The eradication of poverty in all of its worldwide locations is an overarching and urgent humanitarian concern. There is considerable debate, however, as to the means of bringing it about, the applicable strategies and models of development. Some see in the globalizing free market *the* agent of economic growth, conveying through a network of “trickle down” mechanisms the economic benefits that could enable the affected nations to make their way up from poverty. Others are convinced free-market-induced effects of modernization and development actually produce classes of victims. I present here a brief assessment of Amartya Sen’s conception of development as freedom, as the creation of capacity since, in my view, it points in the direction of humankind’s most meaningful chance at eradicating poverty.

*Development Ideology and Its Shadows*

In 1946, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and in hopes of warding off the communist threat, the United States launched its Marshal Plan for Europe and Japan. It sought at the same time to foster the technological development of “Third World” countries that by virtue of their poverty were ripe for cooptation by the communist block. At U.S. instigation, the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council began, in 1947, to produce development strategies and devices that “covered all aspects of society ... implied agrarian reform, planning, reduction in social inequalities ... [and] required the creation
of a modern state, an effective administration.”¹ It dispatched “experts” to the Third World, to the former colonies of the European powers particularly, to assist in local efforts to transform formerly semi-feudal societies into modern states focused upon the pursuit of economic and societal goals comparable to those of countries in the developed world. United States President Harry Truman was especially supportive of these UN programs, on the view that their deployment would “propagate the American social and cultural system through the dissemination of the knowledge and techniques that enabled it to function.”² John F. Kennedy, his successor, was similarly supportive of the UN General Assembly’s launch, in 1961, of the “First Development Decade,” envisioned by its architects to be marked by rapid industrialization, the diversification of economies, and the market-orientation of agricultural produce. Within this timeframe, assessments of the progress made by developing countries would be tied to increases in their annual GNP, and by the end of the decade, within investment climates that these countries would themselves have succeeded in making attractive to foreign investors, these annual increases in the GNP were envisioned to average five percent.

Concomitant strategies for engendering the social and cultural transformation of these societies, through school systems, health services, a fledgling social security system, etc., were worked out as well by related UN agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These efforts, however, begged the question: was the influx into these countries of social and cultural assistance commensurate to the economic development so resolutely aimed at by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)? Moreover, burning questions such as the erosion of traditional customs and community bonds brought about by rapid modernization were systematically relegated to the fringes.

Against the background of these internal tensions, the UN General Assembly in 1969 issued a ‘Declaration on Social Progress and Development’. This declaration contains brilliant ideas. It comes up

² Ibid., 194.
with "a catalogue of projects, from the supply of free health services for the whole population to the setting up of crèches for small children to help working parents, including a whole range of measures for education and professional training". However, it leaves these projects as recommendations for local governments, without any provision for how these projects are to be financed. The 'First Development Decade' was rich in well-intentioned declarations, but after a while the United Nations had to leave the whole development program in the hands of robust financial institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These organizations were focused primarily on economic, rather than social, development.

Yet, the 1969 declaration undoubtedly had one advantage: it brought into sharp focus the clash between purely economic development (which at most would benefit the higher strata of the population) and a more comprehensive approach that would include social development at the grassroots level (which includes health care, schooling, and the satisfaction of basic needs). This clash would become even more striking from the moment the IMF and Word Bank started making use of conditionalities that the lending countries had to meet in order to obtain funds for development. One only has to think of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) the IMF attaches as strings to its loans, and which reflect the ideology of the free market. To restore the balance of payment disorder two sorts of conditionalities are imposed. First, the state must refrain from unnecessary spending on social services, unemployment benefits, pensions, health care, and schooling. This spending should be kept within limits (for to the extent that the state acts as the great benefactor, laziness is allegedly propagated, which erodes the spirit of free initiative, free commerce and competition among the citizens). And, second, to boost the economy, fresh flows of capital and foreign direct investment should be eased in. Enhanced circulation of money is believed to flow from unlimited free trade, drastic privatization of state-own services, and deregulation of hitherto closed economies.

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3 Ibid., 200.
Vigorous objections to IMF and World Bank strategies for husbanding the development of disadvantaged economies were raised by "Global Exchange" in its letter of 2001 entitled, "How the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Undermine Democracy and Erode Human Rights." Global Exchange claims the following:

In dozens of countries around the world, the IMF and the World Bank have violated the 'right to social security.' The institutions have forced debtor countries to cut social spending on health, education, and other public services. They have pressured poor nations to charge their own citizens for the use of public schools and public hospitals. And they have demanded that countries keep their wage levels low, a policy which harms ordinary citizens but benefits multinational corporations. In compelling countries to adopt such policies, the IMF and the World Bank have not only threatened the communities' right to social security — they have also undermined the countries' democratic systems... As soon as government officials begin worrying more about what Wall Street will think than what their own people think, democracy has been perverted.4

Global Exchange objects, among other things, to the confusion attendant upon the notion of "development," which is deployed at times to refer to the absorption by the neo-liberal world market of local industries to benefit local elites and international financial investors, but at other times to refer to the delivery of financial aid, health care, education, and other social services to the poor in hopes of significantly mitigating their abject poverty. Authors who plea for a post-development approach, as we will see, want to unravel this distressing ambiguity.

Besides the social question, there is also the ecological issue that began to preoccupy people's thinking in the seventies, especially after the Club of Rome in 1971 published its report 'Limits to Growth,' a warning that under the actual expansion of industrialization, the natural resources of the globe would in a couple of decades be seriously damaged, if not irreversibly depleted. Ever since ecologists all over the

world have come together for the preservation of the environment, whereas economists have started to reflect on sustainable development, a development that seeks to sustain as far possible the ecological fabric of the globe. This led in the 1980s to the creation, by the United Nations, of the World Commission on Environment and Development which published in 1987 its end report ‘Our Common Future’. In this report special emphasis was laid on the rights of future generations to an ecological fabric that would not be fatally ruined by the actual generation’s industrial activities.

The 1992 World Summit of Rio de Janeiro, and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), tried hard to reconcile development-in-terms-of-growth and sustainability of the environment. Again, this conference had recourse to the term ‘sustainable development’ which, however, for many contains a *contradictio in terminis*: How is it possible to preserve the ecosystem and at the same time continue to boost global industrial growth and to export this model to new emerging giants in Asia and elsewhere in the world? From the ecological perspective ‘development’ has met with even more disapproval than it did from the social perspective.5

*Post-development Perspective*

In this section I turn to the convergent views of environmental conservationist Wolfgang Sachs and social traditionalist Majid Rahnema. Sachs (of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate) maintains that the ever worsening and practically unbridgeable gap between the world’s wealthy elites and the masses of its poor, coupled with the serious, possibly irreversible, degradation of the earth’s ecosystems, attest to the failure of the 1960s “development” saga. The dilemmas imbedded in it say it all:

> Whoever demands more agricultural land, energy, housing, services, or, in general, more purchasing power for the poor, finds himself in conflict with those who would like to protect the soils, animals, forests, human health or the atmosphere. And whoever

calls for less energy or less transport and opposes clear-cutting or input-intensive agriculture for the sake of nature, finds himself in conflict with those who insist on their equal right to the fruits of progress.\textsuperscript{6}

To get out of this dilemma Sachs sees but one solution, to look for a different model of development that is not necessarily growth-oriented in space and time. True, certain willingness has already been achieved to look at the consequences of steady growth for the future generations. Yet, a serious answer has hardly been given to the effects of the growth-oriented model on the actual generations that share the same space, that of the globe at this moment in time. Rather than thoughtful answers to the dilemma, one finds two crude reactions being put forward. First, the poor countries in the South are to be blamed for their overpopulation — which is neither good for nature nor for distributive justice (too many mouths will lay claim to having a share in the cake). And second, the huddled masses from poor nations (whose purchasing power is deficient anyway), constitute a threat to affluent nations everywhere, and must therefore be prevented from slipping into fortress Europe, or fortress USA, through the imposition of strict immigration regulations and the tightening of border controls. These defensive reactions, in Sachs' view, in failing to go to the heart of the matter, are ill-considered. He writes: "[t]he problem of poverty lies, not in poverty, but in wealth, as much as the problem of nature lies, not in nature, but in overdevelopment." Sachs emphasizes instead the importance of looking for "forms of prosperity that would not require permanent growth."\textsuperscript{7}

Sachs brings up in this connection the rebellion of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, as a prime example of the way in which struggle for justice and struggle for the environment can go hand in hand. From a certain moment the native tribes of Chiapas no longer put up with the destruction of their forests and lands by railways, power supply lines, trucks, ships, airplanes. They register their fierce opposition to a foreign invasion that has extracted oil, electricity, coffee, and tobacco from their homelands and robbed them of the necessary space for

\textsuperscript{6} Wolfgang Sachs, "The Need for the Home Perspective," in The Post-Development Reader, 293.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 299.
earning their livelihood. Their lot, Sachs adds, is comparable to that of the peasants and landless workers, migrants, and tribal peoples on all continents who become the victims of unbridled economic expansion. It is therefore time that the wealthy elites in North and South begin to realize that what they are doing boils down to predatory pillage, and to the destruction of the local micro-economies on which the lives and the well-being of the poor masses depend. Those wealthy elites, he writes, "occupy foreign soils to provide themselves with tomatoes, rice, feedstuff or cattle; they carry away raw materials of any kind, and utilize the global commons — like the oceans and the atmosphere — far beyond their share."8

Sachs’ sentiments are echoed in the writings of Rajid Rahnema, a Persian diplomat who has played out executive functions at both the UNESCO and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He points out in his book, Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté (When Indigence Expels Poverty), that, in many parts of the world, people with low incomes are able to survive with dignity prior to the onslaught in their regions of planners and schemes of ‘development’ that upset the existing equilibrium and suddenly expose them to a life of dire misery. He specifically cites the forced eviction of tribal peoples from their ancestral lands in the Narmada Valley, and of their painful resettlement elsewhere, simply because the Indian government had decided to develop an irrigation system, as well as to generate power for industry, by constructing dams on the Narmada River. He cites as well the ban in many “modern” Indian cities of rickshaws, on the excuse that they constitute a serious hindrance to city traffic; and the dispersion of the pavement dwellers who were once to be found all along the broad boulevards in Calcutta, because its mayor had determined it was time to clean up the city and restore their boulevards to their old colonial grandeur. In all these cases people are uprooted from their ‘natural’ milieu and loose their livelihood; for the pavement dwellers are enmeshed in an informal economy from the humble place were they live in the centre of the city that the prophets of ‘development’ neither see nor understand.9

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Rahnema is convinced that development programs crafted by western technocrats in the period following the Second World War, and avidly received by a number of post-independence governments, have produced a greater amount of destruction to these post-colonial outposts than colonial rule itself. *Homo economicus* in the service of colonial rulers had devised strategies for replacing economies that had been geared towards the satisfaction of basic human needs, with one-sided economies geared towards gain on the part of the colonial master. To this end, *homo economicus* built an elaborate infrastructure of roads, plantations, schools. His influence, however, remained indirect, since he answered to colonial administrators who, as a rule, “preferred to achieve their imperial objectives through the local institutions rather than upsetting them.”\(^{10}\) All this changed in the post-independence period. Coming out from underneath the tutelage of political colonialism, the new rulers sought to modernize their countries “through development,” which was tied at first to the colonizer’s methods of operation, as well as on donated international development funds. Unfettered by the former bias for local institutions, *homo economicus* equated modernization, or the game of “catch up” with the former colonizer, with the imperative “to destroy the basic institutions of local populations... considered detrimental to economic growth.” “*Homo economicus* was now coming as a friend and a savior, as a grave-digger of colonialism, wearing the mask of liberation.”\(^{11}\)

Rahnema draws comparisons between development strategies and the AIDS virus that, once in the body, develops carriers in its very cells that destroy the immune system. Until recently, he explains, the poor of India were protected by the immune system of the community, of which simplicity of life, conviviality, a subsistence economy, and mutual solidarity were everyday features. One never got the feeling of abandonment by the community, even in times of financial distress; never saw oneself as utterly “poor” or “destitute,” in face of empathy in the community. This immune system, according to Rahnema, has been infected by the bug of “modernization,” which citizens appropriate at various levels. There is, first of all, the elitist western schooling, which

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is presented as a scarce good and is thus mimetically desired by all, the lowest strata included. In these schools one learns to make the distinction between “developed” and “underdeveloped,” between “productive economies” and “backward economies,” between cultured and inhumane ways of life. Second, there is the production of addictive needs; for the “developed” neo-liberal free market to function, brand new commodities — a refrigerator, a television set, a washing machine, a car — must relentlessly be added to the market, and advertised as essential to the good life. Those who can afford to buy these things become the “addicts” of this new way of life, and subject to its blandishments. Those who are without the purchasing power suddenly begin to see themselves as poor wretched beings, left to themselves and to their own misery. Third, there occurs within the very “target groups” of development strategies, a movement to depreciate local vernacular culture as the root cause of “underdevelopment.” When the infection has gone far enough the social immune system dies. Individualism replaces communal bonds, greed replaces simplicity, social apathy towards the victims of misfortune replaces mutual aid among the social classes, and we attend to the birth, as Rahnema puts it, of “the modernized poor.”

Poverty from the Perspective of the Poor

Rahnema strikes a sensitive chord, although he slightly tends to idealize the solidarity structure in vernacular societies. In his analyses, for example, he makes no mention of the bonded laborers who are at the mercy of their landlords, or of children who labor in often deplorable circumstances. These, too, must be acknowledged as part of the feudal society that modernity sought to overcome. Second, he himself has grown up in a milieu of Sufi piety in which simplicity of life is seen as a path to the discovery of one’s inner self. This allows him to empathize with the simple folk’s conviviality and frugality — the disappearance of which under the impact of modern civilization he more than regrets. On the whole, his approach to the problem of development is certainly laudable, but must at the same time be complemented with what the

poor themselves have to tell us about their experiences of distress.

Then came the World Bank study, *Voices of the Poor* (2000). From interviews with 60,000 poor people in sixty countries, the study gives us insight into the daily struggles of the poor, into just “how their lives are shaped by hunger, powerlessness, social isolation, state corruption, gender inequality, and the rudeness of local officials”. The study was made on the initiative of James Wolfensohn, the then president of the World Bank, who found that the huge amounts of development funds invested in the “Third World” were not really reaching the poorest of the poor. The “trickle-down” effect upon which the World Bank had wagered its programs for decades was apparently not working, and that was his worry.

According to the findings of *Voices of the Poor*, “the very poor are divided into two broad groups: God’s poor, a group that includes factors for which there is no obvious remedy — disability, age, widowhood and childlessness. The second group, the resourceless poor, includes widowers and other landless poor. Between the two extremes of rich and very poor are the deprived but hardworking not-so-poor, or not hand-to-mouth category.” This categorization already tells us that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. The last category, the not-so-poor, is mostly made up of people who earn their living in the informal economy; they do not belong to those who have to spend all the money they daily earn on a meager diet of food in order to survive, but if they or their children become ill, or if natural catastrophes like famine, drought or flooding occur, they quickly get on the downward slide to extreme poverty. Bad luck always lurks around the corner and can hit them hard, as was the case with “God’s poor,” the disabled, widows, the elderly, orphans. As to the worst category, the resourceless poor, they are mostly to be found among the landless peasants and bonded labor. The latter’s situation is mostly due to indebtedness: since they are unable to pay off their debt, they are obliged “to work in a

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14 “Voices of the Poor Speak about Health”, http://www.ccih.org/forum/0006-08.htm

15 *Voices of the Poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?*, 33.
moneylender’s house as a servant or on his farm as a labourer or in other activities for years".16

In an attempt at systematizing the causes of poverty, Voices of the Poor lists various areas in which indigence can occur, namely in the domains of physical, human, social and environmental assets. Lack of physical assets, such as ownership or access to land, is a root cause of poverty in rural areas; lack of human assets, such as health, basic education, and training, is also a serious handicap because it blocks people’s initiatives in survival strategies (as already said, illness in the family entails a drastic drain of household resources); lack of social assets, such as recourse to kinship and neighborhood networks when help is needed, throws people into isolation (having left the countryside, many urban poor are cut off from their kinship networks and have a hard time surviving in the slums); lack of environmental assets, finally, such as grass, trees, water, and non-timber products, can also lead to starvation (seasonal calamities, drying up of wells, and predatory logging may put a heavy burden on those who have to live from the ‘fruits of the land’).

Besides these aspects which mainly focus on the satisfaction of one’s basic needs, there is also powerlessness, humiliation, and the ineffectiveness of the state in reaching the poor. Psychologically, poverty is experienced as “humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help.”17 Indeed, when they seek help from state or private agencies they are often treated with indifference and disdain. For them, “formal institutions are ineffective, inaccessible, and disempowering. The recurrent themes running through the reports are distrust, corruption, humiliation, intimidation, helplessness, hopelessness, and often anger.”18 Moreover, poor people are often not able to participate in festivals and rituals, which is very frustrating for them. They feel excluded from public life and this makes them uncertain in social relations. This is especially true for women: on account of gender segregation they have practically no voice in community decision-making.

16 Ibid., 42.
17 Ibid., 30.
18Voices of the Poor. Crying Out for Change, 203.
Also to be factored into consideration is the lack of a basic infrastructure, such as roads, transport and clean water. The poor, too, would like to send their children to school, to have access to hospitals, and (for those involved in the informal economy), to set up small businesses, but because of lack of roads and adequate transportation they are isolated in their villages: “In India many of the poorest villages are located 15-20 kilometers from the nearest infrastructure; during the rainy season villages find themselves isolated from the more developed areas. The result is that the members of the unconnected villages remain effectively marginalized from virtually all educational institutions above primary level, from adequate health facilities, and from important government and non-government institutions.”19 This example makes it clear that the state, indeed, is often ineffective at meeting the needs of the poor. Some “Third World” countries boast that they offer programs of basic services and assistance, such as schooling, free health care, subsidized food, drinking water, credits, seeds, pensions for widows, and assistance to the disabled. These programs, however, hardly reach the grass roots because of the corruption of middlemen and officials in state institutions. In India, for example, middlemen and officials are drawn from the higher castes and do not hesitate to divert financial aid from those in the lower castes for which it was intended.

In order to bring about change in this situation, Voices of the Poor insists that local governments should spend resources and energies on schooling and health care. Education is of prime importance because without it the poor masses — and especially women — will remain illiterate, which means that they never will be able to get the necessary information about their rights and duties: “For reading and using documents, for checking prices, and for avoiding exploitation, the poor people see basic literacy as a key ability.”20 Unfortunately, even primary schools are often a disaster. Very often, teachers fail to show up (owing to delays in their salary payments), and the schooling they impart is of low quality. As a result, poor parents decide not to send their children to school, and instead engage them in the labor process. With credible estimates ranging from 60 to 115 million out of a population of one

19 Voices of the Poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?, 46.
20 Voices of the Poor. Crying Out for Change, 240.
billion, India, has the largest number of working children in the world,\textsuperscript{21} despite the fact that it is the second fastest growing Asian nation after China.

Besides schooling and education, \textit{Voices of the Poor} insists on the government's role in providing health care. Various measures are proposed as urgent: (1) protecting the poor against the shock of catastrophic illnesses, (2) setting up health infrastructure, such as water and sanitation where the poor reside, (3) improvement of the behavior of the personnel of public health care who often treat the poor with rudeness, (4) attention to gender-based domestic violence, and (5) [with special reference to Africa] doing something about the psychological and physical impacts of AIDS.

\textit{Amartya Sen: Development as Freedom}

In 1996 and 1997 Amartya Sen of Bangladesh gave a series of lectures at the World Bank which were later published under the title "Development as Freedom." For him, poverty must in the first place be defined as capability deprivation and not so much as income deprivation (although income remains, of course, an important factor for living a decent life). In making this basic option Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, departs from the classical approach in which the degree of a person's poverty or development is measured in terms of one's income (just as the wealth of a nation is measured by the yardstick of the growth of its GNP per head). He does so deliberately, because of the importance he attaches to quality of life and development of human capabilities. This approach allows him to avoid the pitfall of linking development to rapid economic growth and consumerism — the type of development Rahnema detests. To value persons for what they earn places them immediately in the logic of an economy whose growth depends on the consumption capacity of moneyed people. Sen's concern is, rather, about improving people's quality of life, a goal which is not necessarily to be linked to a spectacular increase in prosperity.

There, are, indeed a lot of good things in one's life that are not directly connected with income, but depend on processes of decision-making (participation in political decisions) and on the "opportunity people

\footnote{http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/India3.htm}
have to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value,” such as “the freedom to live long, or the ability to escape avoidable morbidity, or the opportunity to have worthwhile employment, or to live in peaceful and crime-free communities. These non-income variables point to opportunities that a person has excellent reasons to value and that are not strictly linked to economic prosperity.”

In Sen’s vocabulary, freedom and abilities or capabilities are often interchangeable notions. It is important to have a look at his classification of freedoms. From the outset, however, one ought to realize that this classification is not meant to isolate freedoms from one another; on the contrary they are strongly interwoven: it is by attaining one type of freedom that one will be able to get access to other types of freedom. For “freedom is not only the primary object of development but is also its principal means.” To the extent that one acquires one basic freedom (freedom from bonded labor e.g.) one reaches a higher level of being human and this capability fuels one’s initiative in recognizing other opportunities for growth, in combination with the resolve as to what kind of life one wants to live in the human community. Thus, Sen speaks of “instrumental freedoms.” If one enjoys them, they become instruments of further development, for oneself and for one’s fellow people. He lists the following types of instrumental freedoms: (1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees, and (5) protective securities.

(1) Political freedoms are those that foster genuine democracy; they refer to the right to vote, freedom of political expression, the right to scrutinize and critique authorities, the freedom to chose between different political parties, in short the opportunity to determine who should govern the country and according to which principles.

(2) Economic facilities “refer to the opportunities that individuals respectively enjoy to utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or


23 Ibid., 38. (Italics mine, GDS).
production, or exchange."24 These economic entitlements depend on the resources owned or available, the conditions of exchange and the mechanisms of the markets. On the whole, the wealth of a nation should be reflected in the economic entitlements of its citizens, which precisely shows the urgency of distributional considerations. Availability and access to finance is also crucial, not only for big enterprises but also for tiny establishments that are run on micro credit.

(3) Social opportunities "refer to the arrangements that society makes for education, health care, and so on, which influence the individual's substantive freedom to live better."25 These opportunities are important because they facilitate the people's integration in political and economic life. As long as people are, for example, illiterate they are excluded from specialized jobs and are unable to follow political developments in newspapers.

(4) Transparency guarantees refer to the openness citizens may expect from each other and from officials. In this way corruption and underhand dealings will be avoided.

(5) Finally, protective security relates to the creation of safety nets by the state whenever unexpected material changes adversely affect people's lives.

The above list demonstrates that Sen surely values the economic entitlements of the citizens, without, however, making them the sole objective and means of development, as is often the case in development studies. For Sen, the four other "freedoms" are equally important. This becomes evident when he discusses the basic criterion used for assessing the wealth of a nation — longevity. The life expectancy of the population tells something about the state of affairs of a country. Here he observes that the life expectancy at birth is significantly higher in

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 39.
low-income regions like China, Sri Lanka, and the Indian state Kerala than in the rapidly growing economies of countries like Namibia, Brazil, South Africa, and Gabon.

The reason for this discrepancy is that China, Sri Lanka and Kerala have well organized facilities for health care and education. When one regards these assets or freedoms — freedom from avoidable diseases and freedom from illiteracy — not only as aims of development but also as instruments for further development then it is evident that these regions have laid the foundation for fast economic growth. 26 China is on the way to becoming an economic giant, whereas for the moment Kerala, which is largely rural, is less engaged in industrialization and contents itself with a rather frugal life-style in clothing and housing. From these data, Sen draws one important conclusion: "a country need not wait until it is much richer (through what may be a long period of economic growth) before embarking on rapid expansion of basic education and health care. The quality of life can be vastly raised, despite low incomes, through an adequate program of social services." 27 This is all the more important, because good health and basic education gives people the opportunity "to shape their own destiny," instead of being "passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs." 28

To be sure, Sen's "development as freedom" is a western program. Yet it does not espouse the inhumane economic logic that is often associated with the western Enlightenment, since the Enlightenment also comprises the ideal of emancipation from a lack of freedom. Sen perfectly realizes that such a program — which includes literacy, democracy and freedom of expression — will erode the social and political fabric of the Asian nations. He therefore devotes a whole chapter to a discussion of the allegedly authoritarian organization of Asian societies. For him, this autocratic bias ought to be rectified, since there exists a greater diversity of intellectual movements in these countries than is generally accepted. It is nonsense therefore to play

26 Sen adds that services for health care and education are very labor-intensive (a lot of personal is involved) and thus relatively inexpensive in poor and low-wage countries: "A poor economy may have less money to spend on health care and education but it also needs less money to provide the same services, which would cost much more in richer countries" (Ibid., 48).

27 Ibid., 48-49.

28 Ibid., 53.
off against each other Asian authoritarian values and the western idea of freedom. Buddhism, for example, "has much room for volition and free choice."  

This does not imply, though, that Sen is in favor of the "Westernization" of non-European cultures. He leaves it up to each country in the South to decide — through broad-based common deliberations — which traditional values and habits to preserve and which to change. But having said that, he is quick to add that an advance in civilization is bound to follow the path of promoting basic freedoms: political freedom (free elections, multiparty system, public discussions), the freedom to enter a labor contract (which goes against bonded labor and child labor), the freedom to enjoy public goods (clean environment, water supply, malaria-free surroundings), the freedom of access to micro credits and to social safety nets, the freedom to have a government that is accountable to the people and acts with transparency, the freedom of family planning (an option which is facilitated through female basic education), the freedom of women to be employed outside the home, and to earn an independent income, etc.  

In order to obtain or to enforce these freedoms action groups will have to organize themselves — as is the case with SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association) in a part of India, or BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). The whole program of "development through freedoms," however, must be shouldered by the government, whereas nations engaged in it should be given public recognition. For Sen, it is clear that in judging a nation's development one should not only look at the indicator of the annual GNP per head; one must also look at the amount of money that a nation spends on social services for basic education and health care and on the furtherance of political and civic freedoms. These measures have a direct impact on the lives and capabilities of the citizens, and prepare the ground for widespread economic growth in which the grassroots also share.

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30 In Kerala, voluntary birth control is the rule, among Hindus as well as among Muslims and Christians.
31 Sen could also have added: freedom from discrimination on the grounds of race and caste.