the same polity. The absence of an external voice, whose rationality entails what may be an altogether divergent rationality, would contribute to the perpetuation of such practices. This hypothetical situation would therefore require,[48] as a safeguard against parochially acceptable practices of injustice, what Adam Smith refers to as the device of the impartial spectator – that is, a voice that serves to arbitrate discussions that has no vested interests in the discussion.

Aside from parochialism, reasonable objectivity in Sen's approach does not require a unique ranking of priorities nor a unique set of institutions which entails his point of divergence from Rawls.[49] In Sen's example of the three children who have differing reasons for receiving a flute, any of the three alternatives can be reasonably arrived at by people engaged in free and informed discussion.[50] Depending on the underlying principle of justice that the person making the decision would value more, one alternative would make more sense in terms of justice than another. From a *niti*-focused perspective, this is

[46] Ibid., 45.

[47] Ibid., 123.

[48] Sen provides a more technical description of the reasons why an impartial spectator is needed, namely: (1) exclusionary neglect, (2) inclusionary incoherence and (3) procedural parochialism (see ibid., 138-139).

[49] Ibid., 10-12.

[50] Ibid., 13-14.

clearly unacceptable but for a *nyaya*-based perspective on justice, arriving at an incomplete ranking of priorities and leaving sufficient space for divergence from discussion to implementation is part and parcel of the discipline of practical reason. For Sen, attaining a complete ordering of priorities is not needed for a partial ordering based upon reasoned discussion would serve as a guide for further specification and action by the people involved in the decision-making procedure. A decision to choose one alternative at one point and a decision to choose another alternative at another point may be justified depending on the identified goal of the exercise as well as the specific circumstances in which each decision is made. At the end of the day, and this is where many thinkers find difficulty with Sen's refusal to layout a full theory in the form, for example, of presenting a comprehensive list of fundamental capabilities, what Sen encourages people is to take charge of the decisions that they, in discussion with other people who will themselves know better and be the ones primarily affected, should make in light of the values that they choose to subscribe to. In no way has Sen prescribed a formula that would simply tell people what they should do. Rather, he leaves the onus of choosing, willing, and acting on each individual who is capable of exercising his or her practical reason together with the individuals in their collective (and beyond).

The Threefold Effects of Understanding Democracy as Government by Discussion

Following all that was discussed above, Sen's understanding of the practice of democracy as government by discussion stems from a *nyaya*-perspective of justice that focuses on the question of how to advance justice rather than by identifying what a perfectly just society would look like. To achieve this, Sen argues for the need of unrestrained discussion by people exercising their capacity for reasoning in order to arrive at reasonably objective decisions as a safeguard against epistemic violence in the form of imposing a unique set of priorities that a people must subscribe too as well as the parochial acceptance of manifest forms of injustice. Democracy, for Sen, must be able to respond to the aforementioned concerns if it is to be able to actualize the potentials which it possesses. These potentials are threefold, namely: (1) intrinsic, (2) instrumental, and (3) constructive.[51] Democracy understood as *rahi aql* gives priority to the freedom that people should have to lead their own lives according to their own values – what Sen refers to as intrinsic freedom.[52] In addition, the practice of *rahi aql* entails that people living with one another should subject to scrutiny what they believe to be the valuational priorities that their polities must pursue (constructive) as well as shape the social

[51] Sen, *DF*, 148.

[52] See Sen, *DF*, chapter 1.

arrangements that they have in order to actualize the valuational priorities that they have identified (instrumental). While the bulk of this work has concentrated on the second and third potentials of democracy, it must be clearly understood that the entirety of the discussion is anchored on the intrinsic importance of freedom that people should have in determining the lives they value and have reason to value.[53] While Sen began his work with the notion of capabilities, his latter works has served to contextualize this in light of a partial theory of justice. Indeed, with the this work, Sen's capability approach has come full circle.

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[53] Sen, *DF*, 87.