

# POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

## Women's Agency & Overpopulation

### Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

### Reading

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf. (Excerpts are from chapters 8 and 9.)

Optional: Zoepf, K. (2013, December 23 & 30). Shopgirls. *New Yorker*, 58–67.

### Questions

1. In chapter 8, Amartya Sen argues that expanding women's agency is a more worthy development goal than simply improving women's well-being and welfare. (If you are interested, the optional reading by Katherine Zoepf illustrates how a lot of the points made by Sen appeared in Saudi Arabia after the King decreed that women could work outside the home.)

What is the difference between agency and well-being? What reasons does Sen provide for a focus on agency over well-being?

2. In chapter 9, Sen considers what may be the most effective ways to handle concerns (like those from Garrett Hardin) about overpopulation.

What seems to be Sen's proposed solution to problems of overpopulation? Is this the same as Hardin's?

3. This reading is from Sen's book, *Development as Freedom*, and at the end of chapter 9 (p. 226), he specifically connects what he has been talking about to support the idea of development as freedom.

What does Sen seem to mean by "development as freedom"? How do the answers to the previous two questions seem to support this idea?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.