

Capabilities and choice

What does a good life look like?

What's in a choice?

- The thing (or things) that you choose (options)
 - ... how big is the range of choices?
 - ... how easy is access to them?
 - ... are they things you actually want?
- The ability to make the choice (agency)

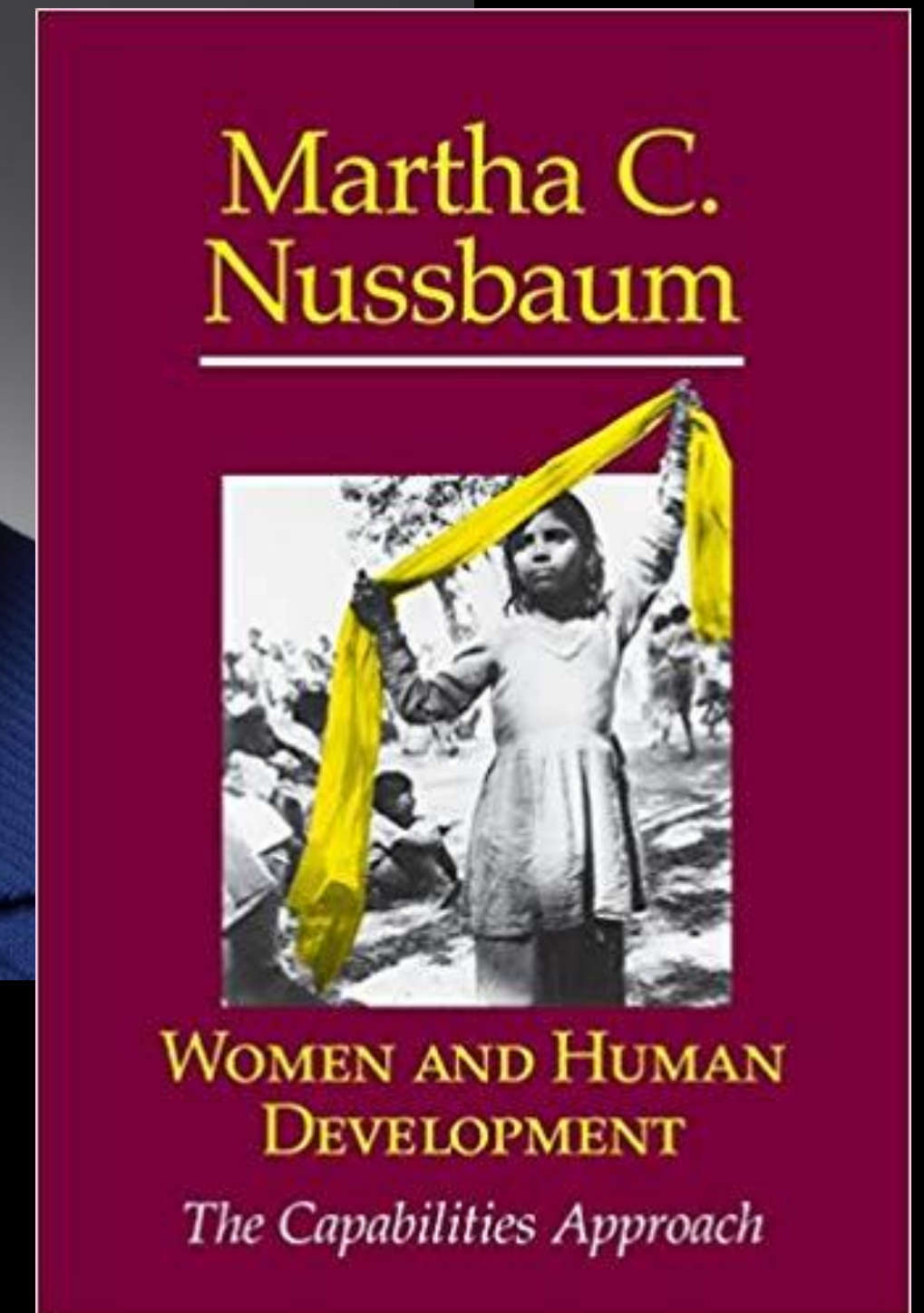
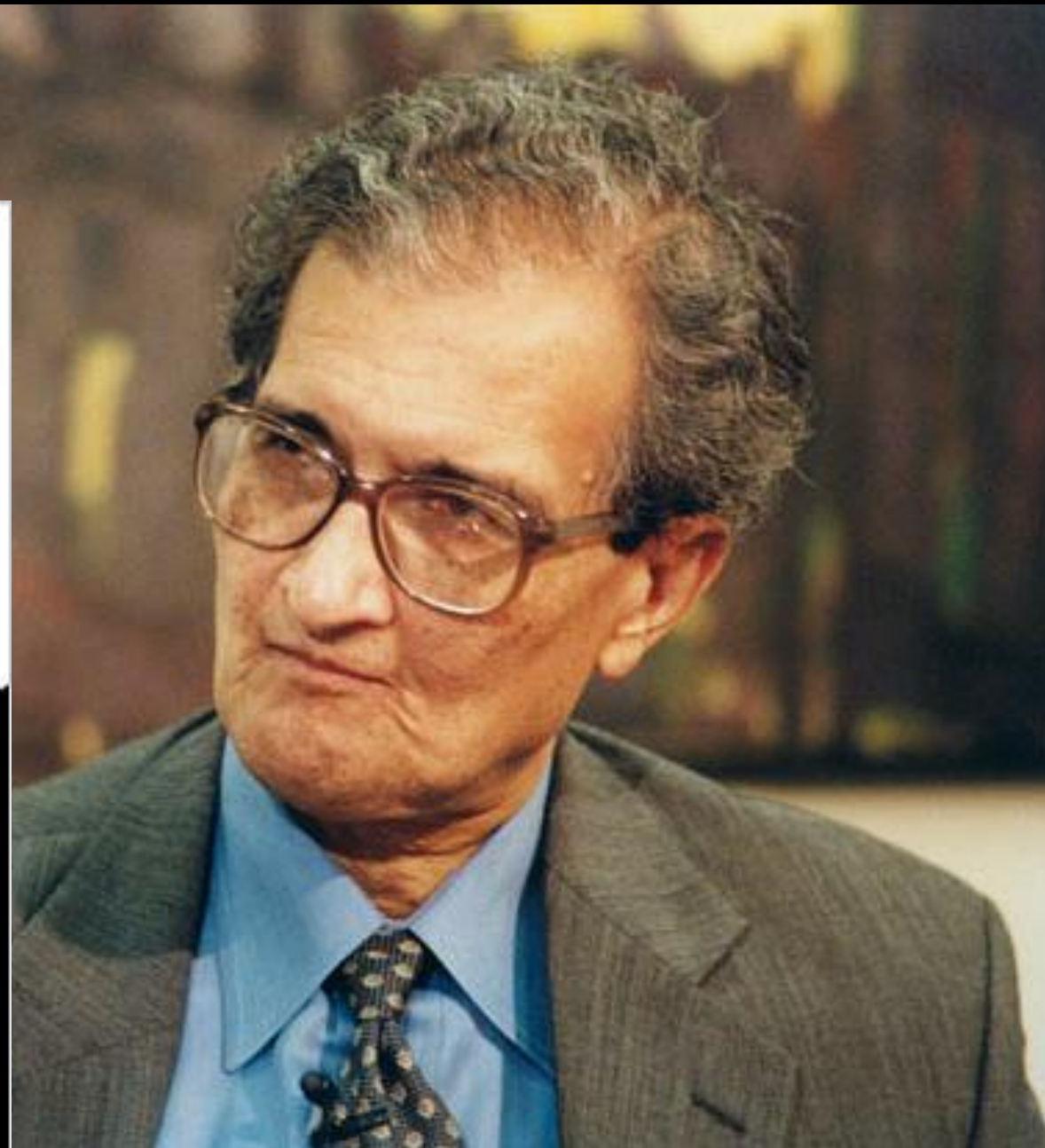
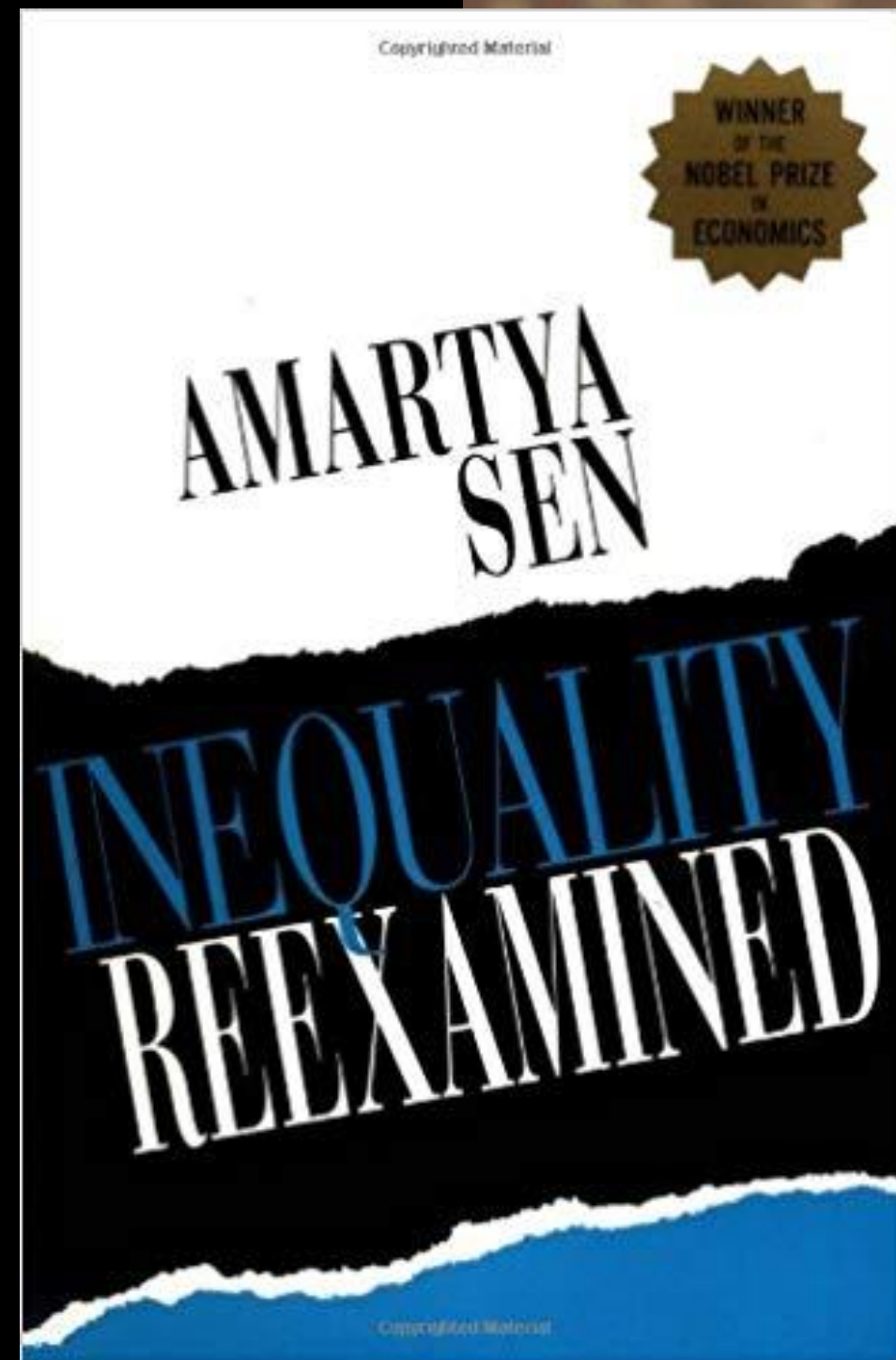
Choice and value

- To value something is to think it good or worthwhile
- What we value is not always what's good for us
- ... but there are some things that we *have reason to value*
- We can and do value different things (value pluralism)

Introducing capabilities

- First developed by **Amartya Sen** and expanded by others including **Martha Nussbaum**
- A way of assessing human well-being in terms of the **freedom to be and do things that we have reason to value**
- Hugely influential in economics, international development, anti-poverty work and (increasingly) housing and homelessness

The capabilities approach



“...according to the capability approach, the objective of both justice and poverty reduction (for example) should be to expand the freedom that deprived people have to enjoy ‘valuable beings and doings’. They should have access to the necessary positive resources, and **they should be able to make choices that matter to them**”

Sabina Alkire (2005), “Why the capability approach?”, p. 115

Nussbaum's 10 'central' capabilities

1. Life
2. Bodily health
3. Bodily integrity
4. Senses, imagination and thought
5. Emotions
6. Practical reason
7. Affiliation
8. Other species
9. Play
10. Control over one's environment

What capabilities
matter to you?

Social support and capabilities

- Research with 13 organisations across Scotland supporting people experiencing poverty and multiple forms of disadvantage, including homelessness and poor housing
- All take 'relational' approaches: long-term, flexible support that creates an equal and trusting relationship between helper and helped
- We explored whether this support has an impact on the capabilities people have

“Through the support that SIP partners provide, people are able to improve their **confidence, self-awareness and mental health**. There are close links between these changes and their ability to move towards employment, improve family relationships and engage more positively with other services.

Together these outcomes can be seen as evidence that individuals’ agency – their ability to make decisions and pursue goals they have reason to value - is enhanced, leading to **greater potential for improved well-being**.”

Capabilities and homelessness

Three reasons from Watts and Fitzpatrick (2020) to focus on capabilities when thinking about homelessness:

1. Ability to set a minimum threshold of capabilities that everyone should have, which can avoid 'othering' people experiencing homelessness
2. Recognises there are plurality of things that people have reason to value, beyond basic material needs
3. Provides an objective way of thinking about advantage and disadvantage that allows us to maintain that homelessness is an injustice

Housing as an enabler

- People's capabilities are shaped by the circumstances - personal, social, environmental - that they find themselves in
- These factors affect their ability to turn resources into capabilities
- **What would a housing and homelessness system look like if it was built around the objective of enhancing people's capabilities?**

Discussion