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DEVELOPMENT: WHICH WAY NOW?*

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I. THE PROMISE AND THE DEFAULT

'Development economics is a comparatively young area of inquiry. It was born just about a generation ago, as a subdiscipline of economics, with a number of other social sciences looking on both skeptically and jealously from a distance.'[1] So writes Albert Hirschman, but the essay that begins so cheerfully turns out to be really an obituary of development economics – no longer the envy of the other social sciences. In this illuminating essay, aptly called 'The Rise and Decline of Development Economics', Hirschman puts his main thesis thus:

> our subdiscipline had achieved its considerable lustre and excitement through the implicit idea that it could slay the dragon of backwardness virtually by itself or, at least, that its contribution to this task was central. We now know that this is not so.[2]

The would-be dragon-slayer seems to have stumbled on his sword.

There is some plausibility in this diagnosis, but is it really true that development economics has no central role to play in the conquest of underdevelopment and economic backwardness? More specifically, were the original themes in terms of which the subject was launched really so far from being true or useful? I shall argue that the obituary may be premature, the original themes – while severely incomplete in coverage – did not point entirely in the wrong direction, and the discipline of development economics does have a central role to play in the field of economic growth in developing countries. But I shall also argue that the problematique underlying the approach of traditional development economics is, in some important ways, quite limited, and has not – and could not have – brought us to an adequate understanding of economic development. Later on, I shall take up the question as to the direction in which we may try to go instead.

There is a methodological problem in identifying a subject – or a subdiscipline as Hirschman calls it – with a given body of beliefs and themes rather than with a collection of subject matters and problems to be tackled. But Hirschman is

* Presidential Address of the Development Studies Association given in Dublin on 23 September 1982. In preparing the final version of the paper, I have benefited from the comments of Carl Riskin, Louis Emmerij, Albert Hirschman, Seth Masters, Hans Singer, and the editorial referees of this Journal, and from the discussions following my DSA address, and also that following a talk I gave on a related theme at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague on 11 October 1982.

[1] Essay 1 in Hirschman (1981).

[2] Hirschman (1981), p. 23.

certainly right in pointing towards the thematic similarities of the overwhelming majority of contributions in development economics. While some development economists such as Peter Bauer and Theodore Schultz have not been party to this thematic congruence, they have also stood outside the mainstream of what may be called standard development economics, as indeed the title of Peter Bauer's justly famous book, *Dissent on Development*,[1] indicates. The subdiscipline began with a set of favourite themes and the main approaches to the subject have been much moulded by these motifs. Clearly, the subject cannot live or die depending just on the success or failure of these themes, but the main approaches would need radical reformulation if these themes were shown to be fundamentally erroneous or misguided.

Hirschman identifies two major ideas with which development economics came into being, namely 'rural underemployment' (including so-called 'disguised unemployment') and 'late industrialisation'. The former idea led naturally to a focus on utilisation of underemployed manpower and to acceleration of capital accumulation. The latter called for an activist state and for planning to overcome the disadvantages of lateness through what Hirschman calls 'a deliberate, intensive, guided effort'. The subject expended a lot of time in developing 'new rationales ... for protection, planning, and industrialisation itself'.[2]

While there have been differences in assertion and emphasis *within* the mainstream of the subdiscipline, it is fair to say that in terms of policy the following have been among the major strategic themes pursued ever since the beginning of the subject: (1) industrialisation, (2) rapid capital accumulation, (3) mobilisation of underemployed manpower, and (4) planning and an economically active state.[3] There are, of course, many other common themes, e.g. emphasis on skill formation, but they have not typically been as much subjected to criticism as these other themes, and there is thus much to be said for concentrating on these four.

These themes (especially the need for planning, but also the deliberate fostering of industrialisation and capital accumulation and the acceptance of the possibility of surplus labour) are closely linked to criticisms of the traditional neoclassical models as applied to developing countries. Hirschman calls this eschewal of 'universal' use of neoclassical economics the rejection of 'monoeconomics'. Monoeconomics sounds perhaps a little like a disease that one could catch if not careful. I shall avoid the term, though some would no doubt have thought it quite appropriate to characterise universal neoclassical economics as a contagious affliction.

It was argued by development economists that neoclassical economics did not apply terribly well to underdeveloped countries. This need not have caused great astonishment, since neoclassical economics did not apply terribly well anywhere else. However, the role of the state and the need for planning and

[1] Bauer (1971). See also Schultz (1964) and Bauer (1981). For a forceful critical account without breaking from traditional development economics, see Little (1982).

[2] Hirschman (1981), pp. 10–11.

[3] See Rosenstein-Rodan (1943), Mandelbaum (1945), Dobb (1951), Datta (1952), Singer (1952), Nurkse (1953) and Lewis (1954, 1955).

deliberate public action seemed stronger in underdeveloped countries, and the departure from traditional neoclassical models was, in many ways, more radical.

The discrediting of traditional development economics that has lately taken place, and to which Hirschman made reference, is undoubtedly partly due to the resurgence of neoclassical economics in recent years. As Hirschman (1981) rightly notes, 'the claim of development economics to stand as a separate body of economic analysis and policy derived intellectual legitimacy and nurture from the prior success and parallel features of the Keynesian Revolution' (p. 7). The neoclassical resurgence against Keynesian economics was to some extent paralleled by the neoclassical recovery in the field of economic development. The market, it was argued, has the many virtues that standard neoclassical analysis has done so much to analyse, and state intervention could be harmful in just the way suggested by that perspective.

The neoclassical resurgence has drawn much sustenance from the success of some countries and the failure of others. The high performance of economies like South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore – based on markets and profits and trade – has been seen as bringing Adam Smith back to life. On the other hand, the low performance of a great many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been cited as proof that it does not pay the government to mess about much with the market mechanism. Recently, doubts raised about the record of China, and the vocal desire of the Chinese leadership to make greater use of material incentives, have been interpreted as proof that even a powerful socialist regime cannot break the basic principles on which the market mechanism is founded.

The attack on state activism and planning has been combined with criticism of some of the other features of traditional development economics. It has been argued that enterprise is the real bottleneck, not capital, so that to emphasise capital accumulation and the creation of surplus – as was done for example by Maurice Dobb (1951; 1960) and Paul Baran (1957) – was to climb the wrong tree. The charge of misallocation of resources has been levelled also against industrialisation, especially for the domestic market. Hirschman (1981) notes: 'By itself this critique was highly predictable and might not have carried more weight than warnings against industrialisation emanating from essentially the same camp ten, or twenty, or fifty years earlier.' But – as he goes on to say – the effectiveness of this critique was now greater for various reasons, including the fact that 'some of the early advocates of industrialisation had now themselves become its sharpest critics' (p. 18). Hirschman refers in this context to some 'neo-Marxist' writings and the views of some members of the so-called 'dependency' school. Certainly, the particular pattern of industrial expansion in Latin America provides many examples of exploitative relations with the metropolitan countries, particularly the United States of America, and the internal effects were often quite terrible in terms of fostering economic inequality and social distortion. But to move from there to a rejection of industrialisation as such is indeed a long jump.

I should explain that Hirschman, from whom I have been quoting extensively, does not in many cases endorse these attacks on the policy strategies of traditional development economics. But he provides excellent analyses of the arguments figuring in the attacks. I believe Hirschman is more hesitant in his defence of traditional development economics than he need have been, but his own reasons for rejecting that tradition – to which he himself has of course contributed much[1] – rests primarily on the argument that development economics has tended to be contemptuous of underdeveloped countries, albeit this contempt has taken a 'sophisticated form'. These countries have been 'expected to perform like wind-up toys and "lumber through" the various stages of development single-mindedly'. As Hirschman (1981) puts it, 'these countries were perceived to have only *interests* and *no passions*' (p. 24).[2]

I believe this diagnosis has much truth in it. But I also believe that, contemptuous and simplistic though development economics might have been in this respect, the main themes that were associated with the origin of development economics, and have given it its distinctive character, are not rejectable for that reason. I shall argue that they address common problems, which survive despite the particular passions.

II. TRADITIONAL THEMES IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EXPERIENCES

Growth is not the same thing as development and the difference between the two has been brought out by a number of recent contributions to development economics.[3] I shall take up the complex question of the content of economic development presently (in Sections III–V below). But it can scarcely be denied that economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development. And it happens to be the aspect on which traditional development economics – rightly or wrongly – has concentrated. In this section I do not assess the merits of that concentration (on which more later), but examine the appropriateness of the traditional themes, given that concentration. Dealing specifically with economic growth as it is commonly defined, the strategic relevance of these themes is examined in the light of recent experiences. How do these theories – formulated and presented mainly in the 'forties and 'fifties – fare in the light of the experiences of the 'sixties and the 'seventies?

The World Development Report 1982 (henceforth (*WDR*) presents comparative growth data for the period 1960–80 for 'low-income economies' and 'middle-income economies', with a dividing line at US $410 in 1980. Leaving out small countries (using a cut-off line of 10 million people) and excluding the OPEC countries which have had rather special economic circumstances during the 'seventies, we have 14 countries in the low-income category for which data on economic growth (GNP or GDP) are given in *WDR*. Correspondingly, there are 18 such countries in the middle-income category. Table 1 presents these data. For three of the low-income countries, namely China, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, the GNP growth figures are not given in *WDR* and they have been approximately identified with GDP growth. In interpreting the results,

[1] See particularly Hirschman (1958, 1970).

[2] For the conceptual framework underlying the distinction, see Hirschman (1977).

[3] See, for example, Streeten (1981). See also Grant (1978), Morris (1979) and Streeten *et al.* (1981).

Table 1

Country	GNP per head		1980 gross domestic investment (% of GDP)	1980 share of industry in GDP (%)
	1980 Value ($)	1960–80 Growth (%)		
Low-income				
Bangladesh	130	1·3*	17	13
Ethiopia	140	1·4	10	16
Nepal	140	0·2	14	13
Burma	170	1·2	24	13
Afghanistan	—	0·9*	14	—
Zaire	220	0·2	11	23
Mozambique	230	−0·1	10	16
India	240	1·4	23	26
Sri Lanka	270	2·4	36	30
Tanzania	280	1·9	22	13
China	290	3·7*	31	47
Pakistan	300	2·8	18	25
Uganda	300	−0·7	3	6
Sudan	410	−0·2	12	14
Middle-income				
Ghana	420	−1·0	5	21
Kenya	420	2·7	22	21
Egypt	580	3·4	31	35
Thailand	670	4·7	27	29
Philippines	690	2·8	30	37
Morocco	900	2·5	21	32
Peru	930	1·1	16	45
Colombia	1,180	3·0	25	30
Turkey	1,470	3·6	27	30
S. Korea	1,520	7·0	31	41
Malaysia	1,620	4·3	29	37
Brazil	2,050	5·1	22	37
Mexico	2,090	2·6	28	38
Chile	2,150	1·6	18	37
South Africa	2,300	2·3	29	53
Romania	2,340	8·6	34	64
Argentina	2,390	2·2	—	—
Yugoslavia	2,620	5·4	35	43

Source: World Development Report 1982, tables 1–5. The countries included are all the ones within the 'Low-income' and 'Middle-income' categories, other than those with less than 10 million population, members of OPEC, and countries without GNP or GDP growth figures. Asterisked growth rates are based on GDP growth figures per head (tables 2 and 17).

this has to be borne in mind, and only those conclusions can be safely drawn which would be unaffected by variations of these estimates within a wide range.

The fourteen low-income economies vary in terms of growth rate of GNP *per capita* during 1960–80 from *minus* 0·7% in Uganda to 3·7% in China. The top three countries in terms of economic growth are China (3·7%), Pakistan (2·8%) and Sri Lanka (2·4%). (Note that China's pre-eminent position would be unaffected even if the approximated growth figure is substantially cut.) In the middle-income group, the growth performance again varies a great deal, ranging from *minus* 1·0% for Ghana to 8·6% for Romania. The top three countries in terms of economic growth are Romania (8·6%), South Korea (7·0%) and Yugoslavia (5·4%).

How do these high-performance countries compare with others in the respective groups in terms of the parameters associated with the main theses of traditional development economics? Take capital accumulation first. Of the three top growth-performers, two also have the highest share of gross domestic investment in GDP, namely Sri Lanka with 36% and China with 31%. Pakistan comes lower, though it does fall in the top half of the class of fourteen countries.

Turning now to the middle-income countries, the top three countries in terms of growth are also the top three countries in terms of capital accumulation, namely Yugoslavia with 35%, Romania with 34%, and South Korea with 31%. Thus, if there is anything to be learned from the experience of these successful growers regarding the importance of capital accumulation, it is certainly not a lesson that runs counter to the traditional wisdom of development economics.

It might, however, be argued that to get a more convincing picture one should look also at failures and not merely at successes. I don't think the cases are quite symmetrical, since a failure can be due to some special 'bottleneck' even when all other factors are favourable. Nevertheless, it is not useless to examine the cases of failure as well, especially with respect to capital accumulation, since it has been seen in traditional development economics to be such a *general* force towards economic growth.

The three worst performers in the low-income category in terms of growth rate are, respectively, Uganda with *minus* 0·7%, Sudan with *minus* 0·2%, and Mozambique with *minus* 0·1%. In terms of capital accumulation, Uganda's rank is also the worst there, with only 3% of GDP invested. Mozambique is the second lowest investor, and Sudan the fifth lowest.

What about growth failures in the middle-income countries? The worst performers in terms of growth rate are Ghana with *minus* 1%, Peru with 1·1%, and Chile with 1·6%. As it happens these countries are also respectively the lowest, the second lowest and the third lowest accumulators of capital in the category of the middle-income countries.

So both in terms of cases of success and those of failure, the traditional wisdom of development economics is scarcely contradicted by these international comparisons. Quite the contrary.

Hans Singer (1952) in his paper entitled 'The Mechanics of Economic Development', published thirty years ago, seems to be almost talking about today's worst case of growth failure in the combined category of low-income and middle-income countries, namely Ghana. Using the Harrod–Domar model with an assumed capital–output ratio, Singer argues that a country with 6% savings and a population growth rate of 1·25% will be a 'stationary economy'. While Ghana has managed an investment and savings ratio of just below 6% (5% to be exact) it has had a population growth between 2·4 and 3·0% during these decades as opposed to Singer's assumption of 1·25%. Rather than being stationary, Ghana has accordingly slipped back, going down at about 1% a year. The Harrod–Domar model is an over-simplification, of course, but the insight obtained from such reasoning is not altogether without merit.

I turn now to the theme of industrialisation. In the category of low-income countries, the top performers – China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – happen to be among the four countries with the highest share of industries in GDP. In the middle-income group, the top growers – Romania, South Korea and Yugoslavia – are among the top five countries in terms of the share of industries in GDP.[1]

The picture at the other end, i.e. for countries with growth failures, is certainly less neat than at the top end in this case, or at either end in the case of capital accumulation. It is, however, certainly true that Uganda, which occupies the bottom position in the low-income category in terms of growth rate, also has the bottom position in terms of the share of industries, and similarly Ghana, with the lowest record of growth in the middle-income group, also has the lowest share of industries in that group. But the positions of second and third lowest are not quite so telling. In the low-income category, low-performing Sudan and Mozambique have middling industrial ratios. In the middle-income group, the second-lowest growth performer, Peru, has the third *highest* ratio of industries in that group, though the third-lowest growth performer, Chile, has a middling industrial ratio. The picture is, thus, a bit more muddled at the lower end of growth performance.[2]

Altogether, so far as growth is concerned, it is not easy to deny the importance of capital accumulation or of industrialisation in a poor pre-industrial country. Turning to the thesis of underemployment and the role of labour mobilisation, there have been several powerful attempts at disestablishing the thesis of 'disguised unemployment', e.g. by Theodore Schultz (1964), but they have not been altogether successful.[3] Furthermore, what is really at issue is the crucial role of labour mobilisation and use, and not whether the opportunity cost of labour is exactly zero.[4] It is worth noting, in this context, that the high growth performers in both groups have distinguished records of labour-using economic growth, and some (e.g. China and South Korea) have quite outstanding achievements in this area. While they have very different political systems, their respective successes in labour mobilisation have been specially studied and praised.[5]

The question of planning and state activism is a field in which comparative quantitative data is particularly difficult to find. But some qualitative information is of relevance. Of the three top growing economies in the low-income group, one – China – is obviously not without an active state. While Pakistan

[1] An additional one in this case is South Africa, and its industrial share is high mainly because mining is included in that figure. In fact, if we look only at manufacturing, South Africa falls below the others.

[2] The rank correlation coefficient between *per capita* growth and the share of gross domestic investment in GDP is 0·72 for middle-income countries, 0·75 for low-income countries and 0·82 for the two groups put together. On the other hand, the rank correlation coefficient between *per capita* growth and the share of industries is only 0·22 for middle-income countries, even though it is 0·59 for the low-income countries and 0·68 for the two groups put together.

[3] My own views on this are presented in Sen (1975). See also Sen (1967), and the exchange with Schultz following that in the same number of this Journal.

[4] See Marglin (1976), chapter 2. Also Sen (1975), chapters 4 and 6. See also Fei and Ranis (1964).

[5] See Little (1982). See also the important study of Ishikawa (1981), which discusses the empirical role of labour absorption in different Asian economies.

is in no way a paradigmatic example of determined state planning, it has been frequently cited as a good example of what harm government meddling can do.[1] The third – Sri Lanka – has been recently studied a great deal precisely because of its active government intervention in a number of different fields, including health, education and food consumption.

In the middle-income group, of the three top performers, Romania and Yugoslavia clearly do have a good deal of planning. The third – South Korea – has had an economic system in which the market mechanism has been driven hard by an active government in a planned way. Trying to interpret the South Korean economic experience as a triumph of unguided market mechanism, as is sometimes done, is not easy to sustain. I have discussed this question elsewhere,[2] and I shall not spend any time on it here. I should only add that, aside from having a powerful influence over the direction of investment through control of financial institutions (including nationalised banks), the government of South Korea fostered an export-oriented growth on the secure foundations of more than a decade of intensive import substitution, based on trade restrictions, to build up an industrial base. Imports of a great many items are still prohibited or restricted. The pattern of South Korean economic expansion has been carefully planned by a powerful government. If this is a free market, then Walras's auctioneer can surely be seen as going around with a government white paper in one hand and a whip in the other.

The point is not so much that the government is powerful in the high-growth developing countries. It is powerful in nearly *every* developing country. The issue concerns the systematic involvement of the state in the *economic* sphere, and the pursuit of *planned* economic development. The carefully planned government action in, say, China or Sri Lanka or South Korea or Romania, contrasts – on the whole strongly – with the economic role of the government in such countries as Uganda or Sudan or Chile or Argentina or Ghana.

This examination of the main theses of traditional development economics has been too brief and tentative, and certainly there is no question of claiming anything like definitiveness in the findings. But, in so far as anything has emerged, it has not gone in the direction of debunking traditional development economics; just the contrary.

Before I move on to develop some criticisms of my own, I should make one last defensive remark about traditional development economics. The general policy prescriptions and strategies in this tradition have to be judged in terms of the climate of opinion and the over-all factual situation prevailing at the time these theories were formulated. Development economics was born at a time when government involvement in deliberately fostering economic growth in general, and industrialisation in particular, was very rare, and when the typical rates of capital accumulation were quite low. That situation has changed in many respects, and, while that may suggest the need to emphasise different issues, it does not in any way invalidate the wisdom of the strategies then suggested.

[1] For example, Little *et al.* (1971).

[2] Sen (1981 *b*), and the literature cited there, especially Datta-Chaudhuri (1979).

The point can be brought out with an example. In the 1952 paper of Hans Singer from which I have already quoted, one of the conclusions that Singer emphasised is the need to raise the then existing rate of saving. He argued, with some assumptions about production conditions, that to achieve even a 2% rate of *per capita* growth, with a population growing at 1·25% per year, 'a rate of net savings of $16\frac{1}{4}$% is necessary', and that 'this rate of saving is about three times the rate actually observed in underdeveloped countries' (Singer, 1952, pp. 397–8). The current average rate of saving is no longer a third of that figure, but substantially *higher* than the figure. The weighted average ratio of gross domestic saving for low-income developing countries is estimated to be about 22%, and that for middle-income developing countries about 25%; and, even after deducting for depreciation, Singer's target has certainly been exceeded. And, even with a faster growth of population than Singer anticipated, the weighted average of GDP growth rates *per capita* has been about $2\frac{1}{2}$% per year for low-income countries and more than 3% per year for middle-income countries over the 'seventies.[1]

The point of policy interest now is that, despite these *average* achievements, the performances of different countries are highly divergent. There is still much relevance in the broad policy themes which traditional development economics has emphasised. The strategies have to be adapted to the particular conditions and to national and international circumstances, but the time to bury traditional development economics has not yet arrived.

III. FAST GROWTH AND SLOW SOCIAL CHANGE

I believe the real limitations of traditional development economics arose not from the choice of means to the end of economic growth, but in the insufficient recognition that economic growth was no more than a means to some other objectives. The point is not the same as saying that growth does not matter. It may matter a great deal, but, if it does, this is because of some associated benefits that are realised in the process of economic growth.

It is important to note in this context that the same level of achievement in life expectancy, literacy, health, higher education, etc., can be seen in countries with widely varying income per capita. To take just one example, consider Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, China and Sri Lanka.[2]

China and Sri Lanka, with less than a seventh of GNP per head in Brazil or Mexico, have similar life expectancy figures to the two richer countries. South Korea, with its magnificent and much-eulogised growth record, has not yet overtaken China or Sri Lanka in the field of longevity, despite being now more than five times richer in terms of *per capita* GNP. If the government of a poor developing country is keen to raise the level of health and the expectation of life, then it would be pretty daft to try to achieve this through raising its income per head, rather than going directly for these objectives through public policy and social change, as China and Sri Lanka have both done.

[1] See tables 2, 5, and 17 of the *World Development Report 1982*.

[2] Taken from *World Development Report 1982*, table 1. The 1982 Chinese census indicates a higher expectation of life – around 69 years. The Sri Lankan figure of 66 years relates to 1971, and the current life expectancy is probably significantly higher.

Table 2

Country	Life expectancy at birth 1980 (years)	GNP per head, 1980 (U.S. dollars)
Brazil	63	2,050
China	64	290
Mexico	65	2,090
South Korea	65	1,520
Sri Lanka	66	270

Not merely is it the case that economic growth is a means rather than an end, it is also the case that for some important ends it is not a very efficient means either. In an earlier paper (Sen, 1981*b*) it was shown that had Sri Lanka been a typical developing country, trying to achieve its high level of life expectancy not through direct public action, but primarily through growth (in the same way as typical developing countries do), then it would have taken Sri Lanka – depending on assumptions – somewhere between 58 years and 152 years to get where it already now happens to be.[1] It might well be the case that 'money answereth all things', but the answer certainly comes slowly.

IV. ENTITLEMENTS AND CAPABILITIES

Perhaps the most important thematic deficiency of traditional development economics is its concentration on national product, aggregate income and total supply of particular goods rather than on 'entitlements' of people and the 'capabilities' these entitlements generate. Ultimately, the process of economic development has to be concerned with what people can or cannot do, e.g. whether they can live long, escape avoidable morbidity, be well nourished, be able to read and write and communicate, take part in literary and scientific pursuits, and so forth. It has to do, in Marx's words, with 'replacing the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances'.[2]

Entitlement refers to the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces. Entitlements are relatively simple to characterise in a purely market economy. If a person can, say, earn $200 by selling his labour power and other saleable objects he has or can produce, then his entitlements refer to the set of all commodity bundles costing no more than $200. He can buy any such bundle, but no more than that, and the limit is set by his ownership ('endowment') and his exchange possibilities ('exchange entitlement'), the two together determining his over-all entitlement.[3] On the basis of this entitle-

[1] See Sen (1981*b*), pp. 303–6. See also Jayawardena (1974), Marga Institute (1974), Isenman (1978), Alailima (1982), Gwatkin (1979).

[2] Marx and Engels (1846); English translation taken from McLellan (1977), p. 190.

[3] The notion of 'entitlements' is explored in Sen (1981*a*). It is worth emphasising here, to avoid misunderstandings that seem to have occurred in some discussions of the concept, that (1) 'exchange entitlement' is only a *part* of the entitlement picture and is incomplete without an account of ownership or endowment, and (2) 'exchange entitlement' includes not merely trade and market exchange but also the use of production possibilities (i.e. 'exchange with nature').

ment, a person can acquire some capabilities, i.e. the ability to do this or that (e.g. be well nourished), and fail to acquire some other capabilities. The process of economic development can be seen as a process of expanding the capabilities of people. Given the functional relation between entitlements of persons over goods and their capabilities, a useful – though derivative – characterisation of economic development is in terms of expansion of entitlements.[1]

For most of humanity, about the only commodity a person has to sell is labour power, so that the person's entitlements depend crucially on his or her ability to find a job, the wage rate for that job, and the prices of commodities that he or she wishes to buy. The problems of starvation, hunger and famines in the world could be better analysed through the concept of entitlement than through the use of the traditional variables of food supply and population size. The intention here is not, of course, to argue that the supply of goods – food in this case – is irrelevant to hunger and starvation, which would be absurd, but that the supply is just one influence among many; and, in so far as supply is important, it is so precisely because it affects the entitlements of the people involved, typically through prices. Ultimately, we are concerned with what people can or cannot do, and this links directly with their 'entitlements' rather than with over-all supplies and outputs in the economy.[2]

The failure to see the importance of entitlements has been responsible for millions of people dying in famines. Famines may not be at all anticipated in situations of good or moderate over-all levels of supply, but, notwithstanding that supply situation, acute starvation can hit suddenly and widely because of failures of the entitlement systems, operating through ownership and exchange. For example, in the Bangladesh famine of 1974, a very large number died in a year when food availability per head was at a peak – higher than in any other year between 1971 and 1975. The floods that affected agriculture did ultimately – much later than the famine – reduce the food output, but its first and immediate impact was on the rural labourers who lost jobs in planting and transplanting rice, and started starving long before the main crop that was affected was to be harvested. The problem was made worse by forces of inflation in the economy, reducing the purchasing power especially of rural labourers,

[1] Capabilities, entitlements and utilities differ from each other. I have tried to argue elsewhere that 'capabilities' provide the right basis for judging the advantages of a person in many problems of evaluation – a role that cannot be taken over either by utility or by an index of commodities (Sen, 1982*a*, pp. 29–38, 353–69). When we are concerned with such notions as the well-being of a person, or standard of living, or freedom in the positive sense, we need the concept of capabilities. We have to be concerned with what a person can do, and this is not the same thing as how much pleasure or desire fulfilment he gets from these activities ('utility'), nor what commodity bundles he can command ('entitlements'). Ultimately, therefore, we have to go not merely beyond the calculus of national product and aggregate real income, but also that of entitlements over commodity bundles viewed on their own. The focus on capabilities differs also from concentration on the mental metric of utilities, and this contrast is similar to the general one between pleasure, on the one hand, and positive freedom, on the other. The particular role of entitlements is *through* its effects on capabilities. It is a role that has substantial and far-reaching importance, but it remains derivative on capabilities. On these general issues, see Sen (1982*a*, *d*, 1983) and Kynch and Sen (1983).

[2] See Sen (1981*a*, *b*), Arrow (1982), Desai (1983).

who did not have the economic muscle to raise their money wages correspondingly.[1]

Entitlements may not operate only through market processes. In a socialist economy entitlements will depend on what the families can get from the state through the established system of command. Even in a non-socialist economy, the existence of social security – when present – makes the entitlements go substantially beyond the operation of market forces.

A major failing of traditional development economics has been its tendency to concentrate on supply of goods rather than on ownership and entitlement. The focus on growth is only one reflection of this. Extreme concentration on the ratio of food supply to population is another example of the same defective vision.[2] Recently the focus has shifted somewhat from growth of *total incomes* to the *distribution of incomes*. This may look like a move in the right direction, and indeed it is. But I would argue that 'income' itself provides an inadequate basis for analysing a person's entitlements. Income gives the means of buying things. It expresses buying power in terms of some scalar magnitude – given by one real number. Even if there are no schools in the village and no hospitals nearby, the income of the villager can still be increased by adding to his purchasing power over the goods that are available in the market. But this rise in income may not be able to deal at all adequately with his entitlement to education or medical treatment, since the rise in income as such guarantees no such thing.

In general, one real number reflecting some aggregate measure of market power can scarcely represent so complex a notion as entitlement. The power of the market force depends on relative prices and, as the price of some good rises, the hold of income on the corresponding entitlement weakens. With non-marketability, it slips altogether. In the extreme case, the entitlement to live, say, in a malaria-free environment is not a matter of purchase with income in any significant way.

In dealing with starvation and hunger, the focus on incomes – though defective – is not entirely disastrous. And of course it is a good deal better than the focus on total food output and population size. The weighting system of real income and cost-of-living pays sufficient attention to food in a poor community to make real income a moderately good 'proxy' for entitlement to food in most cases.[3] But when it comes to health, or education, or social equality, or self-respect, or freedom from social harassment, income is miles off the target.

[1] See Sen (1981*a*), chapter 9. Other examples of famines due to entitlement failure without a significant – indeed any – reduction of overall food availability can be found in chapter 6 (the Great Bengal Famine of 1943) and chapter 7 (the Ethiopian famine of 1973–4); see also chapter 7 (the Sahelian famines of the 1970s). On related matters, see also Sen (1976, 1977), Ghose (1979), Alamgir (1978, 1980), Chattopadhyay (1981), Oughton (1982), Ravallion (1983). See also Parikh and Rabar (1981) and Srinivasan (1982). Also the special number of *Development*, Aziz (1982).

[2] On this and related issues, see Aziz (1975), Taylor (1975), Griffin (1978), Sinha and Drabek (1978), Spitz (1978), Lappé and Collins (1979), George and Paige (1982), Rao (1982).

[3] However, the index of real income will continue to differ from the index of food entitlement since the price deflators will not be the same, though the two will often move together. A problem of a different sort arises from *intra*-family differences in food consumption (e.g. through 'sex bias'), as a result of which both the real income and the food entitlement of the family may be rather deceptive indicators of nutritional situations of particular members of the family. On this issue, see Bardhan (1974), Sen (1981*c*), Kynch and Sen (1983) and Sen and Sengupta (1983).

V. POLITICAL COMPLEXITIES

To move from concentrating on growth to supplementing that with an account of income distribution is basically an inadequate response to what is at issue. It is also, in effect, an attempt to refuse to come to terms with the complexity of entitlement relations. The metric of income, as already discussed, is much too crude. Indeed, entitlements related even to purely economic matters, e.g. that to food, may actually require us to go beyond the narrow limits of economics altogether.

Take the case of famine relief. A hungry, destitute person will be *entitled* to some free food *if* there is a relief system offering that. Whether, in fact, a starving person will have such an entitlement will depend on whether such a public relief operation will actually be launched. The provision of public relief is partly a matter of political and social pressure. Food is, as it were, 'purchased' in this context not with income but with political pressure. The Irish in the 1840s did not have the necessary political power. Nor did the Bengalis in the Great Bengal Famine of 1943. Nor the Ethiopians in Wollo in the famine of 1973. On the other hand, there are plenty of examples in the world in which timely public policy has averted an oncoming famine completely.

The operation of political forces affecting entitlements is far from simple. For example, with the present political system in India, it is almost impossible for a famine to take place. The pressure of newspapers and diverse political parties make it imperative for the government in power to organise swift relief. It has to act to retain credibility. No matter how and where famine threatens – whether with a flood or a drought, whether in Bihar in 1967–8, in Maharashtra in 1971–3, or in West Bengal in 1978 – an obligatory policy response prevents the famine actually occurring.

On the other hand, there is no such relief for the third of the Indian rural population who go to bed hungry every night and who lead a life ravaged by regular deprivation. The quiet presence of non-acute, endemic hunger leads to no newspaper turmoil, no political agitation, no riots in the Indian parliament. The system takes it in its stride.[1]

The position in China is almost exactly the opposite of this. On the one hand, the political commitment of the system ensures a general concern with eradicating regular malnutrition and hunger through more equal access to means of livelihood, and through entitlements *vis-à-vis* the state; and China's achievements in this respect have been quite remarkable. In a normal year, the Chinese poor are much better fed than the Indian poor. The expectation of life in China is between 66 and 69 years in comparison with India's miserable 52 years. On the other hand, if there is a political and economic crisis that confuses the regime and makes it pursue disastrous policies with confident dogmatism, then it cannot be forced to change its policies by crusading newspapers or by effective pressure from opposing political groups.

It is, in fact, now quite clear that in China during 1959–61 there were deaths

[1] See Sen (1982*b*, *c*).

on a very large scale due to famine conditions. The extent of the disaster has only recently become evident, even though there are still many uncertainties regarding the exact estimation of extra mortality.[1] Important mortality data were released in 1980 by Professor Zhu Zhengzhi of Beijing University,[2] indicating that the death rate rose from about 10·8 per thousand in 1957 to an average of 16·58 per thousand per year during 1958–61. This yields a figure of extra mortality of 14–16 million in China in the famine-affected years – a very large figure indeed. It is, in fact, very much larger than the extra mortality (calculated in the same way) even in the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 (namely about 3 million[3]), the largest famine in India in this century.

In 1981 the noted economist Sun Yefang released some further mortality data,[4] referring to 'the high price in blood' of the economic policy pursued at that time. He reported that the death rate per thousand had risen to as high as 25·4 in 1960, indicating an extra mortality of 9 million in that year alone. His figures for the four years also yields a total of around 15 million extra deaths during the Chinese famine of 1959–61.[5] Others have suggested even higher mortality.[6]

These are truly staggering figures. Even if we take a level quite a bit below the lower limit of the estimates, the sudden extra mortality caused by the famine[7] would still be on a scale that is difficult to match even in pre-independent India (and there has of course been no famine in India since independence).

Is it purely accidental that a famine – indeed one on an enormous scale – could take place in China while none has occurred in post-independent India? The contrast is particularly odd when viewed in the context of the undoubted fact that China has been very much more successful than India in eliminating regular malnutrition. There may well be an accidental element in the comparative records on famines, but as already noted (on page 757), on a number of occasions potentially large famines have been prevented in India through quick, extensive and decisive government intervention. Reports on deaths from hunger reach the government and the public quickly and dramatically through

[1] See Aird (1982), pp. 277–8.

[2] Zhu Zhengzhi (1980), pp. 54–5. These data have been analysed by Coale (1981). See also Bernstein (1983*b*).

[3] See Sen (1981*a*), Appendix D. In both cases the death rate immediately preceding the famine-affected year is taken as the bench mark in comparison with which the 'extra' mortality in famine-affected years are calculated.

[4] Sun Yefang (1981) and People's Republic of China (1981).

[5] See Bernstein (1983*a*, *b*).

[6] See Bernstein's (1983*b*) account of the literature. See also Aird (1980). For a description of the intensity of the famine in a particular commune (the Liyuan Commune in Anhui province), see Research Group of the Fen Yang County Communist Party Committee (1983). 'The commune's population of 5,730 people in 1957 had dropped to 2,870 people in 1961. More than half died of starvation [*e si*] or fled the area. . . . In 1955, the Houwang production team was a model elementary co-operative. The village had twenty-eight families, a total of 154 people. . . . fifty-nine people starved to death [*e si*], and the survivors fled the area' (p. 36).

[7] The number of deaths due to a famine must not be confused with the number actually dying of starvation, since most people who die in a famine tend to die from other causes (particularly from diseases endemic in the region) to which they become more susceptible due to undernutrition, and also due to breakdown of sanitary arrangements, exposure due to wandering, eating non-eatables, and other developments associated with famines. See Sen (1981*a*), pp. 203–16.

active newspapers, and are taken up vigorously by parties not in power. Faced with a threatening famine, any government wishing to stay in office in India is forced to abandon or modify its on-going economic policy, and meet the situation with swift public action, e.g. redistribution of food within the country, imports from abroad, and widespread relief arrangements (including food for work programmes).

Policy failures in China during the famine years (and the Great Leap Forward period), which have been much discussed in China only recently, relate not merely to factors that dramatically reduced output, but also to distributional issues, e.g. inter-regional balances, and the draconian procurement policy that was apparently pursued relentlessly despite lower agricultural output.[1] Whatever the particular policy errors, the government in power was not forced to re-examine them, nor required to face harrowing newspaper reports and troublesome opposition parties. The contrast may not, therefore, be purely accidental.

In an interesting and important speech given in 1962 – just after the famine – Chairman Mao made the following remarks to a conference of 7,000 cadres from different levels: 'If there is no democracy, if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. . . . Without democracy, you have no understanding of what is happening down below; the situation will be unclear; you will be unable to collect sufficient opinions from all sides; there can be no communication between top and bottom; top-level organs of leadership will depend on one-sided and incorrect material to decide issues, thus you will find it difficult to avoid being subjectivist; it will be impossible to achieve unity of understanding and unity of action, and impossible to achieve true centralism.'[2] Ralph Miliband (1977), who has provided an illuminating and far-reaching analysis of the issue of democracy in capitalist and socialist societies from a Marxist perspective, points out that Mao's 'argument for "democracy" is primarily a "functional" one' (pp. 149–50), and argues that this is an inadequate basis for understanding the need for 'socialist democracy'.[3] That more general question certainly does remain, but it is worth emphasising that even the purely 'functional' role of democracy can be very crucial to matters of life and death, as the Chinese experiences of the famine of 1959–61 bring out.[4]

Finally, it is important to note that the protection that the Indian poor get from the active news distribution system and powerful opposition parties has very severe limits. The deprivation has to be dramatic to be 'newsworthy' and politically exploitable (see Sen, 1982*c*). The Indian political system may

[1] See Bernstein (1983*b*), who also argues that the harsh procurement policies in China did not have the ideologically 'anti-peasant' character that similar policies in the USSR did during 1932–3, but reflected 'erroneous' reading of the level of output and of the economic situation.

[2] Mao Zedong (1974), p. 164.

[3] Miliband goes on to argue: 'Much may be claimed for the Chinese experience. But what cannot be claimed for it, on the evidence, is that it has really begun to create the institutional basis for the kind of socialist democracy that would effectively reduce the distance between those who determine policy and those on whose behalf it is determined' (p. 151).

[4] The Soviet famines of the 1930s and the Kampuchean famine of more recent years provide further evidence of penalties of this lacuna.

prevent famines but, unlike the Chinese system, it seems unable to deal effectively with endemic malnutrition. In a normal year when things are running smoothly both in India and China, the Indian poor is in a much more deprived general state than his or her Chinese counterpart.[1]

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I shall not try to summarise the main points of the paper, but I will make a few concluding remarks to put the discussion in perspective.

First, traditional development economics has not been particularly unsuccessful in identifying the factors that lead to economic growth in developing countries. In the field of causation of growth, there is much life left in traditional analyses (Section II).

Secondly, traditional development economics has been less successful in characterising economic development, which involves expansion of people's capabilities. For this, economic growth is only a means and often not a very efficient means either (Section III).

Thirdly, because of close links between entitlements and capabilities, focusing on entitlements – what commodity bundles a person can command – provides a helpful format for characterising economic development. Supplementing data on GNP *per capita* by income distributional information is quite inadequate to meet the challenge of development analysis (Section IV).

Fourthly, famines and starvation can be more sensibly analysed in terms of entitlement failures than in terms of the usual approach focusing on food output per unit of population. A famine can easily occur even in a good food supply situation, through the collapse of entitlements of particular classes or occupation groups (Section IV).

Fifthly, a study of entitlements has to go beyond purely economic factors and take into account political arrangements (including pressure groups and news distribution systems) that affect people's actual ability to command commodities, including food. These influences may be very complex and may also involve apparently perplexing contrasts, e.g. between (1) India's better record than China's in avoiding famines, and (2) India's total failure to deal with endemic malnutrition and morbidity in the way China has been able to do (Section V). Whether the disparate advantages of the contrasting systems can be effectively combined is a challenging issue of political economy that requires attention. Much is at stake.

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[1] The crude death rate in China in 1980 was reported to be 8 per thousand in contrast with India's 14 (*World Development Report 1982*, table 18, p. 144). Only in famine situations did the reported death rate in China (e.g. 25·4 reported in 1960) exceed that in India.

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