The Role of Moral Agency in Sen’s Identity Theory

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The aim of this paper is to identify a view of personality that makes Sen’s identity theory and ethical theory coherent.

Amartya Sen has criticized the assumption that a rational individual acts primarily with a selfish motivation. He contends that we can have sympathy and commitment as unselfish motivations for our actions. Sympathy means sharing another’s feelings. Commitment is our desire to improve another person’s condition when we do not share their feelings, but we believe their suffering is caused by injustice. Sen considers that such sympathy and commitment are derived from humanity, which all human beings possess. In other words, Sen considers that we are not just selfish, but also motivated by humanity.

On the other hand, in his identity theory, Sen assumes that we have various identities simultaneously, and that we can prioritize these identities at different times. He believes that we do not merely discover our identity, but can choose it, freely and rationally. Therefore, it is interpreted that a person can choose identity which is opposed to humanity.

However, this idea can be criticized, for three reasons:

First, if we have humanity as a universal motivation, then it has to be assumed that humanity must influence our identity and restrict our choices. However, Sen does not acknowledge such a moral restriction on our identity. Although Sen defends our free choice of identity, he does not clarify whether we can or should be free to choose an identity that is opposed to humanity. Sen mentions that we can choose an identity in accordance with humanity through rational scrutiny. However, it is still unclear whether such a moral and rational identity exists before we choose from among the variable identities in a given moment, or whether this moral and rational identity is one of the options from which we must choose.

Second, Sen’s identity theory cannot explain how an individual can have a durable personality, because it claims that we can change our identity in any given moment. Previous studies examining the relationship between self and rationality agree that an assumption of rational agency regards the self as an aggregation of moments in time. Sen’s identity theory confirms a human’s freedom of choice at any given moment, but undermines the existence of an unchanging self that controls our choices over a long period. For example, the theory does not require that promises in the past restrict our present or future choices. Instead, Sen advocates the idea of rational choice, including
its character of free choice in any moment.

Third, though Sen mentions that we can reach humanity through rational scrutiny, humanity in general and Sen’s conception of rationality are different. The former can be a motivation to respect another person’s personality. However, the latter cannot be such. It requires treating everyone impartially, but does not require respecting each personality.

In conclusion, this paper asserts that without assuming that a person originally has durable and unchangeable humanity in mind, we cannot make Sen’s theory of identity coherent and meaningful. This conclusion suggests a viewpoint of personality that fits Sen’s ethical theory.

First, we summarize Sen’s identity theory. Second, we show that the conception of rationality Sen uses differs from the general meaning used in social choice theory. We explain his conception of reasoned humanity, and raise a question whether a person can choose identity which is opposed to humanity. Third, to solve this question, we show some problems if Sen assumes that humanity is also one option of identities which we can choose. Therefore, we conclude that the assumption of durable identity will morally restrict a person’s free choice of identity at any moment. Finally, we show that this notion fits Sen’s idea in other fields.

1. Sen’s identity theory

This section aims to clarify Sen’s identity theory.

According to Sen, many people, and especially communists, have considered that a person’s social identity is only one such, and is not selected, but is rather “discovered.” In other words, it is considered that our social identity is given by the social circumstances in which we have lived. According to this idea, we cannot change our social identity. It remains permanent throughout our life (IV, 4-5).

However, Sen disagrees with this idea, for two reasons. First, the idea that we have only one social identity is not experimentally valid. We all have many social identities, for example, Indian, male, Christian, liberalist, and so on (cf. IV, 19). Therefore, Sen considers that we can have several kinds of social identities at the same time.

Second, we can change our social identity. This identity is not “discovered” or given by social circumstances. It is true that social circumstances influence our identity. However, we can rationally decide which identity to adopt. Moreover, we can have several kinds of identities at the same time, and rank them rationally. According to Sen, “[g]iven our inescapably plural identities, we have to decide on the relative importance of our different associations and affiliations in any particular context” (IV, xiii). In other words,
“A person has to make choices—explicitly or by implication—about what relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence” (IV, 19). In short, it is assumed that we can prioritize social identities in each occasion. We can rank our social identities rationally.

Such an idea is the antithesis of communitarianism, which considers that we have only one social identity, and that this identity is decided by social circumstances. People who consider that we have a sole and unchangeable social identity regard it as one reason for war. For example, ethnic conflict can be explained as the battle between one social identity (e.g., Indian) and another (e.g., Pakistani). They regard this as a person’s sole social identity and that he/she has to protect it against enemies. A person may feel that he/she will lose his/her whole identity if it is denied. However, Sen considers that such an idea of social identity is not real; in other words, it is an illusion (IV, Chap. 1). Someone may feel that the influence of social circumstances is too overwhelming to overcome. However, humans have reason and can use this to free themselves from social circumstances. According to Sen, we can scrutinize social influences rationally and objectively, and can decide whether they will influence our identity. In his words, “[r]easoning and scrutiny can thus play a major role both in the specification of identities and in thinking through the relative strengths of their respective claims” (IV, 29), and “[i]nfluence is not the same thing as complete determination, and choices do remain despite the existence—and importance—of cultural influences” (IV, 35). Therefore, Sen mentions that “[c]entral to leading a human life, [...] are the responsibilities of choice and reasoning” (IV, xiii).

Although we can ideally decide which identity we have, not all social identities are always available in each real occasion. For example, a person may wish to be a doctor, and so have a social identity of a doctor. However, if we do not have enough money or the opportunity to enter a medical school, we cannot become doctors. Therefore, although we can choose our social identity freely, there is still a limitation. In Sen’s words, “[t]he existence of choice does not, of course, indicate that there are no constraints restricting choice. Indeed, choices are always made within the limits of what are seen as feasible. [...] The ‘budget constraint,’ as economists call it, is omnipresent” (IV, 5–6). In short, the limits of the options from which we can freely choose differ with each occasion.

Let us summarize that Sen’s identity theory depends on three assumptions. First, a person is endowed with reason before identity. Second, a person can rationally rank several identities that are feasible at each occasion and, therefore, can create a

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preference ordering. Third, a person can choose the top option (or options) as being the most important.

Such assumptions are the same as those of social choice theory. In other words, he applies the framework of social choice theory to his identity theory. In his words, “I turn, finally, to the case for a greater recognition of the need for reasoned choice of identity and community” (RI, 27). This framework depends on the following three assumptions. First, we have the ability to choose from among options, freely and rationally. Second, the opportunity set of feasible options can be decided by a restriction, such as a feasible budget or social conditions on each occasion. We create a preference ordering satisfying certain conditions over such options. Third, we can choose an option that is ranked at the top of the preference ordering.

2 Reason and Identity

It must be noted that Sen does not use the term of “rational choice,” but he uses the term of “reasoned choice.” Although he applies a framework of social choice theory to his identity theory, he changes the conception of rationality. In order to clarify the difference, first we show his criticism against rational agency in economics. Second, we explain his original meaning of reason.

2.1 Sen’s criticism against rational agency in economics

According to Sen, the conception of rationality in economics has three characteristics. First, it is assumed that a person’s welfare is based only on his/her consumption (in his words, self-centered welfare). Second, it is assumed that we choose options that maximize our welfare. This characteristic is known as welfarism (self-welfare goal). Third, it is assumed that we choose options in order to achieve our goals (self-goal choice) (RI, 213–214).

However, Sen is opposed to these three characteristics.

First, Sen does not assume that we create a preference ordering to maximize profit, although he does assume that we do so according to our values. However, we may value someone else’s profit more than we do our own because of our sympathy for the other person. Sympathy means that we feel bad if another person’s profit becomes damaged. Therefore, we prefer the option that improves our profit and the other person’s profit to one that improves our profit only. Moreover, we create a preference ordering according to such sympathy. Therefore, we can create the ordering, for example, depending on the extent to which the options improve the other person’s profit (RI, 214).

Second, although Sen is one of the most famous social choice theorists, he criticized
the welfaristic character of both economics and social choice theory before he began discussing identity theory. He criticizes the validity of the assumption that we decide on our actions in order to maximize our welfare. According to Sen, consumer choice theory assumes that we act to maximize our utility in the market. Social choice theory applied this assumption to behavior outside the market. In other words, social choice theory generalizes this assumption and, thus, assumes that, in general, we act to maximize our welfare.

However, in reality, in addition to acting based on selfish motivations, we also act based on sympathy and commitment. Therefore, we often act to improve others’ welfare through sympathy and commitment. Some may say that sympathetic feelings can be included in our own welfare. However, commitment means that we sometimes want to improve other people’s welfare, even though we do not feel bad if their welfare is damaged (RF, 214). For example, Kate hates Mary. She does not sympathize with Mary, even if Mary’s welfare is damaged. However, Kate has a strong liberal faith and takes it for granted that everyone should have civil liberties. Therefore, if some policy violates Mary’s civil liberties, she will be opposed to it, even if she prefers it to another policy that improves Mary’s welfare. In short, Sen considers that commitment is “concerned with breaking the tight link between individual welfare (with or without sympathy) and the choice of action” (RF, 214).

Third, Sen is opposed to the idea that we choose an option to achieve our goals. He mentions that even if it is assumed that we act to maximize our welfare, we have several social identities. Therefore, we act to maximize the welfare of the social groups to which we belong if we act to maximize our welfare. This means that we do not act to maximize our own welfare only (RF, 215-219). In Sen’s words, “The influence of social identity on behavior can be one route to departures from narrowly defined self-interest” (RI, 4). Thus, if we consider our identity carefully, we find that we seldom act to achieve purely private goals.

In short, Sen criticizes the assumption that we act to maximize our own welfare, and considers that we act based on various motivations, including sympathy, commitment, and attachment to social groups. Moreover, he points out that we can rethink even the assumption that rational agency acts to achieve one’s own goal by considering social identities.

2. 2 Reasoned humanity

As mentioned earlier, Sen criticized the assumption of motivation of rational actors. He also seems to criticize the function of rationality and consider the different meaning
of reason. On the one hand, in general social choice theory (or Arrovian social choice theory), rational choice means that we create a preference ordering satisfying some conditions according to our values, and act according to the preference ordering. Social choice theory is not concerned with whether our values are based on emotion or rational consideration. On the other hand, Sen considers that his “reasoned choice” means a choice based on rational scrutiny. In other words, he considers that our values should be based on rational scrutiny. Therefore, Sen seems to consider that there are two functions of reason. First, we can consider our motivation or options rationally. In his words, we consider them by “rational scrutiny.” Such reasoning is quite different from rationality of social choice theory. Second, after rational scrutiny, we rank options rationally. This rationality has the same meaning as that in social choice theory.

In this paper, we distinguish between these two rationalities. We refer to the former as rational scrutiny, and to the latter as rationality for ranking options. In this section, we explain Sen’s conception of reasoned humanity by examining how these two rationalities are related to each other.

Sen admits that we sometimes act according to selfish motivation, or other emotion, such as sympathy for others and a commitment to moral principles. However, we cannot act effectively without rational thinking. For example, we cannot know what action will improve our or someone else’s welfare from a long-term viewpoint. In other words, we need rational thinking to know how to achieve a goal effectively. Therefore, one needs rational scrutiny when deciding to act for one’s goal.

However, it seems that Sen does not consider that the role of rational scrutiny is only to find the effective way to achieve one’s goal. He considers that we can make a moral decision through rational scrutiny. In other words, it can be interpreted that Sen considers that we can change our value or motivation through rational scrutiny.

According to Sen, everyone can act rationally (based on Sen’s definition). We sometimes act according to tradition or blind faith. However, this is just because we have not learnt rational scrutiny. Once we do, we gradually listen to and act according to reason. It may be that we may consider that such tradition and faith are true, based on reason. However, following them with and without rational scrutiny are two different things. What is important is that we should consider them rationally and be free from them. Then, we can obtain freedom of thought, even if we are attached to them.

Such rational scrutiny can change our motivation or goal. For example, if we sympathize with others and want to help them, such sympathy may be only for the

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2 These two kinds of rationality are similar to Rawls’s conception of “rationality” and “reasonableness.”
people who live in a closed community. However, if we scrutinize our emotion rationally, we may find that it is only for special people, and that it is better for us to consider all people, including those who live outside of our community.

According to Sen, one of the reasons people fight with those who live outside their community is that we cannot imagine other people’s lives or understand their culture. However, if we think rationally and try to know their culture and life, we will sympathize with them and not want to destroy them. Therefore, rational scrutiny can cultivate a moral imagination that prevents people from fighting with each other. In his words, “we have to ask what kind of reasoning the members of each culture can use to arrive at better understanding and perhaps even sympathy and respect” (AI, 282).

Moreover, if we consider a matter rationally, we can judge it impartially. According to Sen, when we consider something rationally, we can take a position as a third party. Therefore, we can consider others equally and impartially. In other words, we can take a perspective of “open impartiality” through rational scrutiny. Sen discusses the contrast between open and closed impartiality. Closed impartiality refers to that which treats the welfare of everyone who lives in society as equal. On the other hand, open impartiality is that which treats the welfare of everyone in the world as equal. Sen considers that we can judge people's interest according to the principle of open impartiality (IJ, Chap. 6). Public reasoning is necessary to cultivate such open impartiality. In reality, the conclusion based on public reasoning can be correct and the same as that in ideal conditions (IJ, Chap. 1). Individuals can judge impartially (i.e., ethically) through rational scrutiny and public reasoning (AI 478).

In short, Sen considers that we can make an ethical judgment through reason because we can cultivate a moral imagination and take a perspective of “open impartiality”. He refers to such an idea as “reasoned humanism” (AI, 287, 290). To achieve humanistic society, sympathy and commitment are not enough. “To prevent catastrophes caused by human negligence or obtuseness or callous obduracy, we need practical reason as well as sympathy and commitment” (AI, 277).

Let us interpret Sen’s discussion. A person who has such humanity can make a judgment based on open impartiality. Moreover, we can make a judgment based on humanism through rational scrutiny, which enables us to be impartial judges. We can apply his idea of reasoned humanity to his identity theory. When we rank several social identities, we may rank them through rational scrutiny. If so, we may choose identities that are for humanity or, at least, not opposed to it. However, there are some questions in Sen’s idea, which we examine in the next section.
2.3 Humanity as a fundamental identity

Sen’s idea of “reasoned humanity” is open to question. It is unclear whether he thinks that humanity is a fundamental identity before several identities, or whether it is simply one of the options.

He considers that everyone originally has humanity, and can be motivated by it. However, he also states that we may make a decision based on faith, passion, or emotion, or based on the interest of a region or our own interest. Rational scrutiny is necessary for us, even if we want to choose for our own interest, because it is this that teaches us how to pursue it.

However, in this case, we are not motivated by humanity. Such rationality is for our own purpose, but not for open impartiality or humanity. Moreover, if we have to obey rationality for open impartiality, we have to abandon our own purpose. In other words, it is ambiguous why it can be assumed that we would abandon it and obey rationality for open impartiality.

It may be that choosing our identity through rational scrutiny means that we ultimately lose our personality. If we act according to open impartiality, this may exclude all subjective views. We may treat everyone equally, and make a decision considering everyone’s interests. Therefore, those who act rationally will act in the same way. This means everyone chooses the same identity and loses their originality if we choose an identity based on rational scrutiny.

Sen answers this problem by saying that he does not mention that all social influence is banished by rational scrutiny. Even though public reasoning will achieve a consensus, it is not a perfect consensus. It is uncomplete, but we can avoid the common worst situations (IJ, 396-400). Therefore, if we obey rationality for open impartiality, our personality will not be banished.

When it comes to the problem of identity, Sen considers that we have to have a global identity to be free from the partial view. To have a global identity does not mean to abandon local loyalties at all. In his words,

If a person can have only one identity, then the choice between the national and the global becomes an “all or nothing” contest. And so does the contest between any global sense of belonging we may have and the local loyalties that may also move us. But to see the problem in these stark and exclusive terms reflects a profound misunderstanding of the nature of human identity, in particular its inescapable plurality. Recognizing the need to consider the claims of a global identity does not eliminate the possibility of paying much attention also to local and national problems.
The role of reasoning and choice in the determination of priorities need not take that either-or form (IV, 182).

However, he does not clarify how we should act if the claims of such global identity and that of local loyalties are not compatible with each other. Sen seems to consider that we consider our motivation and options using rational scrutiny, and then rank the options, or identities, rationally. In this case, we can make an ethical decision using rational scrutiny. We rank the options, but restrict the preference ordering ethically. Therefore, it is considered that we do not rank an identity that is opposed to humanity as the top identity.

However, Sen seems to admit that we can abandon our fundamental identity and freely choose other identities that oppose it. In other words, he does not assume that we always have to obey rationality for open impartiality. When it comes to the problem of identity, Sen’s argument is not clear. On the one hand, he regards humanity as a common identity that we all have. According to Sen, “human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have” (IV, xv) is “our shared humanity” (IV, xiii). If we have such humanity, we can avoid social battles. Individuals can have good relationships beyond nations and regions through humanity. In his words, “[t]he assertion of human commonality has been a part of resistance to degrading attributions in different cultures at different points in time” (IV, 7).

Even the identity of being a ‘human being’—perhaps our most basic identity—may have the effect, when properly seized, of broadening our viewpoint: and the imperatives that we may associate with our shared humanity may not be mediated by our membership of collectivities such as ‘nations’ or ‘peoples’. … the perspective of direct interpersonal sympathies and solidarities across the borders seemed to have a cogency that can substantially transcend the national particularism of the estranged polities (RI, 28-29).

There are two meanings of identity for human beings. One is a biological meaning, and the other is an ethical meaning of humanity. Sen seems to consider the identity of human beings as being the latter, because he compares it to kindness and generosity.

On the other hand, Sen admits that we can rank our identities freely. Even humanity is one only one of the options.

The point is … perhaps more importantly, whether we have some freedom in
deciding what priority to give to the various identities that we may simultaneously have. People’s choices may be constrained by the recognition that they are, say, Jewish or Muslim, but there is still a decision to be made by over others that they may also have (related, for example, to their political beliefs, sense of nationality, humanitarian commitments or professional attachments) (AI, 351)

Therefore, though rational scrutiny leads us to be humanistic, we still can rank several identities, including humanity, freely.

Moreover, he mentions that “not all identities need have durable importance” (IV, 25). This means that we can change our individual preferences for various identities in any given occasion. If so, it is assumed that we can freely choose an identity against humanity. In his words, “The importance of choice does not entail that any choice we make must be once-for-all and permanent. Indeed, our loyalties and self-definitions often oscillate” (RI, 17). However, if this true, is Sen’s idea of humanity meaningful? To make his concept meaningful, he tacitly seems to assume that many people originally have humanity, and then admits their freedom of choice.

In short, there is a question in Sen’s idea of “reasoned humanity.” It is open to question whether we always have humanity as a fundamental identity before ranking other identities and choosing from among them, or whether humanity is simply one of the options available to us. In other words, it is open to question whether we always have to obey humanity even if our purpose is opposed to it. If we consider this question, Sen’s idea of reasoned humanity is not coherent unless he assumes that we have a humanistic identity before choosing several identities rationally. However, his argument is sometimes opposed to this assumption.

3 Sen’s idea of justice

In this section, we consider this question in more detail. Here, we clarify the problem that arises if we consider humanity to be one of our options. Then, we conclude that it should belong to our personality before choosing identities.

3. 1 Personality

In this section, we argue Sen’s idea of personality.

3. 1. 1 Ethical relativism

The aim of this section is to clarify Sen’s idea of ethical relativism if he considers that humanity is one available option. In order to achieve this aim, we first argue that he is a
liberal utilitarian if he considers that we always act according to our individual preferences.

According to Riley, rational agency in social choice theory is liberal utilitarianism. Liberal utilitarianism assumes that we create individual preferences according to our values. It is true that our motivation is not always selfish, but we create individual preferences based on our desire to do so. We always act something because we desire to do so (Riley 1988). If so, conscience is also a desire to do the right thing. We act ethically because we prefer doing the right thing to not doing so (Mill 1878). Therefore, we can choose whether to act ethically. There is no objective ethical principle separate from our subjective preferences.

This concept is that of ethical relativism. If he considers that humanity is one of several identities, his idea of humanism is relativism. However, this does not match the universality of humanism. Therefore, his idea of reasoned humanity will not justify if he thinks that humanity is one option of identities which we can choose.

3.1.2 Presentism

In this section, we discuss whether an individual in Sen’s identity theory has identity of personality, which lasts for a long time.

Some previous studies argue the long-term identity of rational agency. According to Posner, rational agency is assumed to make a decision at any moment. This means there exists agency at each moment (Posner 1997). However, if we do not assume that there is identity over time, we cannot explain durable identity, which identifies us as one person over time. We can apply this problem to Sen’s identity theory. Sen considers that we can choose among various identities at any moment. If this is true, we cannot have an unchangeable identity over time. Then, how do we distinguish ourselves from others? Sen assumes there is rational agency over time before identities. In this case, only rationality guarantees our unchangeable identity, or personality. We may rank various identities rationally at any moment, and we may create individual preferences, based on our values.

We can consider that this is rationality to achieve our goals. This is different from rationality only for humanity, or open impartiality, because the latter cannot guarantee our personality, as we argued before. Therefore, Sen assumes that we have rationality to achieve our goals before choosing from among various identities. Thus, it should be assumed that there is a rational agency before identities. Such an agency is also an identity we possess. However, if all identities can be chosen at any moment, there is no identity before them. Therefore, Sen tacitly assumes that identity of rational agency is
unchanged, and is not one of the options we can choose. For example, he may not admit that we can freely choose irrational identity. However, as we have argued, it is doubtful whether Sen assumes that we can freely choose an identity against humanity. If Sen assumes that if there is only rationality to achieve our goals before identities, such a choice can occur, depending on our values.

Moreover, if we assume that there is only rationality for private purpose before choosing identities, we cannot guarantee the importance of premise. If we have only rationality for purpose, we might not protect our past premise. We might abandon it because of the profit available in the present.

Therefore, we can suppose that when Sen mentions “reason before identity,” he considers that there is both reason by which we can think logically and rationality for ranking before identities.

In short, if we consider that humanity is one of several identities, we face ethical relativism. In contrast, if we assume there is only rationality for open impartiality, before identities, we cannot have personality. Therefore, in Sen’s identity theory, we have to assume that we have both rationality for purpose and rationality for open impartiality before choosing identities at any given moment. Moreover, we have to consider that we also have humanity before identities.

In conclusion, it can be said that Sen’s idea is one of ethical relativism, and he does not consider identity as long term or unchanging, assuming that he considers that all identities, including humanity, are options that can be chosen in each moment. As such, his idea is criticized from two aspects. First, ethical relativism is not compatible with humanity. Second, Sen cannot explain the long-term fundamental identity that we have before choosing from among various identities in any moment.

3. 2 An idea of justice

Is Sen’s idea of “reasoned humanism” working well when it comes to consensus on public affairs? In other words, can we assume that we have to obey rationality for open impartiality and can reach humanistic society instead of achieving our goals when it comes to public affairs? If so, we do not have to assume that humanity is not one option when it comes to public affairs.

Here, we find that he considers that public reasoning will find a rational conclusion on each occasion. He considers that people should argue public affairs, and then rank options rationally. In this case, though there is no ideal justice, we can always compare many options rationally and find a better situation.

Sen called this “a theory of relative justice.” He compared it to transcendental theory,
as in John Rawls in IJ. According to Sen, a framework of social choice theory can be applied to a theory of justice. In social choice theory, we compare options and rank them to create a social preference ordering. It is true that there are many impossible theorems in this theory, so we may not be able to create a complete social preference ordering. However, it is not always necessary to do so to contribute to a theory of justice. Even if a social preference is not complete (i.e., we cannot know the best situation), we can identify better situations and avoid worse situations. Incomplete social preference tells us what the better option is, compared with the present situation. He considers that transcendental theory that seeks an ideal and best situation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for improving the present situation.

In summary, it is important to improve the present situation, and a framework of social choice theory can be useful in helping us to do so. Therefore, it can be a great tool when it comes to a matter of justice. In contrast, transcendental theory is neither useful nor necessary to do so.

As argued previously, Sen considers that we can reach reasoned humanism, which means we can create a humanistic society through public reasoning. If we apply his idea of justice to his identity theory, we have to rank social identities impartially when deciding on public affairs to achieve humanistic society. However, there are differences between open impartiality and humanism.

First, it is not clear why we should respect other people's lives or cultures if we only have ration. It is true that we can understand them by reason. However, we do not always respect something we understand.

Second, there are differences between humanity and open impartiality. If we choose based on open impartiality, we may consider everyone's interest impartially. However, when we choose based on humanity, we sometimes act in the interests of a particular person. For example, we may help someone who is drowning instead of attending an international conference on poverty. Moreover, we might respect our originality or plurality if we are motivated by humanity. In other words, humanism means love or an attachment to each person, including his/her personality. However, when we obey rational scrutiny, we do not consider this, because we have to treat everyone's interests equally. In order to solve this question, Sen has to assume that we originally have humanity, which means love for each person's personality.

In summary, we have to assume that there is rational and ethical identity before several identities according to Sen's theory of identity when it comes to public affairs.

4 Ethics before rationality
In this section, we argue the relationship between Sen’s identity theory and his idea of justice. We conclude that our assumption of the individual matches the latter idea.

4.1 A liberal individual of the solution of Liberal Paradox

In social choice theory, there is a famous paradox raised by Sen, called the paradox of the Paretoian liberal (Sen 1971). This is a paradox between the principle of individual rights and the Pareto principle. In order to solve this paradox, Sen proposed a concept of a liberal individual. By definition, a liberal individual is one who restricts his/her own preference if his/her action will violate another person’s rights. Such an individual does not always act according to his/her preferences. In this person’s mind, there is ethical agency who respects others’ rights before individual preferences (Sen 1976, Suzumura 1978). Such an individual matches the argument presented in this paper.

4.2 Capability approach and the plurality of individuals

Second, we argue that humanity respects a person’s personality or plurality. This point matches his criticism of Rawls. He criticizes Rawls’s idea of primary goods, because it neglects a person’s plurality. According to Sen, if primary goods are equally distributed, we cannot achieve a fair allocation of freedom. Some people may receive less nutrition than others do, even if some foods are distributed equally (IJ, 66; Sen 1980a). Based on this argument, we can understand that Sen wants to respect people’s plurality.

Concluding Remarks

Here, we summarize our discussion. In Sen’s identity theory, he assumes that a person has rationality before various identities. On the other hand, he does not clearly assume that a person also has ethics or humanity before these identities. However, his identity theory is contradictory unless he assumes that a person has both rationality and ethics before these identities. He argues that we can make a decision based on humanity through rational scrutiny because we respect open impartiality. However, there are differences between open impartiality and humanity. For example, humanity respects a person’s plurality, while open impartiality does not. Therefore, humanity cannot be based on rationality only. His theory is based on humanity, which motivates people to respect others’ personalities before rational scrutiny.

References


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