Republican Freedom and Amartya Sen's Theory of Capabilities[*]

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I have two main aims in this article, first of which is to locate the points of commonality between republicanism as developed by Philip Pettit[1] and Amartya Sen's theory of capabilities. Broadly construed, these two theories are 'cousins' and their commonality is grounded on the fact that both find the liberal conception of freedom as non-interference to be insufficient for an adequate political theory. Freedom, according to Pettit and Sen, is not merely the absence of interference from the state or fellow citizens, but the presence of suitable conditions for the realisation of citizens' capabilities. This implies that the realisation of freedom does not require that we be against interferences per se. Certain qualified forms of 'interferences' for redistributive purposes and for the provision of public goods may be tolerated so as to achieve the greatest possible extent of freedom for all citizens. When these interventions are capabilities-promoting for everyone, and are guaranteed to take place non-arbitrarily under the purview of a fair rule of law and in compliance with human rights, they can hardly be considered as interferences in the negative sense of the term.

My second aim is to explore whether Sen's theory of capabilities can be socially and politically radicalised by endorsing the robustness condition of freedom and the idea of the common good which are central to republicanism. I want to argue that while these two elements may not be lacking from the capability paradigm, they however do not receive the same direct and forceful consideration as they do in the republican tradition. A capability theorist may eventually come to endorse them, but may hesitate to endorse them as part of the conception of freedom. I try to show that a theoretical exploration and extension along these dimensions would not only be within the objectives of the capability theory, but would also have significant implications for social justice, development issues and political practice.

The arguments of the article are organised into three parts. First, following a brief review of the central tenets of republicanism, Sen's theory is scrutinised particularly for its strength and weakness to address conditions of domination. Second, I revisit the exchange between Pettit (2001) and Sen (2001) on the difference between republicanism and the capability theory, and suggest how the capability theory can accommodate the robustness condition of freedom within its own theoretical framework. Third, in the light of the republican conception of the common good, I assess the possibility of representing capabilities and individual freedom as intimately related to the freedom of the community as a whole.[2]

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I. CAPABILITIES AND THE QUESTION OF DOMINATION

Republicanism, particularly the variant developed and advocated by Pettit is founded on a distinct conception of freedom, freedom as non-domination (Pettit 1999). An agent is said to be free, on this account, when he or she is not subject to any form of domination. On a general understanding, domination is the imposition of one's will on another. It can arise not only from government and its various institutions (*imperium*), but also from individuals and groups in society outside of government (*dominium*). A standard justification for the government and its coercive power is that it can reduce violations of freedom by non-government agents and agencies. Yet there is the concern of the government itself begetting domination. As noted by Walzer (1983) and subsequently elaborated by Miller (1999: 21-41) to different kinds of human relationship, domination can occur when the goods of one social sphere influence the distributive patterns of another sphere, when for example money buys votes, social status secures high level jobs and public offices, and universities toe the line of political or religious powers. An ideal polity is one which seeks to minimize or eliminate dominations of both sorts – imperium and dominium, and upholds the plurality of distributive principles such as need, desert, equality and free exchange relevant to each sphere and modes of human relationship.

On a more comprehensive explanation, however, domination is not merely the imposition of one's will on another, but doing so on an "arbitrary" basis, without regard for the interest and well-being of the agent. This implies that even though the dominator does not at present interfere, so long as he possesses the capacity and the possibility to interfere with the agent he exerts domination over him. Consider for instance the condition of the slave of a benevolent master. Owing to the benevolence of the master or his own cleverness to dodge such a slave may not actually be interfered with in his choices. And yet the situation of the slave is obnoxious and one of domination because he is at the mercy of the master and the little or great things he is able to accomplish are conditional on the favour and the good will of his master.

Pettit contrasts the republican conception of freedom as non-domination with the notion of freedom as non-interference traceable to Hobbes (Pettit 1999: 37-44; Skinner 1998: 4-10). According to Hobbes, people are unfree only to the extent they are physically coerced or interfered with. In *Leviathan*, Chapter 14, he writes: "By LIBERTY is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external Impediments: which impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what he would" (Hobbes 1985: 189). Such a depiction of freedom – freedom literally understood as the absence of physical coercion – is reflected in Hobbes' attitude to law. For Hobbes, the law is seen an intrusion into people's lives, and therefore, the extent of people's liberty depends on what he calls the "silence of the Law". As long as there are no laws to which you must conform and obey, you remain in full possession of your freedom. "In cases where the Soveraign has prescribed no rule there the Subject hath the liberty to do, or forebeare according to his own discretion" (Hobbes 1985: 271). In short, Hobbes advocates the view that people remain free as subjects only if they are neither physically nor legally coerced. It is important to underscore that Hobbes is not a liberal. Skinner (1998: 6) and other historians would place him in the company of Royalists and authoritarian thinkers. Nevertheless he seemed to have anticipated the idea of freedom as non-interference espoused to varying degrees by different versions of liberalism.

From the republican point of view, freedom as non-domination differs from and in some sense more fundamental and encompassing than the notion of freedom as non-interference at least on two counts. First, non-interference by other agents whether by the state or by fellow citizens is insufficient for freedom if and when these other agents retain the power to exercise arbitrary interference even though this may not be presently exercised. Second, non-interference may be irrelevant for freedom particularly when the forms of interference envisaged are non-arbitrary and track people's common recognisable interests.[3] One of the recognised and proven means by which the end of non-arbitrariness is sought to be secured is through laws. For this reason, laws play a crucial role in the republican polity and are viewed in quite a different light than the way Hobbes sees them. The Hobbesian account of freedom sees laws as essentially interfering with people's actions and thus as minimizing the degree of freedom people may come to have. As Skinner (1998: 5) characteristically puts it, for Hobbes and his modern liberal followers, "where law ends, liberty begins." By contrast, in Pettit's account of freedom, the law can in principle bring about and increase freedom by restraining or preventing potential dominators. The laws of a well-ordered republic may reduce the number of choices available to a person, but insofar as they are non-arbitrary they will not compromise on people's freedom. While faulty legislations and arbitrary interpretation and enforcement of laws can themselves generate or reinforce domination, the aim of the republican polity is to avoid such foreseeable dangers through the constitutional separation of powers and a deliberative approach to collective decision-making.

As with republicanism, one of the motivational departures of Sen's theory of capabilities is discontent with the liberal notion of freedom as non-interference. In his "entitlement approach" to the economic analysis of famines, Sen showed that millions of people die during famines not so much because there is a decline of food production or availability, but due to the loss of "entitlements" and "purchasing power" to acquire food (Sen 1980; 1999: 160-88). Neither in alleviating nor in understanding the complexities involved in the causes of famines and other such societal failures has the ideal of non-interference proved sufficient or useful. It is no less than a social irony that during famines freedom as non-interference could be perfectly honoured with no interferences from the government or fellow citizens. Yet famines can be overcome or prevented in the first place by appropriate interventionist economic policies which protect people's entitlements and by a functioning democracy with vibrant opposition and a critical press which can elicit swift response on the part of the government. This is the basis for Sen's thesis: No famine has ever occurred in the history of the world in a functioning democracy (Sen 1999: 16). Despite its own share of imperfections and limitations, a democratic regime still bears the power to reduce the physical, social and moral space between individuals and groups which were taken for granted in the erstwhile regimes of hierarchy and social classes. Indifference and inaction to the plight of fellow citizens would be today considered morally inappropriate for a decent democratic society.

In his various writings on what is now known as the "capability approach"[4] to well-being or the quality of life, Sen has argued that development should be viewed as a process of expanding the "real freedom" of people. Real freedom, for Sen, consists in the person's "capability to achieve valuable human functionings" (Sen 1992; 1999).[5] Hence measuring real freedom in terms of indicators such as life expectancy, literacy and educational attainments, levels of nutrition, access to health care, employment, social respect and political participation are central to assessing how individuals and societies are faring. This differs from the traditional economic approaches which focus merely on "income", "resources" or "aggregative economic growth" as indicators of successful development. Sen's real freedom approach also differs from liberal approaches that focus on formal or negative rights without paying attention to people's capability requirements and their material and welfare conditions which are essential to make an effective use of their rights. The right to free speech and political participation, for instance, would be rendered meaningless if people are uneducated and illiterate. The right to employment would continue to remain a formal right when it is not accompanied by a matching level of skills and talents to derive benefits from it. It becomes therefore imperative to distinguish between having a formal right to something and having the required capacities and conditions to exercise that right effectively in protecting one's interests or pursuing one's goals.

Sen's emphasis on people's "real freedom" reveals a deep connection with the republican critique of freedom as non-interference. In a capabilities-oriented reasoning, a person who is poor, uneducated, unemployed, afflicted by a preventable disease or socially excluded might strictly speaking encounter no interference from the state or fellow citizens, but he or she lacks the required capacities and conditions to live a life of real freedom. Moreover, redistributive policies, social security and the provision of public goods involve some degree of intervention by the government. Even the most basic form of interference such as taxing some to give to others entails interference. But other more substantial forms of redistribution such as land ownership, education and political offices require a greater degree of interference in the lives of citizens. In these matters, where libertarians and *laissez-faire* liberals have favoured unconditional property rights and market freedoms, Sen has insisted on regulated markets and redistributive policies (Sen 1988; 1999: 123-26). Sen upholds property rights and finds them indispensable for individual freedom. But if unqualified property rights directly or indirectly cause famines and starvation, and are found to be responsible for environmental problems and aggressive depletion of natural resources, they should be balanced with other equally valuable rights such as the human right not to die of hunger.

It is somewhat puzzling that despite its shared features with the republican critique of non-interference, Sen's theory does not represent non-domination as its central concern. Nor does Sen explicitly enlist people's important capabilities, and the required built-in mechanisms or institutional safeguards so as to secure some of people's basic capabilities against the capriciousness of potential dominators. In many instances of entrenched inequalities and power relations, it turns out that the enhancement of people's various capabilities are necessary but they may not be sufficient for effectively overcoming conditions of domination. To put it more explicitly, when people are poor, illiterate, unhealthy and so on, and as a result, lack certain basic capabilities for leading a life of their choice, they are vulnerable and subject to various forms of exploitation and domination. Consequently, any improvement in their capability prospects can empower them to get rid of destitution and poverty; it can also give them the confidence necessary to resist any arbitrary interference and domination. This however seems to come short of a more radical approach that directly tackles dominating social relations and power structures.

The lack of radicalism in Sen's approach, as Bagchi (2000) points out, can be partly accounted for from the fact that Sen's interest has been mainly on how institutions affect the "exchange entitlements" of individuals, overlooking or only indirectly targeting "relationships of production and domination" in the household, workplaces and society at large. Bagchi argues that in order to comprehend the well-being and freedom of a garment worker in sweatshop conditions in India or Bangladesh for example, it is not enough to look at her own health or the health and education of her children. It is also crucial to view it as part of the competition and survival under existing dominating relationship generated by capitalism. A moral analysis that overlooks this may run the danger of viewing the sweatshop worker functioning as a capable human being (Bagchi 2000: 4418).

A similar apprehension has been voiced by feminist thinkers who find that socially entrenched forms of gender discrimination can be overcome not only by empowering women's capabilities, but also simultaneously ensuring that the enjoyment of these capabilities is not dependent on the favour and the goodwill of others – and particularly in this case on the male members in the family, work and society. Women's capability deprivation is a result of compound factors. While some are due to economic factors such as the lack of income and command over resources, others however are due to the socio-cultural factors of a male-biased power relationship. As Phillips (2000) has shown, feminism in recent times is increasingly reclaiming the republican tradition particularly because the republican critique of dependency and domination speaks to the many dominating situations of women and positively lends an ideological support to the aspirations of women's movement politics. This has also in some ways helped to rework and transform earlier antagonisms as republicanism in its classical Greek formulation was anything but women-inclusive and women-friendly. Referring for instance to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Phillips points out that what bothered Wollstonecraft was not so much the poverty or the miserable working conditions of women, but their dependency on and domination by men. Women were the victims of deeply-ingrained stereotypes about their intelligence, sexuality and social status and were encouraged to get their way through flattery and deceit rather than through rightful demands.

Even feminist thinkers who view Sen's capability theory as quite hospitable to develop a project of gender justice find it wanting in this respect, although the arguments they make are not exclusively feminist (Nussbaum 2002; Anderson 1999; Robeyns 2003; Hill 2003). As pointed out later in the third section, people who seek to advance social justice to other vulnerable groups on the basis of race, caste and culture would be able to relate to their discontent. The capabilities-based feminists thinkers particularly point out that because Sen leaves it open and is hesitant to take a stand on what should be considered as important capabilities, the capability theory is vulnerable to andocentric specifications and applications. For example, Nussbaum (2000; 2003) who has philosophised Sen's approach by showing its connection to Aristotle's moral and political philosophy argues that Sen's theory of capabilities can help us construct a normative conception of gender justice, and social justice in general only when it espouses a definite set of capabilities as the most important ones to protect. Without an assurance and security of people's basic entitlements, Sen's theory tends to remain vague and vulnerable. In view of overcoming this weakness, Nussbaum therefore has put forward a list of (ten) capabilities. On the basis of a similar kind of reasoning, Anderson (1999) delineates three important spheres of basic capabilities which could be stipulated as the foundation for a polity of democratic equality. Robeyns (2003) is at first critical of the approaches that stipulate a definite list or spheres of capabilities. She therefore makes a detour of a procedural approach that suggests a set of 'criteria' (cultural sensitivity, methodological justification, etc.) for the selection of relevant capabilities. However, by using these criteria she also comes up with a list of capabilities for the purpose of analysing gender inequality in Western societies.

The concerns expressed by the critics as well as those working within the capability framework seem to be further justified when we also look at the pernicious influence that dominating social relations can have on the overall functioning of democracy. Democratic institutions and the process of public discussion which are to work in favour of everyone including the worse off in society are twisted and distorted to work to the advantage of a powerful few. In a typical micro-level setting – village or town councils, for example – landlords, businesspeople and local elites tend to dominate, even when other participants are not so badly off in terms of basic capabilities of nutrition, education, health, political participation and so on. At the national or macrolevel public discussions, it is the rich industrialists, multinational corporations, the well-educated and well-placed who tend to dominate and steer the course and outcome of public discussion. As the general thrust of the capability literature seems to suggest, a substantial goal in the face of all these power imbalances and asymmetries is to enhance the educational, health, income-earning and professional capabilities of women, the poor and the underdogs of society, since the enhancement of their capabilities would eventually empower them to resist domination and subjugation by others. However, as republicanism urges, a more demanding goal is to pay attention to the robustness condition that secures certain basic freedoms against arbitrary power and domination, and to envision individual freedom as intimately linked to the common good of the community as a whole.

II. THE ROBESTNESS CONDITION OF FREEDOM

In an appraisal of the freedom entailed in Sen's theory of capabilities, Pettit criticises it for not making freedom to be "context-independently effective" (Pettit 2001). He argues that while it is important to concentrate on the extent of the real or effective freedom people have to choose from various functionings, it is equally important to know whether this is dependent on the favour or the goodwill of dominating individual or institutional agents. Pettit therefore insists that for a fuller intent of freedom, Sen's theory should also satisfy what he calls the "robustness" or "context-independence" condition. So goes his rationale for this demand:

> Imagine that you have a disposition to choose between A and B that is content-independently decisive but that your enjoyment of such decisive preference depends on the goodwill of those around you. You are not powerful enough in relation to them to be sure of your preference's being decisive regardless of their wishes. You have a decisive preference only so far as you enjoy the grace and favour of those others. You can get A or you can get B, depending on your preference, but that this is so is due to their allowing it to be so. Whatever you obtain as result of your preferences, then, you obtain by virtue of your good fortune in having masters or betters who look kindly on you; by virtue of your success in securing their complacence; or by virtue of your cunning in managing to avoid their notice. You may be said to have decisive preferences but their decisiveness is favour-dependent. (Pettit 2001: 6)

Pettit however does not find the missing element detrimental to the capability perspective as this could be derived from Sen's own ideas on the agency aspect of the person. In assessing the extent of the real freedom that a person enjoys, Sen has argued that it is essential to pay attention to both "well-being" and "agency" aspects (Sen 1985). Well-being refers to individual's own advantage, where advantage can be assessed in terms of valuable states of being such as being well-nourished, healthy, decently educated and so on. Agency on the other hand, refers to the different ways the persons themselves act and exercise their choice to achieve valuable states of being including goals, commitments and obligations whose outcome need not be advantageous to the agents themselves. For Sen, there are substantial connections between the two, and most often the proven way to enhance people's well-being is to follow the 'agency' and 'participation' route (Sen 1999: 189-92). For example, it has been shown that women's well-being in developing countries is tremendously improved by such things as women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to be literate, to be informed participants in decision-making within and outside the family, and to have ownership rights. Consequently, an improved state of well-being can also further reinforce women's voices and agency and positively enhance the social standing of women in the household and family. Empirical studies establish that even infant mortality and overpopulation are more effectively tackled by agency and participatory approaches of educating and empowering women than through some coercive health policies. Pettit therefore suggests that the republican demand for context-independence can be considered satisfied by Sen's engagement not just with well-being but also with agency and participation.

In his reply to Pettit's appraisal, Sen acknowledges the need for a context-dependence analysis and of the policy implications such analysis can have for the government and fellow citizens. As he puts its: "Even if one gets what one wants, indeed even if one invariably gets whatever one wants, … it would still be relevant to know whether this effectiveness is dependent on the help or goodwill or favour of others" (Sen 2001: 53). Furthermore, Sen agrees that context or favour independence is crucial for addressing people's "adaptive preferences". As in the case of the slave of a benevolent master discussed earlier, a battered housewife for instance can appear to increase her freedom as long as she can adjust her expectations to the wishes of her abusive husband on whose favour she depends.

Yet, Sen makes it clear that the capability theory does not need any modification since the republican demand for context-independence, according to him, is primarily concerned with the "robustness" of freedom and not with its "existence and content" (Sen 2001). Moreover, Sen finds that in some situations the robustness condition may not be the most important thing to achieve. To illustrate his standpoint, Sen presents the example of a person who is neither in a position to establish her own school nor has any considerable influence on public policy for the establishment of a school in the region, but nevertheless would greatly benefit if one were to be set up; her freedom to be educated would indeed be increased by such a situation. He contrasts this with a second sort of situation where there are no schools and no freedom for the person to be educated. Sen points out that while republicanism tends to treat these two situations similarly, the theory of capabilities can consider them as distinct, even though in neither situation can the person bring about her schooling independently of the goodwill or support of others. Hence he holds the position that we require both approaches to attend to the different dimensions of freedom.

> I would argue that we need both the capability approach and the republican approach to point to different aspects of freedom. The former approach concentrates on whether someone is actually free and able to achieve those functionings that she has reason to want, and the latter on whether the capability enjoyed is conditional on the favours and the goodwill of others. (Sen 2001: 55).

Sen's conclusion that the capability theory and republicanism are aiming at different aspects of freedom raises at least two further considerations. First, by stating that the difference between the capability theory and republicanism is one of "existence" versus "robustness" of freedom, Sen gives the impression that the robustness condition is something extraneous, a decorative coating that comes over and above the basic freedoms that people come to have. In many situations of dire wants as it were we might do without it. Human experience, however, seems to indicate that this is often not the case or at least we would not want it to be so. The fulfilment of even some of the most basic things such as people's need for food, shelter, sustenance, health care and education should be visualised in conjunction with the exercise of people's own agency and effort in achieving them. They ought to be realised in a way that respects human dignity and people's capacity for reciprocity. In a number of places, Sen himself has alluded to this ethical experience. For example, he emphasised the importance of agency and reciprocity even in famine relief and poverty reduction programmes. Instead of just distributing food and welfare, it is more dignified to link these to some public work and employment. Indeed, beneficiaries would be resentful and feel humiliated, if the welfare compensation dispensed to them is condescending and involves absolutely no reciprocity on their part (Sen 1999: 177-78). Agency and dignity are also the rationale behind Sen's defence of human rights and their universal significance particularly against the argument and belief that the so-called Asian values can override them (Sen 1999: 227-35; 2006). For Sen, human rights including some economic rights to decent living standards are entitlements that need to be assured to everyone irrespective of the culture and country they are in, and promoting them would mean enabling people to act agents. Hence it seems only reasonable to demand that the robustness condition of freedom be construed not as some additional or optional superstructure of freedom, but as being intrinsic to the very enjoyment of basic freedoms.

Second, a capabilities-based reasoning itself offers good arguments and ample justifications as to why we should try to secure various capabilities through constitutional and institutional safeguards, instead of leaving them open and undetermined (Pettit 2001). We may for instance think of various guarantees for education since education is important not only for the career prospects of individuals, but also from the viewpoint of their effective citizenship. When citizens are endowed with intellectual skills and various ranges of epistemic capacities they are equipped to participate in the polity on equal terms. Often enough, it is when they are ignorant and uneducated that citizens become most vulnerable to deception and exploitation. The level of education and the kind of guarantees sought for securing it to all citizens would no doubt vary from country to country and the level of economic prosperity the country in question is in. Yet that there should be some sort of guarantee and security to education without subjecting it to the vagaries of the market or to other social and political forces is what is at the core of a republican polity.

A similar defence can be advanced as to why there should be some threshold levels of social security against poverty, unemployment and illness. When human life can be upset by accidents and reversals which are beyond one's control, not only the poor but even the moderately well-off citizens would find it difficult to cope up without falling below a normal level of functionings. The consideration of minimizing, if not totally eliminating the effects of misfortunes provides enough justification for creating various forms of social safety networks. They also provide sufficient rationale for providing them in a manner that respects human dignity so that the access to these services does not depend on the arbitrary will of those who design and manage them. Again, just like education and other resources, the extent of coverage envisaged by social safety nets will much depend on the society under consideration. A society can, for instance, provide such assurance and security by requiring every member to subscribe to some insurance scheme, or providing such insurance itself, or opting for a mixture of both. The point to insist here is that instead of leaving them to the charitable and good intentions of private individuals and community, we ought to make sure that at least some established practices and norms, institutional and legal safeguards are in place so as to provide immunity rights in these areas.

It will not be surprising to learn that people who will derive advantage from such stable and publicly acceptable arrangements are not only the beneficiaries, but also its benefactors, people who contribute to social benefits. Citizens who through taxation or other ways contribute to them would be willing to do so particularly when they are grounded on regular, reliable and commonly recognised procedures and not on some random and arbitrary arrangements. Moreover, accommodating the requirement for a non-arbitrary access to social benefits whether for education or social security is not something antagonistic to the objectives of the capability theory. It is quite compatible with them and in fact would help advance them much more effectively as it will generate a "common knowledge" among citizens of what they owe to each other, and of possibilities of redress if and when these are arbitrarily deprived.

III. THE IDEA OF THE COMMON GOOD

We have been noting that, even though non-domination is not embodied as the central concern of a capabilities-motivated approach, there are compelling reasons for securing people's capabilities against arbitrary power and control, and incorporating this aspect of freedom not as something supplementary, but as an integral part of freedom. The fact that both republicanism and the theory of capabilities are opposed to reducing freedom to non-interference and are focused on the agency of the person lends the possibility for such a theoretical endeavour. Now we need to look at the republican notion of the common good and consider different ways of envisioning a stronger bond between individual freedom and the freedom of the community as a whole. As it is argued here, it is not that the capability theory lacks such a conception and therefore we need to 'import' it from republicanism. It is possible to derive the notion of the common good implied in Sen's approach by looking at his focus on the 'institutional' base for the enhancement of individual capabilities and his appeal to values such as justice, fairness, commitment, trust, solidarity and civic duty that support various social institutions (Sen 1977). Yet what is aimed at here is to study whether the idea of the common good as envisaged and articulated in republicanism can provide a more persuasive justification in realising the objectives of the capability approach.

One of the best keys to understand what "the common good" means in the republican theory and how it is sought to be identified in the political practice of an electoral-constitutional democracy is to recognise the intimate relationship between a "free citizen" and a "free state" (Pettit 1999: 120-26; Skinner 1998: 23-36). Individual freedom, in the republican perspective, is embedded in the background of what it implies for the whole "political community" or the "state" to be free: only in a free state or a free government, it is possible for individuals to be free. A state is said to be unfree when it for instance finds itself subject to the will of another state through conquest or colonisation. But the state can equally find itself unfree when its internal constitution permits rulers to exercise any "prerogative" or "veto" power which itself does not arise from the will of the citizens as a whole. If such were the case, then the state and all individual citizens in it ought to be considered unfree even if citizens individually are able to do and accomplish a number of things. Hence in the republican mode of thinking, individual freedom is inextricably linked to the "self-government" of the state. For some liberals who insist on making a departure from individual rights and freedom, this might seem somewhat wrong-headed, but a closer look reveals that it is not so. It is not that individual freedom is overlooked or trivialized but instead it is considered a benefit assured to every citizen of the free state. Along with other advantages such as sustenance, wealth, property, social recognition and civic honours, individual freedom is a by-product of a well-ordered and non-dominating government.

Analogically, the common good in the republican sense may come to share the traits of the "public goods" that are referred to in standard welfare economics, but it is not quite the same. Public goods are such that they are non-rival and non-excludable in the sense that they are consumed collectively and once they are in place individuals cannot prevent others benefiting from them. A particular public good is common because it can only be provided effectively on a collective basis. For example, it is not practically possible or even efficient to make the streets safe for some people without making it safe for everyone. Yet the value of the good of safety does not directly depend on being collective or common. If it were possible to provide safety and security to people on a non-collective basis its value to people would not be any the less. Public transport, parks, museums, national defence etc may be cited as other examples of public goods. In contrast to these, the common good, as the republican tradition construes it, is one where its value is inseparable from what makes it common. An analogy that closely reflects the republican idea of the common good is friendship. The most telling trait that is important in friendship is not the fact that it necessarily involves more than one person since many non-common goods in this sense require more than one individual or a community for their enjoyment. Instead, what makes it fundamentally distinct is the fact that the good of friendship is constituted by its commonality. Goods such as language and culture would also belong to the group of common goods. Following Taylor's (1995) depiction of "irreducibly social goods", we can say that what makes a common good different from a public good in the economic sense is its "indecomposable" nature. Although most of the time a public good is provided collectively, to a group of people or to a community as a whole, and in fact it is efficient to provide it so, it can in principle be decomposed or separated into goods of individuals. This however cannot be the case with the common good as it is a feature of a community or society rather than individuals. Just as friendship, the common goods of language and culture are interwoven with a community and cannot be reduced to individual occurrences. These are "authoritative horizons" of meanings against which individual identity and freedom can be properly comprehended. It is in this sense of the common good that Pettit thinks non-domination becomes a common good in the republican polity.

The intimate and non-contingent character of the relation between individual freedom and the freedom of the political community as a whole visualised in republicanism is further reiterated by the way the common good is sought to be identified in the republican polity. Pettit points out that something can be recognised as a common good when it can be ascertained as people's "common avowable interests" of citizens. An interest, according to Pettit, is "avowable" if it is conscious or can be brought to consciousness without great efforts and that it is "common" insofar as cooperatively admissible considerations supports its collective provision. Furthermore, since the common good is equivalent to the common interests that people have *qua* citizens of a polity it cannot be the prerogative of authorities or experts to lead the public to such public interests. Nor can it be thought of merely in terms of some predetermined substantive content such as the maximization of utility construed in some variant of utilitarian notion. It is in the very nature of the common good that it be tracked and justified by public judgements and debates rather than private or parochial reasoning. Identification and justification of the common good requires active participation from every citizen, even if to varying degrees.

At the core of Sen's theory of capabilities is the idea that individual freedom has an important social dimension and requires what Sen calls a concerted and relentless "social commitment" to appreciate it and promote it. "Freedom," he says, "is one of the greatest social ideas" (Sen 1992: 69). Sen emphasises the social dimension of freedom by calling attention to the fact that society's various institutions affect the capability prospect of individuals. To a large extent, the kind and extent of opportunities we have to do things that we might want to do and to live a life that we have reason to value depend on what institutions exist and how effectively they function. Problems such as malnutrition, infant mortality, unemployment, gender discrimination and social exclusion should be seen more as the lack of or malfunctioning of appropriate institutions rather as something exclusively related to the capacities of individual agents. As Sen (1999: 297) puts it: "A wide variety of social institutions – related to the operations of the markets, administrations, legislatures, political parties, nongovernmental organisations, the judiciary, the media, and community in general – contribute to the process of development precisely through their effect on enhancing and sustaining individual freedom." It is important therefore to reiterate the institutional emphasis of Sen's thought especially in view of the fact that many current discussions of Sen's literature tend to overemphasize the concept of capabilities, overlooking that Sen has been equally concerned about social, economic and political institutions which play a crucial role in determining people's capability prospects.

Moreover, as part of his institutional approach, Sen brings to light the importance of values that sustain society's various institutions. The success of a capitalist economy is sometimes exclusively credited to competition and market mechanism, failing to realize that markets do and can work effectively only when there are firm foundations of moral values and non-market institutions. Political and legal structures that protect and promote rights issuing from contracts are imperative for a smooth operation of the market. A general conducive climate of mutual trust and business ethics is indispensable for market success (Sen 2002a: 501-530). Sen therefore insists that a comprehensive analysis of the functioning and the alleged success of a purely capitalist economy would have to take note of the role of moral values in personal behaviour and institutional arrangements.

Conversely, Sen has also emphasized the potential of democracy and public reasoning in value-construction. For example, the exercise of political freedoms such as public criticisms and protests are not only useful in demanding a policy response towards urgent economic needs, but also the public debates and discussions that accompany them play a 'formative' or 'educative' role even in conceptualising and prioritising these economic needs. As Sen expresses it: "The practice of democracy gives citizens an opportunity to learn from one another, and helps society to form its values and priorities" (Sen 1999c: 10). To come back once again to the issue of famines that we have referred to earlier, even underlying Sen's thesis that "there has never been a famine in a functioning multi-party democracy" we can discern an underlying process of solidarity and value-construction (Alexander 2005). It is generally the case that the percentage of the potential victims of famines in a country or region is relatively small – often it is between 5-10 per cent of the total population. Strictly speaking, if this comparatively smaller percentage of population does not vote for the government, it need not fall. And yet, in a functioning democracy, why does famine pose a big threat to the government and demands action on its part? This is because through public reasoning and solidarity other citizens will criticize and are most likely to vote against the government.

Given Sen's emphasis on creating and sustaining the right type of institutions for the development of human capabilities, the theory of capabilities emerges to be much closer and congenial to the republican theory than a liberal conception that subscribes to a set of procedures, with only a minimal conception of the community and the common good that support it. Indeed, much progress can be made on the fronts of well-being and freedom when the polity is driven by the common good of creating the greatest possible conditions for the realisation of citizens' capabilities. Moreover, a capabilities-oriented political theory with its emphasis on values, participation and civic virtues embodies a republican character and flavour. This is all the more so because Sen advocates public reasoning rather than technical or utilitarian reasoning to be the most acceptable way of not only identifying the most important capabilities from the viewpoint of public policies, but also prioritizing them in the order of urgency.

However, it appears that the objectives of the capability theory can be achieved much more effectively when the state and citizens consider not only capabilities but also the context of non-domination that secures them. Capabilities by their very nature and focus are intended to capture, represent and enlist individual benefits and it is important not to lose sight of this focus. A capability theorist therefore need not be apologetic about the fact that the capability theory involves a variant of ethical individualism wherein the effectiveness of institutions should be assessed in proportion to their contribution to individual capabilities. And yet it is difficult to deny that most, if not all of the capabilities (just look at the list of capabilities provided by Nussbaum and Anderson), are socially dependent for their realisation. Some of these social dependence can be explained in terms of public goods or even in terms of economic and political institutions that are central to Sen's economic and philosophical thought. But others however require the acknowledgement of a broader and a more encompassing phenomenon of the common goods, particularly the common good of non-domination. In fact, social interdependences and modes of relationships mediated through established institutions and procedures positively contribute to the common good than the ones without them. Relationships in the family such as between spouses, between parents and children are largely natured on the basis of friendship, love and affection. Business and commercial interactions and relationship between employer and employee are situated in the context of free exchange, reciprocity and mutual trust. People's identity as citizens elicits equal status and treatment. And yet these interdependences are likely flourish much more when they are embedded in a setting of non-domination that provides individuals and groups a protected status.

Given their inherent nature of being the goods of the community as a whole rather than of individual, I'm not sure whether we should call these common goods "common capabilities", but at least there is a need for acknowledging this – a point that is so much at the heart of the republican ethos. In contemporary political dynamics, social movements pressing for demands of social justice in the face of exploitation and marginalization in society have also signalled this need and requirement. To each of the vulnerable groups, whether they are made vulnerable on the basis of their race, caste, culture, gender or sexual orientation, achieving non-domination becomes a common cause, a common capability and a common good. The fate and fortune of achieving freedom for individuals is intimately tied to the prospect of achieving non-domination for the whole of the vulnerable group. If we are particular about promoting the capability prospects of individuals belonging to any of these groups, there is no better or proven way of effecting this than to pursue it as a group grievance and group objective of realizing non-domination for all of the individuals in the group. As Pettit (1997: 123-25) notes, in the area of gender justice, for example, the republican sense of the common good of non-domination requires that not only this or that particular woman is rendered capable and free from conditions of domination, but all women as a whole in the political community. There would always be something wanting in the freedom of individual women as long as womanhood as such remains vulnerable to arbitrary domination. A good and just polity is one that aims at such a degree of freedom without falling prey to a "collectivist thinking" that subsumes individual entitlements, and a "sectarian thinking" that does not place its demands in the context of the overall common good of the polity but breeds new forms of domination.

IV. CONCLUSION

While being generally appreciative of Sen's theory of capabilities, the point of this article has been to raise some conceptual difficulties that arise in addressing entrenched conditions of power and domination from the capability paradigm. The enhancement of people's capability prospects with regard to education, employment, decent living standards and political participation can empower them to challenge and to counteract various dominating conditions in society. It can also bestow a sense of self-confidence in people to stand up to discrimination that may arise from deep-rooted social practices and customs. Yet, the objectives of the capability theory would remain less secure as long as citizens' capability prospects are dependent and subjected to arbitrary power and domination. As we have suggested here, Sen's theory of capabilities can learn from and be enriched by republicanism particularly by seeking to reinforce certain basic capabilities through commonly recognisable institutional measures and by envisioning individual freedom and capabilities as part of the patrimony and common good of the political community as a whole. A capability theorist need not hesitate that accommodating this concern into the capability paradigm would be something that is incongruent to its objectives. When we look at the recent works of capability theorists such as Nussbaum, Anderson and Robeyns and the valuable extensions they seek to realise, it only confirms that this is the most coherent and logical step to radicalise Sen's theory.

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Notes

[1] Skinner (1998) outlines the historical heritage and precedents of republicanism particularly in relation to the political thought in which freedom was associated not with absence of physical and legal coercion or intrusion, but rather with the classical ideal of the free state (*civitas libera*). Skinner calls this 'a neo-roman theory' of freedom because the elements embodied in this view could be traced back to ancient Roman legal and moral thought. But they were at a later period revived and advocated by the defenders of 'republican *liberta*' in the Italian Renaissance, particularly by Machiavelli. They were also prominent in the writings of J. Harrington, A. Sydney and others in and after the period of the English Civil War and Commonwealth. I do not go into the historical details of the republican thought, but restrict myself to the essential characteristics of freedom supporting such a thought. I do not also discuss the strand of republicanism that emphasises active political participation associated with the early Greek tradition and revived by the writings of Hannah Arendt.

[2] Probably each of these two elements deserves an independent engagement and treatment. I defer them for future research projects. My purpose here, however, is to identify the key elements on the basis of which a meaningful dialogue and mutual enrichment can take place between these two theories.

[3] In *Republicanism* (1999: 55, 290-92), Pettit notes that interference particularly governmental interference should be considered non-arbitrary if it tracks the interests and ideas of the citizens, by which he means the interests and ideas they share in common or what he calls "common recognizable interests". However, in *A Theory of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp.156-58, he speaks of "common avowable interests". I come back to this idea later in the third section in the context of the republican idea of the common good.

[4] I understand Sen's 'entitlement approach' that emerged in the context of the political economy of famines to be the forerunner for his later 'capability approach' to well-being or the quality of life. As far as I am aware, neither Sen nor any other capability theorist justifies the switch over of terminology from 'entitlements' to 'capabilities'. The most plausible reason could be that the term 'capabilities' seems to indicate more clearly the agency and active participation of the person than 'entitlements'. When we say that someone is 'entitled to' something, it can give the impression that the person himself or herself does not have to do anything. For more details, see my *Capabilities and Social Justice: The Political Philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum*, Chapter 3.

[5] Sen (1992; 1993) sometimes also refers to capabilities as notions of "positive freedom". Given Berlin's distinction between 'negative' and 'positive' freedom in the classic essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" and the consequent association of negative freedom with absence of interference and positive freedom with various possible degenerations of authoritarianism, Sen's proposed linkage between capabilities and positive freedom can be misunderstood. For reasons as to why it is more cogent to understand Sen's capability theory in the direction of real freedom, see my *Capabilities and Social Justice*, Chapter 6.