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Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach



Creating Capabilities

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM



Synopsis

If a country's Gross Domestic Product increases each year, but so does the percentage of its people deprived of basic education, health care, and other opportunities, is that country really making progress? If we rely on conventional economic indicators, can we ever grasp how the world's billions of individuals are really managing? In this powerful critique, Martha Nussbaum argues that our dominant theories of development have given us policies that ignore our most basic human needs for dignity and self-respect. For the past twenty-five years, Nussbaum has been working on an alternate model to assess human development: the Capabilities Approach. She and her colleagues begin with the simplest of questions: What is each person actually able to do and to be? What real opportunities are available to them? The Capabilities Approach to human progress has until now been expounded only in specialized works. Creating Capabilities, however, affords anyone interested in issues of human development a wonderfully lucid account of the structure and practical implications of an alternate model. It demonstrates a path to justice for both humans and nonhumans, weighs its relevance against other philosophical stances, and reveals the value of its universal guidelines even as it acknowledges cultural difference. In our era of unjustifiable inequity, Nussbaum shows how by attending to the narratives of individuals and grasping the daily impact of policy we can enable people everywhere to live full and creative lives.

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Customer Reviews

A remarkably lucid and scintillating account of the the human development approach seen from the perspective of one of its major architects. (Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economics)Nussbaum, who has done more than anyone to develop the authoritative and ground-breaking capabilities approach, offers a major restatement that will be required reading for all those interested in economic development that truly enhances how people live. (Henry Richardson, Georgetown University)A marvelous achievement: beautifully written and accessible. With Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum is one of the founders of the 'capability approach' to justice; the most innovative and influential development in political philosophy since the work of John Rawls. This book, for the first time, puts in one place all the central elements of Nussbaum's systematic account of the approach, together with its sources and implications. (Jonathan Wolff, University College London)The very best way to be introduced to the capability approach to international development. It is also a wonderfully lucid account of the origins, justification, structure, and practical implications of her version of this powerful approach to ethically-based change in poor and rich countries. (David Alan Crocker, The University of Maryland School of Public Policy)Offering a forceful and persuasive account of the failings of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an accurate reflection of human welfare, the distinguished philosopher Nussbaum provides a framework for a new account of global development based on the concept of capabilities...The author argues that human development is best measured in terms of specific opportunities available to individuals rather than economic growth figures...This small book provides a strong foundation for beginning to think about how economic growth and individual flourishing might coincide. (Publishers Weekly 2011-02-07)Nussbaum looks at what it really means for a country to experience prosperity. Traditionally, a country's economic well-being was measured by its gross domestic product. Nussbaum takes a more personal approach by focusing on how economic prosperity plays out in ordinary citizens' lives. She analyzes the life of a woman in India by taking a close look at her situation to see what capabilities and opportunities she--and women like her--might have. The key is not to look simply at the hand they've been dealt, but whether their particular society affords them opportunities to win with it. Nussbaum calls this the "capabilities approach," and it offers a novel way to measure prosperity on a national level by seeing how well a country can provide life-changing prospects for all its citizens...By demonstrating the philosophical underpinnings of this approach and how the theory plays out in the real world, Nussbaum makes a compelling case. Not only is this a more realistic measure of wealth, but it is also a far more compassionate one. For readers who enjoy economics laced with humanity. (Carol J. Elsen Library Journal 2011-03-01)In her new book, *Creating Capabilities*, the philosopher and legal scholar Martha Nussbaum argues that we need to

refocus our ideas about development on the scale of individuals: on concrete human lives and the way they actually unfold. Quantitative measures like per capita GDP, she writes, are poor measures of development; they can't capture the shape and texture of individual lives, even though individual lives are what matter. Development isn't about how rich your nation is, on average--it's about whether people can live in a way "worthy of human dignity."...Nussbaum's book comes at an interesting time, just as growth in the rich world is slowing. That slowdown makes her ideas relevant for rich people, too. Dignified life in the rich world isn't only about being "well-fed," either...Even amid a slowdown, there are other dimensions in which life can keep improving. (Josh Rothman Boston Globe online 2011-03-16)Renowned philosopher Nussbaum concisely captures the essential ideas of a new paradigm of social and political thought, the "human development and capabilities" approach to global social justice, founded on the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, and now used by the World Bank, the IMF, the Arab Human Development Report, and the United Nations Development Programme. (S. A. Mason Choice 2011-10-01)

Martha C. Nussbaum is Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago.

Professor Nussbaum offers an admirably clear approach that could go a long way to solving our USA race problems. Having just witnessed the police murder in North Carolina, it's clear we need a strong anti-racial position that is also strong on law and order. The law and order element has to have two sides of a difficult coin to divide: (1) one side where the police stop crime and murder perpetrated against the poor ad blacks, out of which the violent criminals often comes; (2) of equal weight in practice, a law and order which insists on the arrest and conviction of police who comment murder, like what in fact we can all see and hear was like a gangland slaying and we need a racial solution that doesn't botch the trials and penalties on police.If the police are there to uphold the law, they had better be spotless in complying with the law. It's like pedophile priests: how can they hear confessions and dispense the sacraments when they themselves are vile in the eyes of everyone? ,Since anyone who did a cursory perusal of Happy Poet critiques, I'll save you the time so you can think about what Nussbaum's articulating from what is on these free pages, including "Open book," about the author, and reviews---Dr. Bart Gruzalski, Professor Emeritus, Northeastern University, Boston.Remarkably, the elements of a complete practical AND theoretical solution are in Martha Nussbaum's book "Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach."

Clearly written and well argued, this book offers an understanding that offers a way forward that doesn't get stuck in the usual debates.

Martha Nussbaum's *Creating Capabilities* is a powerful statement on ways in which societies can promote justice through encouraging the development of certain capacities that are essential to what it means to be a human being. Nussbaum gives a list of what she calls the "Central Capabilities," capabilities without which people cannot flourish in a decent society and which would make for necessary conditions for the society to be called just. She writes that societies should grant their citizens the right to a complete life, health care, freedom of thought, emotion, and play or leisure, control over one's body, permission to associate with whom one pleases, permission to form one's own conception of a flourishing life, a respect for nature and other species, and some sort of control over one's material and political environment. Nussbaum says that this list might not be exhaustive and for its realization perhaps some citizens would find reason to restrict or expand work in any of these areas, but she nevertheless argues that these are necessary components for what would make a society just.

absdlutely wonderful. A break through in understanding human development, economic development and human freedom and dignity.

no additional comments

In *Creating Capabilities*, Martha Nusbaum provides a lucid overview of her version of capabilities theory, which is a theory of justice built on the idea that a society is just if it enables individuals to achieve their potential as human beings. Capabilities theory stresses both the importance of enabling people to develop inner, personal abilities and their living in a society that permits them to use their abilities. In a sense it integrates concepts of liberty and of equality and of positive and negative liberty, concepts that are often viewed as in tension with each other. Prof. Nusbaum also comments on the similarities and differences between her view of capabilities and that of Amartya Sen. Capabilities theory is an important alternative to traditional and contemporary theories of justice, including John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness. This book makes the theory accessible to non-philosophers and could become important in discussions of what the nature of a just society and a just world should and can be in the 21st century.

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