

justice requires theoretical changes. It is also undeniable that a contract for mutual advantage does not illuminate our duties to non-human animals – either through the Kantian notion that we have no direct moral duties to animals or the Rawlsian notion that they are duties of compassion, rather than that of justice. Nussbaum highlights the work of natural law theorists such as Hugo Grotius as well as the interesting Kerala High Court case in 1999, *Nair v. Union of India* [2001] A.I.R. 2337 (S.C.), on the entitlement, recognition and protection of the rights of animals.

However, this part of the book proves to be the least clear of her exposition on the three issues. Nussbaum seems unsure what our duties actually are in reconciling animals and their predators. She talks vaguely of ‘trusteeship’ in various places without making quite clear what that ‘trusteeship’ actually implies in practice. It is not clear how, and why, the many duties which are grounded directly in the needs of the beings are then elevated to being a matter of justice.

Nussbaum makes it clear in various parts of the book that she has the greatest respect for the work of Rawls. However, in other parts, it appears that such deference prevented her from setting out her capabilities approach in a more forceful manner. Although Nussbaum sets out to show that the capabilities approach is one species of the human rights approach and that the language of capabilities should be superior to the bare language of human rights, she is not quite successful in setting out a convincing flow of arguments due to her deferential disposition.

Nonetheless, this book is still a significant challenge, albeit from within liberalism, to the dominant framework of Rawls. It lays out in clear terms what is possible in the pursuit of a future of greater justice for all.

reviewed by TEY TSUN HANG

Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (Issues of Our Time) BY AMARTYA SEN. [New York & London: W W Norton & Company, 2006. xx + 215 pp. Hardcover: US\$24.95]

Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen proposes in this impassioned book that the brutalities in the world are driven as much by confusion in, and the exploitation of, the illusion of cultural identity or religious affiliation. Conflict and violence, in places such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Timor Leste, Sudan, Israel and the

Palestine, Sen argues, are sustained by the illusion of a unique identity, “fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror”.

Sen’s real target is not group loyalty *per se*, but the political and religious leaders who ruthlessly manipulate identity claims for their own political and religious ends. It is very much an indictment of the ways in which these “proficient artisans of terror”, through suitable instigation of the use of sexual, racial, religious and other forms of identity and turning it into a hardened sense of identity or affiliation, foment inter-group strife and conflict.

Sen suggests that each person is a composite of many affiliations, and that identities can be both a source of pride and joy, as well as a generator of confidence and strength. Since human allegiances involving class, gender, profession, language, science, morals and politics are real and essential to people’s lives, and frequently overlap with one another, it is impossible to successfully bundle them into smooth boxes with a single label.

Sen himself is a walking example, “at the same time, an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sankritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a nonreligious lifestyle, from a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin, and a non-believer in afterlife...” Neither is it possible to pigeonhole him academically and professionally. A Nobel economics laureate, and probably the world’s most distinguished analyst of the welfare of the poor, he is equally deft in political philosophy. Although a firm believer in free market economy, he has been pointing out for decades the problem of inequality in the world.

Ideologies of hate typically categorise people into communities based on a single dimension that overrides other multi-faceted affinities. To Sen, such singularising of identity, or coercive labelling of affiliation, is a first dangerous step towards discrimination and inter-group strife and conflict, “a crucial component of the ‘martial art’ of fomenting sectarian confrontation”. Sen points out how sectarian hatreds, in places such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Timor Leste, Sudan, Israel and the Palestine, are ignited or exacerbated by illusions of unique and choiceless identities. When people acquire a strong and exclusive sense of belonging to a group,

the conditions ripen for exploitation by ruthless politicians for inter-group conflict and violence.

As such, this book is very much a vigorous rebuttal of the clash of civilisations theory. Sen sees the dangers of Huntington's thesis in "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order", that downplays the diversity within traditions and the interactions between civilisations. Sen rightly points out the ease with which such a one-dimensional view of human identity reduces the world to "if only implicitly, [a] federation of religions or of civilizations", with the consequent potential of leading to civilisational and religious partitioning of the world.

The chapter on "West and Anti-West" explores the destructive cycle of mutual stereotyping. Sen traces democracy's global roots to its antecedents in India and the Muslim world, justifying his argument that there is nothing peculiarly Western about democracy. He also traces parts of history to point out that while modern institutional forms of democracy are relatively new, the history of democracy in the form of public participation and reasoning has been observed throughout the world. The Western practice of democracy has never developed in splendid isolation. To many non-Westerners who obsessively regard democracy and personal liberty as Western concepts, Sen points out that the democratic inheritance is a truly universal enterprise, that "[t]he Western world has no proprietary right over democratic ideas". Thus, this book is also a viable historical and political rebuttal of the strong versions of "Asian values", "Islamic ideals" and other themes reflecting a singular, and reactive, mode of thinking.

It is also very much a lucid and convincing critique of current trends in communitarian and culturalist thinking, challenging the thin argument that a "dominant communal theory is only a matter of self-realisation, not of choice". Sen refers to some literature to argue that an enriching identity need not only be obtained through discovering where we find ourselves, but also through acquisition and learning. By pointing out the connection between cultural bigotry and political tyranny, as well as exposing the inherent weakness of various versions of cultural explanations of economic underdevelopment in some countries, Sen at the same time presents a vigorous rebuttal of the notion of cultural isolation, immutability, or even destiny.

Much of the book focuses on the Islamic world. Sen warns several times throughout the book of the great dangers of grouping such diverse societies—spread across a tremendous geographical expanse—by religion. Sen points

out that religion need not be the sole and exclusive determinant of either a person's identity, or the beliefs he holds. It is inevitable that highlighting religion results in other significant elements in the Muslim tradition being ignored. He highlights great Muslims who practised tolerance, and the periods of genuine enlightenment. Akbar, a 16th century Mughal emperor and champion of religious toleration, insisted in the 1590s on the need for open dialogue between mainstream Muslim and Hindu thinkers. He also advocated the tenet of free choice, and the view that faith cannot have priority over reason. Sen also highlights that Akbar's advocacy of religious toleration in Agra from the 1590s onwards was taking place at a time when the "Inquisitions were quite extensive in Europe, and heretics were still burned at the stake". Sen avoids falling into the reverse trap, through highlighting that Akbar's great-grandson, Aurangzeb, was intolerant of other religions and how he imposed punitive taxation on these practitioners in the late 17th century.

Although the book is a powerful and convincing critique, the solution that Sen then offers is rather lame—that peace can only prevail if people are free to choose their own identity affiliations and reject narrow stereotypes in favour of humane pluralism. Sen argues that the freedom to choose one's identity affiliations is the antidote to divisive extremism, the assertion of human commonality as a path of resistance to degrading identity attributions. The final chapter of the book thus extols the "freedom to think", linking the prospects of peace in the contemporary world to the recognition of the plurality of our affiliations and the use of reasoning to counter the illusion of singular identity.

Whilst the defence of humane pluralism against narrow-minded communalism is laudable, Sen has not explored sufficiently the big question why has the cultivation or exploitation of singularity been so successful? Neither is there sufficient exploration of methods to nurture a global environment where the richness and diversity of identities can thrive. There is also no attempt in the book to examine the nature of the social psychology and the way in which it translates group identity into violence, or why some people so easily succumb to irrational forms of identity, or how to ensure that diverse identities will thrive in our contemporary world.

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